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The politics of community heritage: motivations, authority and control

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The community and heritage connection is one that is almost considered so natural an affinity it hardly needs justification or explanation. This paper looks critically at how community and heritage are understood and what arises when the two are brought together. Through the consideration of examples in Northern Ireland, the meaning of such engagement is explored with emphasis on motivations, issues of authority and the value of community-heritage engagement as a means of control.

Keywords: community; heritage; museum; contestation; Northern Ireland

Introduction

Community is a multi-layered and politically charged concept that, with a change in context, alters in meaning and consequence. According to the situation, different priorities will come to the fore and the purpose of community-heritage engagement will differ. This paper emphasises the importance of understanding the diversity of that engagement, which varies according to social, cultural and political demands. When, for instance, community is associated with the museum, the museum space becomes a ‘contact zone’ (Clifford 1997), where different meanings of community, reflecting assorted assumptions and aspirations, are expressed. Different interest groups come into contact within the museum space and a new dynamic arises. It follows then that the community and museum relationship can be interrogated from multiple perspectives: that of government, the interests of the museum sector and the desires of grassroots initiatives. Each brings with them a different idea of community and a range of beliefs in the importance and contribution of heritage to their social, cultural or political project. As these enter the heritage sector, or the museum space, a new layer of meaning is introduced. By investigation of the synergies that arise when these various layers of meaning interact, this paper offers a deeper understanding of the significance of the relationship between community and heritage.

Within this paper, diversity is explored through the analysis of examples of community engagement in the museum sector in Northern Ireland. As a divided society, the concept of community in Northern Ireland is politically charged – with questions concerning belonging, representation and agendas underpinning any engagement. Looking at the examples of community projects within museums, as well as those outside the official heritage sector engaging in their own community-heritage

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initiatives, this paper scrutinises the motivations underpinning the projects and the messages they convey. It draws upon the example of those in museums engaged in community-outreach; those in government departments forwarding museums as places for the promotion of ‘good relations’; and those on the outside developing community-based collections relating to the often guarded experiences of local people. The connection between community and heritage will be revealed as a deeply meaningful process that is caught up in a host of contemporary concerns.

Community, heritage and museums
The community and heritage connection is one that is considered so natural an affinity that it hardly needs justification or explanation. Community and heritage are both vague and elusive ideas, yet together they have gained popular currency and are used as the basis of multiple myths. Many understandings of community will refer to the building blocks of heritage as a means to define a community by its customs, language, landscape, history, artefacts and monuments. These representations of identity are thus selected to become the heritage of nations and communities. This is a heritage that is constructed and reconstructed according to time and place; on each occasion heritage is redefined according to what is most expedient. In these scenarios heritage becomes a flexible concept that is reconceptualised according to need (Harvey 2001). This is a characteristic that heritage shares with the concept of community because it too can be difficult to confirm or describe and will be renegotiated so that it fits the purpose for which it is being used. We then bring the two concepts together, one justifying the other. Their ambiguity is proved to be no handicap – in fact, that characteristic may well be their strength. Their malleability, twinned with their appeal, allows the associations to be remade in a myriad of situations. Both the community concept and the idea of heritage become intertwined with the lived experience and expression of community. The community group is defined and justified because of its heritage and that heritage is fostered and sustained by the creation of community.

Museums and heritage practitioners engaged in constructing, preserving and interpreting heritage experiences, and the historical or cultural record, are part of this process. Within the United Kingdom and elsewhere, increasing acknowledgement and integration of audiences within the museum, culture and arts sectors is now framed as involving local people in the creation of community collections, community exhibitions and community education programmes. Furthermore, if a local museum is not connected with its community the rationale for the museum may come into question. Moving from the position in UK museums where the creation of the post of community outreach officer was fairly innovative, the integration of the community agenda at every level within the museum is now essential. No longer considered the preserve of a single appointment, best practice recommends that consideration of community concerns is included in the brief of all staff. Such links have challenged museums to explore their mission statements, modes of practice and relations with the public. Community has become a way of thinking that is running through every level of a museum service shaping collecting, display and museum programming.

Not only is community the new way of thinking about museum audiences, museums are now directly linked to the social and economic agendas of public policy. In the UK, the plethora of community policies published in the late 1990s and 2000s demonstrate that the notion of sustainable, inclusive, cohesive and regenerated
communities was a major strategic government approach. Museums took on the challenge and many were keen to contribute to realising such objectives. In response, museums developed social inclusion policies to guide collection, exhibition and audience development (Newman and McLean 2002). Despite community being for many a grass-roots concept, community policy, as it has developed in the UK, is largely a top-down approach. The community policy that has guided museum practice in recent years is that shaped by government priorities. Government agencies would, of course, argue that their policy is based on research within and amongst the identified groups, but still the agendas have been captured and packaged within the context of contemporary political agendas and has filtered through to the museum sector via the chain of cultural administration. In Australia, where the provision of community galleries is well established, the collaborations are also closely related to government discourses of access and equality. Witcomb (2003, pp. 81–83), in her discussion of a number of examples, acknowledges the interplay of the production and representation of community but has found that in many instances the museum–community relationship is one that is co-operative, enabling a genuine dialogue between museums and community groups.

Few would doubt that the goals of a cohesive, integrated or regenerated society are worth pursuing. At each point, however, it is important to ask about the nature of the power relations and authority, and whether those are explored with equal vigour. Reflecting on examples of community collaboration in a museum in New Zealand and the United States, Message (2007) claims that the instrumentalisation of culture cannot be doubted and in her examples asks whether culture is being used as a resource for social management by the state or is actually a means to encourage open and inclusive debate, as well as active engagement between and within groups of people. For some within community development, and indeed working in museums, it is the renegotiation of these power relations that is the real concern. For those working at the grass roots of community development it is the idea of social action that is prevalent. This is when community becomes an issue of exploring democracy, accountability and relations of power. Within the established museum sector this is also relevant – with proponents advocating a rethinking of expertise and authority in the interpretation and presentation of histories and cultures. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the theme of democracy is currently explored by the think tank the Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries (CLMG). They challenge those in museums with the questions: Why should museum professionals dictate what goes into museums and what gets displayed? Who says that the public should just be consumers of culture? Why can’t they be creators as well? Their proposal is that museums should be transformed so that the public can move from ‘consumers to creators’ and ‘from readers to authors’. This will enable the formation of a two-way dialogue between visitors and institutions and test curatorial practice, with the nature of authority and expertise within the museum now under interrogation.

Community: a political and social construct

The impact of community agendas in the museum and heritage sectors reveals the power of community both as a concept and a form of engagement. Thinking about community has challenged practice and dominated debate in both sectors for the past decade. This has resulted in the development and pursuit of an entire policy area based upon a concept that for many is impossible to define. The idea of community as a
constructed concept is constantly shifting, continually challenged and difficult to grasp, with cultural markers, created and defined by socially engaged groups, used to define it. In some cases, as is often the case with the rise of nationalism and creation of national communities, these markers are themselves constructions, fabricated to suit the needs of the emerging national community. When the term ‘community’ is associated with a group of people, whether that is based on location, ethnicity, age or sexuality, it is a label that has been created for expediency and purpose. Many of us may go through our lives not giving a thought to the community to which we may belong – often we like to avoid such labelling and prefer to move freely amongst multiple situations. It is only when that freedom comes into question that we might step back and assess the value of group belonging. As a result, very often a community emerges as a community of action – the rural community may come together when there is a threat to rural businesses, high unemployment or depopulation. In such cases, claiming membership of a community is undertaken because it is expected that an advantage will be felt from association with others. We are seeking out a gain that will satisfy a need.

It is the balance and interplay of need and gain that underpins the construction and experience of communities. At each level of engagement a trade-off is negotiated, which forms a relationship of exchange that brings rewards for participation. As they connect with each other, community members and community leaders occupy and interact within a framework of defined codes of behaviour marked by cultural symbols – be that language, landscape, dress, religion or the interpretation of history. Within the community there is a hierarchy of those who are most active, assume leadership, and defend cultural markers. These are the people that create and sustain community and draw the members together. This is not a purely altruistic process – there will always be some sense of personal gain. The lack of altruism is not to devalue participation – it may well be the case that community is a positive experience for leaders and members and an enriching and valuable process. Conversely, as experience and the literature reveals, community can be a negative experience. Feelings of exclusion, intimidation and insecurity can emerge for those who are on the outside, whether that is voluntary or forced (Bauman 2001).

The concept of community, the community group that is realised, and the nature of community engagement are interlinked. Engagement creates community by drawing upon notions of unity presented as pre-existing. The idea of community has truly succeeded when it is so embedded that it is rarely questioned. This occurs when the existence of the community is thought to be beyond doubt and indisputable. Community can then be used both as a galvanising force and a legitimising factor, which can justify actions and interests of the group. This is when the formation of community can have political force and the leaders can assume authority.

**Community as a political construct in Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, the concept of community has particular political resonance – this is partly because the term is freely used but it is also because community is interwoven with issues of recognition, rights and representation. Dominic Bryan (2006, p. 605) observes that in Northern Ireland community is ‘central to the political discourse of all the political parties and local activists, it is common parlance in much government policy and legislation and is continually quoted by those demanding peace and reconciliation’. It is also what he describes as a ‘negotiated process’ that
very often arises from ‘fear of “the other”’ (Bryan 2006, p. 608). He provides the example of paramilitary groups which legitimise their existence on the grounds of defending their community and their traditions. As a result, Bryan notes, in Northern Ireland, ‘the phrase “community worker” or “community representative” is, at times, read as a euphemism for paramilitary or ex-paramilitary’ (Bryan 2006, p. 614). This provides an entirely ‘other’ context for how community should be understood. Of course, wherever you interrogate the idea the political reality of the concept should be considered. In Northern Ireland, community contestation has been the basis of a conflict that has been sustained for three decades and is a legacy that is currently being dealt with. There is a political charge in Northern Ireland associated with community that is readily visible, one that may also exist in other locations but simmers further below the surface. Community could be just as contentious elsewhere, but the impression of calm may lure those engaged in community activity into a false sense of security.

In Northern Ireland, state engagement with community is most readily seen through support and development of community relations work. The administration of such work has altered with changing government structures but can be traced through the activity of the Central Community Relations Unit (1987–2000) and later the Community Relations Unit (CRU), now part of the Equality Unit of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Early community relations work in the region has been criticised as a means to manage the conflict, a form of social engineering and as part of a pacification strategy (McVeigh 2002). Some, such as Bryan, would disagree with this particular perspective, but will concur that community, culture and identity have emerged in the region as mechanisms of control (Bryan 2006, p. 615). This is the case when culture or community is cited as a means to justify behaviour or manage responses. This sense of using community, culture and identity as a means of control extends beyond the politician. It can also be found within the community group and amongst the agencies that use community. They too recognise the power of the lure of community and how particular interpretations of culture, heritage and identity have influence.

Community heritage in a Northern Ireland museum

It is within the context of community as a politicised and contested concept that engagements between museums, heritage and community are encouraged and formed. The Mid-Antrim Museums Service, for instance, has developed a Community History Programme based around a principle of community engagement. They hope the project will enrich museum programmes, interpretation and collections. There is also a further underlying principle: ‘it also, importantly, demonstrates the social value of museums and makes a significant contribution to the well-being of our society’.3

The Community History Programme at Mid-Antrim Museums Service (December 2006–2008) was mostly funded by the European Union Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE II) through Local Strategy Partnerships. Administered by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), whose aim is to enhance cross-border working between people and organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland,4 this specific programme aims to promote economic and social benefit in areas most affected by the conflict. Community is at the core of the work of SEUPB with the request that projects should facilitate ‘co-operation or joint action between
different communities and parts of the community or build cohesion and confidence within a community with the perspective that this is a first step in breaking down community divisions.\textsuperscript{5} Target communities were those from disadvantaged areas that had experienced high levels of violence; victims of the conflict; ex-prisoners and their families; young people, women and older people who had been prevented from ‘fulfilling their potential in society or the labour market’.\textsuperscript{6}

The Community History Programme in mid-Antrim, which was part of the community outreach activity within the museums service, involved 20 community-based groups and focused upon the exploration of the histories associated with division in Northern Ireland. With direction and content determined by the group, the purpose was to consider shared histories and explore divisive periods with the aim to effect positive cultural and attitudinal change as well as building positive relationships within and between groups.\textsuperscript{7} The initiatives were also aligned to the Good Relations and Community Development agendas of respective Borough Councils, approaches shaped by \textit{A Shared Future – Policy and Strategic Framework for Northern Ireland} published in 2005 by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.\textsuperscript{8}

For community programmes to develop within the museum sector in Northern Ireland, they need finance and, more often than not, the larger projects are enabled by funding embedded in community relations and community development agendas. This link is almost impossible to escape – if a museum wishes to develop a high-profile service, with activity that can be accounted for as relevant to society, it must embed itself in current policy agendas. For Northern Ireland, the key agenda is that of peace and reconciliation. This is immersed in community policy approaches as understood and promoted by government both locally and nationally. A successful bid for funding for such projects will reflect government policy and be fully involved in the realisation of their objectives.

This provides a context for the community outreach work of the Northern Ireland museum sector, rather than a reason to rebuke the efforts of individuals in the museums working with local people and funded from such sources. The projects developed and realised by the Mid-Antrim Museums Service are impressive and show genuine commitment to exploring history in a life-enhancing manner. The museum team worked with groups in a thoughtful manner, exploring diverse interpretations of histories, places and collections. Community Groups, composed of mixed national and religious groups, senior citizens, ex-prisoners, women and young people, each participated in workshops, reminiscence, field trips and produced an exhibition that was displayed in local centres and later at The Braid, the flagship museum in Ballymena. The final exhibition included text panels depicting the histories they had investigated, objects donated by the groups that held significance for individual members, and video-testimonies of the impact of participation in the programme. In the same room experiences of members of the Inter-Ethnic Forum (Figure 1 and 2) and women’s groups were displayed alongside exhibitions developed by a group composed of ex-paramilitary prisoners and an exhibition developed by youths from a troubled estate that had a significant paramilitary presence.

Rather than causing tension, the well-curated and managed display enabled participants to move beyond past experiences and the stereotyping of histories to explore new avenues. The exhibitions were previously displayed individually in local community centres. This final display in The Braid provides an additional layer
of meaning to the project. Prominent public display of local community stories and experiences in a professional museum introduces another set of values. Community histories were woven into the canon of national experiences, such as migration or the linen industry in Ireland, and significant historical events such as the 1801 Act of Union between Ireland and Great Britain and the First World War. This connects the local experience with national stories adding significance to both. Repeatedly, the participants referred to the enriching experiences and positive camaraderie fostered
amongst the group and with museum staff. External evaluation concluded that the programme was responsible for ‘reawakening civic pride’, led to ‘positive promotion of a community which had previously suffered from negative images’, and had made a ‘positive contribution to community cohesion’ (Social Research Centre and Vision Management 2008).
Motivations amongst stakeholders

The Community History Programme was realised by the linking up of three very different stakeholder groups: the funding agency, the museum, and the participants. This is typical of many community projects in museums and the questions raised by the synergies arising from the diversity of such associations can equally be applied to other examples if, in each case, the aims and objectives of their engagement are considered. Each stakeholder has different priorities, varying understanding and experiences of community, and distinct expectations of their contributions to a project. This reflects the complexity of governance, management and authority within each stakeholder group – to expect motivations across such a range to be equal would risk naivety. We can however question what this brings to the engagement and how meaningful the associations are if the range of motivations and desired outcomes vary to such an extent.

Each stakeholder group will have its own line of authority and mode of governance. At each stage of funder, museum and community involvement, priorities will differ and the motivation to be involved will be far-ranging. The specific aim of the SEUPB PEACE II Programme, the principle funder, was to aid the creation of peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation. Significant to this was addressing the legacy of violence of the recent past and taking advantage of opportunities arising from the peace process. The objective of the Mid-Antrim Museums Service is to collect, preserve and interpret the history of the region and provide accessible and enjoyable public services. Participants in the Community History Programme were described as motivated by an interest in local history and a wish to ‘learn, grow and socialise’. The initiative was an opportunity to develop inter-community links and a chance to meet new people. In the case of the Community History Programme there would, at one level, have been a shared wish amongst the funder, museum and participant groups. Each are, for instance, interested in a less divided society and in increased understanding. Even if that is what is embedded in the work of SEUPB and their funding, it is not the core rationale of the museum or participants. This is not the key motivation of museum or individual participants. The outcomes that each stakeholder will be pursuing, in order to be satisfied that participation was worthwhile, will also differ. For SEUPB, it is the objectives of the funding, for the museum it is more innovative public programmes and, according to the programme evaluation report, for the individuals, the desired outcomes was getting to know their histories and people of their area better.

Common to each group is the idea of change or transformation. Underpinning funding agencies, the concept of change is general and wide-ranging, such as ‘enabling greater social inclusion’ or ‘community cohesion’. In contrast, amongst participants the actual change may be more subtle and personal. These may be changes in perceptions, understandings, and relationships associated with people, places or histories. By providing the opportunity, the museum space becomes a location of interaction between groups of people, their histories and their agendas. It should also be a reactive space that needs to change with such encounters. In such context, the nature of change may not match the language of funding agencies – the particularities are more elusive. It is these indefinable, and maybe immeasurable, changes that are essential to enable the identifiable shifts at societal level. This complexity demonstrates that such engagement, with a range of stakeholders, is not fixed nor is it definite. Instead, it is a negotiated process, a highly creative journey with unpredictable consequences. It is almost futile to aspire to a project within which
individuals in community groups, each with their range of individual experiences, interests and motivations, could be shaped to attain the predetermined objectives of an external funding agency. However, the skilled project applicant, who has to write the funding bids and final reports, can author an account that will satisfy the fixed criteria of a funding brief and will later fine-tune it to satisfy other audiences, such as the community group or the museum board. These are the pragmatics underpinning community engagement within the cultural sectors.

The way the community programmes have been set up in Mid-Antrim Museums Service is much like those in many museums in the UK. At the top level at least, first and foremost the concern is the operation of the museum and the development of the collection. Many in the profession would argue that for a museum that is where priorities ought to lie. Social value is a concern that is mentioned later; in other words it is secondary and eclipsed by fundamental museum concerns – collections and sustainability. Whether collections or public programmes is advocated as the core museum activity is dependent upon how the concept of a museum is understood. For the former the collection is the defining matter of museums, it is what makes a museum unique and should be the highest priority and consume the greatest proportion of museum resources. In favour of the latter, public programmes are the rationale underpinning the care and interpretation of collections and should take the lead. Bringing this even further, for some those public programmes should have a social agenda based upon the perceived needs of society. It is important that a museum’s position in relation to priorities is established because, when engaging with community, where that priority is placed matters. In the worst cases community engagement is simply used as a means to tick a box or gain funding. The question remains, in a sensitive area like community work, should an institution for which community development is not the leading priority, and which is not fully trained in the area, be engaged in such activity? There are examples of when museum practice in community programmes has been exceptional; nevertheless, is the museum the most appropriate institution for it?

Heritage within politicised communities

As noted by Bryan (2006), community in Northern Ireland is a concept often tied up with the conflict and its legitimisation on the grounds of defending perceptions of rightful territory, histories and traditions. With the signing of the 1998 Belfast (Peace) Agreement a new power-sharing devolved administration was established in December 1999. Since that time Northern Ireland is regarded by most as a post-conflict society. Even with the changing political context, community is still burdened with this past legacy. Not only is the legacy of the conflict still very much a lived experience with people and areas experiencing deprivation due to the impact of the conflict, the use of the term community has not lost the connotations of the earlier period.

So, when community groups engage in heritage projects, the contested nature of community, and issues in relation to political context of their work, are still relevant. It is still essential to ask whose history is represented, how identity and culture are interpreted, and what the purpose of such engagement is. These questions are pertinent to the many community-based heritage projects that have emerged across Northern Ireland, such as in areas that have experienced high levels of conflict. These heritage projects are valued by participants and serve a purpose identified by those involved. Belfast Falls Community Council, established in the 1970s, aims to develop community infrastructure and harness community activity in an area it describes as having
experienced ‘social injustice, economic discrimination and civic marginalisation’. The Council has developed a sound archive of oral histories of local experiences both as memorial and as a contribution to political and social transformation. This they hope will later become part of museum display (Crooke 2007, pp. 124–128). In Derry, the Museum of Free Derry, which opened in 2006 in the nationalist Bogside area of the city, aims to tell a community story and not, in the words of the curator, ‘the distorted version parroted by the Government and the media’ (Figure 3).

In these examples, community heritage, as a means to generate and share alternative histories, will find it impossible to escape the political context. In relation to the Derry example, the story told in the museum is the experiences of Bloody Sunday when on 30 January 1972, 26 people, who were part of a much larger civil rights march, were shot by British soldiers. Thirteen people died immediately and one a few months later. The story told in the museum is an important one that is moving and powerful; it is also one that is heavily contested. For the moment, the account told in this museum is that espoused by the managing body, the Bloody Sunday Trust. The aim of the Trust is to commemorate the events of Bloody Sunday and to ‘preserve the memory of those murdered that day’, for the purposes of ‘truth, justice, reconciliation and healing’. In Northern Ireland, the very notions of truth and justice are contested – with challenges to what is presented as truth or considered justice. Nevertheless, a single narrative is presented for the public that provides an account of the events of the day according to that forwarded by the Trust. It is one that makes no attempt to gratify alternative viewpoints, interpretations or audiences. In the sparse environment of the museum highly sensitive material is displayed without reserve and with minimal interpretation.

Figure 3. Visitors in the Museum of Free Derry August 2009. © E. Crooke, 2009.
The example of this display in the Museum of Free Derry raises questions about the definition of community and ownership of histories, as well as the uses or purposes of museums and public display. Regarding the presentation of community, the museum is very much targeted at the Bogside community, which is where the shootings took place. However, the story is also relevant to other nationalist communities in Derry and those belonging to other political persuasions within the city. Some hold the opinion the Trust and Museum have taken ownership of and assumed authority over a story that extends well beyond the Bogside.14 Furthermore, the display is one of the public faces of the Trust and serves a purpose as a public contribution to its justice campaign. The sensitive material on display validates and adds depth to their pursuit. Museum display is a tool to achieve their goal. One of the important points from this example is that, in a region where the majority museums follow the established paths of engagement with audiences, guided by principles of embracing diversity, encouraging choice between stories and paths, as well as recognition of the role of multiple communities, this museum stands out for its singular narrative and overtly political purpose.

Conclusion: meaning and consequences of the associations between community and heritage

Community and heritage are not only malleable concepts; they are also highly emotive, closely guarded and are used to stake control and define authority. This paper has presented examples of community–heritage engagement that has been brought into museum spaces. Captured within the walls of museums and on the panels of exhibitions, the synergies between community and heritage are concentrated. Within individual projects, motivations change with stakeholder groups. Amongst them different conceptualisations of community exist, heritage has varying purposes, and the nature of gain will be different. The consequence of this is a form of engagement that can go in a number of directions. It has a range of meanings that can be interpreted and valued in different ways.

There remains a fundamental difference between the two community projects discussed in this paper. The Community History Programme is embedded in state structures and discourses of community and community relations. It is also aligned to contemporary thinking in relation to museums and access. The Bloody Sunday Trust project is independent of the state and has not evolved from a desire to renegotiate the traditional power structures of museums. Both can be regarded as community-heritage projects but the underpinning discourses are quite different. However, in each of the examples cited the museum space becomes the contact zone, enabling public display that adds impact and depth to project priorities. In the example of the Community History Programme the final exhibition provided the visitor with a glimpse of the community on display. The experience crossed a range of publics: the community group, interested friends and family who attended the opening and revisit later, and the chance visitor who views the exhibition in isolation from the project. Each will have a different experience and impression of the exhibition and the community on show; for each it will function differently. The crossing over of the experiences of these publics is also crucial – the visitor with little experience of the groups concerned learns a small amount of the experiences of the participants enabling new connections and familiarity.

In the community exhibitions, those involved have taken control of the public interpretation and presentation of their story. By controlling their own narratives the group
is attempting to manage how others see them. This is not value-free; instead it is a selective process. In the case of the community museum developed by the Bloody Sunday Trust there is a sense of a heritage with a lot dependent on it. It is purposefully told in an overt manner with the aim to gain support and understanding for the broader campaign. In both examples of communities interpreting their history, public display adds charge to the story as it is told and retold to visitors ranging from those knowledgeable about the history to those who chance upon it. On each occasion the agenda of the group shapes the experience provided for the visitor. With every telling another person is drawn into the narrative and is invited to connect with it. Even if a visitor does not later come directly into contact with the community on display, a link is made, even if it is only in their imagination. Imagined communities, imagined stories and imagined experiences are enhanced in the minds of the visitor and may even become part of their personal story.

In both examples, community heritage has become a means to mould and communicate histories, understandings of identity, and definitions of culture and cultural relevance within groups and to others. By means of display contributors are drawing others into their project, disseminating the message further. By nature of its involvement the museum space is implicated in this process. The result of this is a socially and politically engaged heritage embedded in contemporary concerns and shared with consequence.

Notes
4. For further details of their work see: http://www.seupb.eu/ [Accessed 7 December 2009].
6. Ibid. (quote from p. 40).
7. As described in the Grant Application to the PEACE II programme for the Carrickfergus Community History Programme, November 2005.
10. Since December 1999, devolution and the Northern Ireland Assembly has been suspended for three periods regarding concerns about decommissioning of weapons and the ceasefire.
12. For more on the event see http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/bsunday/ [Accessed 7 December 2009].
14. Points raised by local people in conversation with me.

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