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UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE:
Communities in Time

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Abstract

This article presents an experimental historical-critical examination of underrepresented local community values dormant within the nomination, evaluation and inscription of 'The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh' UNESCO World Heritage (WH) site, drawing a spotlight on urban communities historically outwith heritage-institutional consideration.

To this end, this article examines the institutional evolution of the concept and relevance of "community" in the context of WH theory in the thirty years since Edinburgh's 1995 WH inscription. Drawing upon archival, institutional and secondary sources, this research brings together scholarship from critical heritage studies, cultural anthropology, social and political science, architectural history and systems thinking, to reframe the concept of 'community' in the context of living urban WH sites.

More broadly, this research foregrounds the transformative potential of the concept of "community" within institutional future-making heritage instruments such as the UNESCO WH system, in light of such instruments' direct material impact on a wide range of living human and more-than-human communities.

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"**Do not seek the traces of the ancients, seek what they sought**"
Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694)
'On Parting from Kyoriku' ('Kyoriku ribetsu no kotoba')
(Ueda 1999, 289)

The People's Story Museum

Edinburgh's 'The People's Story Museum', which "tells the story of the lives and work of the ordinary people of Edinburgh from the late 18th century to the present day" (Clark 1991), suddenly closed its doors for several months in the summer of 2024. Stories were told of staff shortages and financial issues, which would push the closure to April 2025. Following local uproar, the Museum was reopened by the city council in early-December 2024.

During the uproar, former councillor and MP George Kerevan, who was part of the city's Labour administration that established The People's Story Museum in 1989, suggested that closing the museum risked losing Edinburgh's "identity". Kerevan went on to argue that the closure was a deliberate attempt at "expunging the history of Edinburgh" (Turvill 2024).

As museum co-founder and pioneering Scottish oral historian Helen Clark explained, The People's Story Museum was to be about "those ordinary people who made the city tick, who worked to make it what it is, but who do not appear on the pages of the history books and remain hidden from view" (Clark 1991, 37). In others words, working-class people whose "story" was previously invisible to the lens of history, rejoining sociologist David McCrone's question in 'Who runs Edinburgh?', about "who gets airbrushed out of the city's history: women, the working class, and in-migrants" (2022, 22).

The People's Story Museum sits within the boundary of the Edinburgh UNESCO World Heritage (WH) site[01]. It predates Edinburgh's 1995 WH inscription. And it has been continuously housed in the Canongate Tolbooth, a building recognised by ICOMOS[02] as one of the most historically significant in the Old Town (WHC03 1995,[03]). Is social history not a key part of Edinburgh's core heritage identity? Is it not part of the WH site's "Outstanding Universal Value"[04], a selective mechanism shaping what is visible, valued and protected within WH boundaries? Is the story of certain groups of people - as mentioned in the museum's name - undeserving of WH recognition, and therefore of international heritage protection?

At the heart of these questions lie a number of complex issues, of which we will here begin by examining two: 'heritage value' and 'community'.

On heritage value

Heritage "values"[05] are defined in broad terms by historic preservation scholars Erica Avrami and Randall Mason (2019, 30) as "the different qualities, characteristics, meanings, perceptions, or associations ascribed to the things we wish to conserve" (2019, 11)[06].

More specifically, Avrami and Mason categorise "values-based heritage conservation" approaches into two "complementary perspectives" that are both "at play in most heritage places, most of the time": the "heritage-intrinsic" or "essential", on the one hand; and the "societal-instrumental", on the other (Avrami and Mason 2019, 30). The former perspective focuses on the material properties of heritage, to be protected and transmitted to future generations, foregrounding materialist heritage expertise. The latter is "reflected in more participatory conservation practices that engage more diverse stakeholders", allowing "multiple publics" to apply a broader range of societal values to heritage assets (Avrami and Mason 2019, 22). Such participatory processes, it is argued, have the potential "to address the varying degrees of agency and power among decision makers" (Avrami et al 2019, 6).

The WH 'system'[07] - in its global dealings - has long walked a tightrope between different perspectives on heritage values, depending on geographical, cultural and typological particularities. On an operational level, the specific WH concept of "Outstanding Universal Value" (or OUV) has been the source of debate since its earliest days regarding its meaning, application, and relationship to heritage value.[08]

As influential former UNESCO WH Centre Director[09] Francesco Bandarin explains, in some instances "the material substance is very important, but it is considered as the support of the values to be preserved. It is not the value itself, it is the support of the values" (Koolhaas et al 2014). For his part, ICOMOS President[10] Gustavo Araoz defines heritage values as "a vaguely shared set of intangible concepts that simply emerge from and exist in the ether of the communal public consciousness" (2011, 58). Araoz further argues that in conservation practice, "heritage professionals have never really protected or preserved values; the task has always been protecting and preserving the material vessels where values have been determined to reside" (2011, 59).

Bearing the above in mind, the concept of OUV - beyond its complex relationship to heritage values on a case-by-case basis - offers insights into the WH approach to heritage value management. To begin to understand this approach, it is worth taking a step back in time to the founding theoretical principles of the WH system itself, to better appreciate the axiological[11] issues at hand.

On Outstanding Universal Value

At its adoption by the UNESCO General Conference in 1972, the WH Convention[12] envisioned "an effective system of collective protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value" (UNESCO 1972, 1). As the WH Operational Guidelines[13] (OGs) would in turn clarify, prospective cultural WH sites would be evaluated through the lens of at least one of six criteria[14], in relation to which the OUV of the property would be defined.

In practice, each WH site's definition of OUV stands to have a significant material impact on the property's subsequent heritage "protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future

generations" (Article 4, UNESCO 1972, 3). As WH experts Bernard Feilden and Jukka Jokilehto explain in their seminal 'Management Guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites' (1998): once a WH site has been inscribed, it is expected that its OUV "will be maintained on a permanent basis" (Feilden and Jokilehto 1998, 9). Through its - both retrospective and prospective - temporal and axiological weight, OUV emerges as a potent future-making device.

Just as importantly, as legal scholar Abdulqawi Yusuf (2023, 49) explains, "it is the select subset of immovable 'cultural heritage' possessing outstanding universal value, as described in the criteria elaborated for this purpose by the Committee, that ultimately qualifies as 'cultural heritage' under the 1972 Convention". This select subset, and no other. In other words, the OUV establishes the remit of WH institutional influence - through the very definition of the term "cultural heritage" - within the boundary of the WH site.

In turn, the property's 'Statement of OUV' (SOUV) becomes "the basis for the future protection and management of the property" (WHC 2024, 49). The SOUV enshrines the key heritage qualities and attributes making up the WH site's OUV, and it outlines the property's strategies to manage and protect that OUV, further operationalising Feilden and Jokilehto's 'permanent basis'.

It is worth noting at this point that the 1972 WH Convention mindfully highlights (Article 12) that the fact that a property has not been included on the WH list "shall in no way be construed to mean that it does not have an outstanding universal value for purposes other than those resulting from inclusion in these lists" (UNESCO 1972, 7). However, the Convention refrains from suggesting that - within the boundaries of inscribed WH sites - values other than those identified through the OUV might be equally worthy of "identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations", for purposes equal to or other than those of the WH Convention.

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[01] The 'Edinburgh WH site' mentioned in this article consistently refers to 'The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh' WH site, and never to 'The Forth Bridge', sometimes referred to as Edinburgh's second WH site.

[02] Cultural heritage advisory body to UNESCO.

[03] UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

[04] The term 'Outstanding Universal Value' has been capitalized in the OGs since 2011. In this article, it is used in its capitalized form for consistency with current OGs.

[05] In their work, the same authors emphasize that heritage values "as qualities departs from another common usage of the word in English: values as ethics, philosophies, or normative codes of behavior" (2019, 30).

[06] For other influential work on 'heritage values' carried out under the aegis of the Getty Conservation Institute see also De la Torre et al (2000, 2002, 2005).

[07] As it is referred to in the 1972 WH Convention (UNESCO 1972, 1).

[08] For further insights into the relationship between OUV and heriage value, see Jokilehto 2008.

[09] Bandarin was WH Centre Director 2000-2010, then UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture 2010-2018.

[10] Araoz was a three-term ICOMOS President from 2008-2017.

[11] Axiology : "the theory of value" (OED 2026).

[12] Official name: 'Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage'.

[13] Official name: 'Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention'.

[14] Summarised respectively by Jokilehto et al (2008, 5) as 'Masterpiece', 'Values/ Influence', 'Testimony', 'Typology', 'Land-Use' and 'Associations'.

In the process, as anthropologist Lynn Meskell (2016, 93) argues, "heritage properties are wrested from their sociohistorical contexts and mobilized as transactional devices in the World Heritage arena that both mask and enable a multifarious network of political and economic values". This complex dynamic prompts fundamental questions about the evolving purpose of the 1972 WH Convention, and the potential 'values' at stake, some of which this article serves to unpack.

In specific relation to the Edinburgh WH site, the UK State Party and the City of Edinburgh Council have respectively described its OUV as "what makes the city special" (UK Gov 2013, 4) and "the collection of things which make the area special" (Edinburgh Council 2025). This may once again be true, but arguably only insofar as the WH system's particular cultural foci, priorities and purposes can be seen to legitimately prescribe - and by extension proscribe - what is "special" - and what is not - within the boundaries of the WH site. The word "special" stems from the Latin specere, to look (OED 2026), denoting what is visible.

On a similar visual register, the UK State Party has justified the absence of a buffer zone around the Edinburgh WH site, through the presence of "a Key Views policy that serves to protect and enhance views into, out of and across the property" (UK Gov 2024, 45).

The above arguably rejoins what architectural historian Françoise Choay calls "the hegemony of the eye" (2001, 177). In this view, heritage becomes a "great mirror" in which society contemplates its own image, and "dynamically assumed cultural identity" is replaced by "passive contemplation and the cult of a generic identity" (2001, 165). To break out of this condition, Choay calls for a traversal of the mirror through "an intimate connection between two bodies, the human body and the patrimonial *corpus*" (2001, 177 - *original emphasis*).

In the case of Edinburgh, a particular human group - to return to Clark's words - might not appear on the pages of the history books and remain hidden from view as a result of specific 'key views', both literal and metaphorical.

Within this context, the concept and definition of OUV emerges as a key factor in the value perceptions, and ensuing protections, promoted by the WH system within the boundary of the Edinburgh WH site. And it is a very same concern about visibility and invisibility which - at its core - the creation of The People's Story Museum sought to address.

On community

When it first opened, The People's Story Museum showcased a "specially commissioned" twenty-minute film, which "concentrates on the experience of four individuals: Annie Scott, a domestic servant; Betty Hepburn, a co-operative worker; Hugh D'Arcy, a bricklayer; and Jimmy Crighton, a printer and one-time member of the Communist party." (PSM 1989; Clark 1991, 37). The four protagonists - and their respective stories - serve as a microcosm of the "real people" the museum sets out to empower (Clark 1991, 38).

Annie Scott, the domestic servant, served as fifth housemaid to a prominent Scottish aristocratic couple connected to the British Royal Family[15]. The use of words in her testimony is telling in respect of several issues addressed in this article[16]. First, when Scott explains that the aristocrats "didn't pay any attention to what you did, or didn't do", she highlights the very invisibility addressed by The People's Story Museum's mission.

Secondly, when Scott says that "actually, the people were nicer to us than the upper staff" (PSM 1989, 04:07), the "people" she is referring to are the aristocrats, as opposed to the staff - exemplifying the complexity of the word 'people', even within The People's Story Museum's own materials. Finally, when Scott says that a ten shilling tip "was nothing to them [the aristocrats], but it was a fortune to us" (PSM 1989, 04:34), she highlights both the extreme financial imbalance and the group-mindedness, the "us", that reinforces such a class system.

Annie Scott's compelling testimony, and the last quote in particular, illustrates McCrone's point that "a key function of creating and maintaining communities is the telling of stories" (2022, 131). The singular "Story" in the name The People's Story Museum further reinforces the notion of a single group narrative.

In another noteworthy passage, Scott explains that "you had to make your own polish for the floors, beeswax and turpentine"[17], and describes working on her knees to brush off and repolish the floors at Carberry Tower (PSM 1989, 03:45). Such backbreaking physical work - under class-based and financial duress - highlights the historically embodied and often forced relationship between the working class and the physical fabric of buildings, lending brutal realism to the abstract poetry of the "practical and concrete traversal of the patrimonial mirror" advocated by Choay (2001, 177).

Through such testimonies, the People's Story Museum brought substantive contributions to what influential critical heritage studies scholar Laurajane Smith (2006, 5) describes as the ethnographically-informed growth - since the 1990s - of "multidisciplinary interest in the way diverse communities forge, maintain and negotiate their identities". Such processes allow "the diversity of community experience and identity claims" to challenge "consensual heritage narratives about the nation and national identity" and what Smith terms "Authorized Heritage Discourse" (2006, 5-6).

In light of the narrative power of such community representation, what role might the WH system play in the influential "framework of external rules" (McCrone 2022, 275) impacting Edinburgh's governance? To begin to address this question, this study will now examine how 'Communities' have been defined in the WH context, as well as the role the concept of community holds at the heart of post-1995 WH theory.

"**Life of the community**" [1972 Convention]

The 1972 WH Convention mentions the concept of local "community" - as distinct from "international community" - only once: Article 5 indicates that each State Party should "give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community", to "ensure that effective and active measures are taken for the protection, conservation and presentation" of WH properties (WHC 1972, 3).

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[15] Lord and Lady Elphinstone at Carberry Tower. Lady Elphinstone was the elder sister of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother.

[16] Though Carberry Tower sits in the countryside outwith Edinburgh's municipal boundaries, Scott's testimony arguably serves as a legitimate representation of working class experience in and around the city at the time.

[17] A natural, but potentially toxic, solvent distilled from tree resin.

"**Within the same culture**"
[1994 Nara Document & 2005 OGs]

The 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity is widely credited for an "expanded treatment of authenticity" in the WH system (Silverman 2015, 73). Since 2005, the WH OGs have copied verbatim the Nara Document in stating that "judgments about value attributed to cultural heritage [...] may differ from culture to culture, and even *within the same culture*." (WHC 2005, 21 - *my emphasis*)

In this context, communities traditionally outwith institutional influence might finally lay claims to heritage rights within the WH system, as the spirit of Nara saw that "ultimately global cultural governance should respect the fundamental cultural values of communities" (Silverman 2015, 73). As cultural anthropologist Claudia Liuzza would point out however, complexities over agency and legitimacy would arise in practice in the distinction between "stakeholders" and "rights holders" in relation to WH sites (Liuzza 2021, 276). At the heart of such issues lies the definition of recognized "communities" within the WH system, on a site-by-site basis.

Defining "**Communities**"
[2007 Strategic objectives]

In 2007, 'Communities' (plural) was added as the "fifth C" in the Strategic Objectives of the WH Convention (Christchurch, WHC 2007), five years on from the Budapest Declaration's 'Credibility', 'Conservation', 'Capacity-building' and 'Communication' (WHC 2002, 1).

The fifth Strategic Objective was integrated into the OGs the following year, to "enhance the role of **Communities** in the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*" (WHC 2008, 7 - *original emphasis*). How broadly one considers the remit and agency of said "Communities" in respect of "implementation" is arguably open to interpretation.

In the 2007 Christchurch Declaration, States Parties[18] to the WH Convention pledged "that they shall, as appropriate, seek the active involvement of communities at all stages" of the WH process (WHC 2007, 7).

But how does the Christchurch Declaration define the word "communities"? As "*inter alia*, community groups, tribes, nongovernmental organizations, private enterprise and/or local authorities" (WHC 2007, 2 - *original emphases*). This broad remit betrays a multilateral concern for universal applicability to all nations, cultures and potential stakeholders, effecting a dilution from an already broad "indigenous, traditional and/or local Peoples" to "all forms of non-State actors" (WHC 2007, 2). The mitigating term "as appropriate" further reinforces the contingent nature of a process regulated by established governance systems.

The Christchurch definition also points out that "typically, these communities share a close proximity with the sites in question". The word "typically" suggests that said 'Communities' might in some cases not actually be geographically colocated with their respective WH sites, this time challenging the relevance of the word 'local'.

During the 2024 The People's Story Museum uproar, award-winning Edinburgh-born author of 'Trainspotting' Irvine Welsh took to social media to recall the circumstances surrounding the museum's original opening in 1989:

> "I worked for Edinburgh Council when this museum opened. The feeling amongst councillors from working class areas of the city was that we represented monarchs, aristocrats and the warlords of slavery and imperialism enough in our civic culture, it might be an idea to represent local people too." (Welsh 2024)

In light of the broad 2007 Christchurch definition of 'Communities', Irvine Welsh's "monarchs", "aristocrats" and "warlords of slavery and imperialism" would arguably deserve the same "local people" and "community" labels as the working class people of Edinburgh, as long as the former did not act alone.

Semantics aside however, Welsh's point is one about solidarity, multiperspectivity[19] and diversity, internal to the mechanisms of Edinburgh's heritage-value ecosystem. This idea rejoins what political scientist Margaret Kohn (2004, 151) calls "public spiritedness", a concept we will return to later.

But why on earth should "local people" be important to Edinburgh's history?

On Edinburgh

This section will cast an eye on Edinburgh's Old Town through the lens of the nomination, evaluation and inscription of the Edinburgh WH site. Reference will be made to several archival documents, each representing a step in the sequential process which led from the 1994 submission of 'The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh' nomination dossier to UNESCO, to the site's WH inscription one year later. Each document informs the next, in the following chronological order:

- the October 1994 UK State Party nomination dossier for Edinburgh, produced by Historic Scotland (hereafter '1994 UK State Party nomination dossier'); which informed

- the March 1995 ICOMOS evaluation report by Herb Stovel, following his visit to Edinburgh on 27 Feb to 2 March 1995 (hereafter '1995 Stovel ICOMOS evaluation'); which in turn informed

- the September 1995 ICOMOS advisory body evaluation final report, for the attention of the WH Committee (hereafter '1995 ICOMOS final report').

At the end of this process, the WH Committee inscribed 'The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh' WH site on 9 December 1995 on the basis of criterion ii ('Values/influences', Jokilehto et al 2008, 5) and criterion iv ('Typology', Jokilehto et al 2008, 5), in line with the advice of the 1995 ICOMOS final report.

In Edinburgh's official WH inscription, while the criterion ii justification focuses solely on the New Town[20], Edinburgh's Old Town explicitly features in relation to criterion iv:

> "The Old and New Towns together form a dramatic reflection of significant changes in European urban planning, from the inward looking, defensive walled medieval city of royal palaces, abbeys and organically developed burgage plots in the Old Town, through the expansive formal Enlightenment planning of the 18th and 19th centuries in the New Town, to the 19th century rediscovery and revival of the Old Town with its adaptation of a distinctive Baronial style of architecture in an urban setting."

At this point, it is worth taking a moment to interpret the abovementioned "19th century rediscovery and revival of the Old Town", as there were in fact - at least - two simultaneous "revivals" at play in Edinburgh's Old Town at that time. The first was a revival of medievalist architectural style, variously identified

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[18] In the WH system as in other UN contexts, the double plural 'States Parties' is used instead of 'State Parties'.

[19] Education scholar Ann Low-Beer (1997) describes 'multipersectivity' as stemming from "the need to assess historical events from different perspectives", while highlighting its limits within historical education (1989).

[20] Criterion ii focuses on the New Town's "major influence on the development of urban architecture and town planning throughout Europe, in the 18th and 19th centuries".

as "Old Scots", "Scots revival" or "Baronial" (Historic Scotland 1994, 5). The second revival, closer to its post-classical Latin etymological root revivere "to live again", alludes to the Late-Victorian social consciousness and civic initiatives that labored to rekindle the ties of "sympathy and fellowship between different classes", exemplified by such groups as the Edinburgh Social Union, co-founded by Patrick Geddes, Jane Whyte and others in 1885 (Darling 2020, 15).

This question is answered in Edinburgh's 1995 Stovel ICOMOS evaluation, where he argues in favor of the relevance of criterion i ('Masterpiece', Jokilehto et al 2008, 5) in addition to criteria ii, iv and vi ('Associations', Jokilehto et al 2008, 5), finding OUV in the fact that:

> "the Old Town, its ten and eleven-storey medieval "lands" providing the densest urban configuration in Europe and bringing aristocrats, merchants and the urban poor together under a single roof, is a strong and unusual response to the physical, political and economic circumstances prevailing in the Middle Ages" (Stovel 1995, 2).

Although Stovel's advocacy for criterion i - and for criterion vi - did not find its way into the September 1995 ICOMOS final report to the WH Committee, his insight opens the door to a deeper understanding of the fundamental heritage value of the Old Town's social history.[21]

Stovel's "Urban poor"

The Oxford English Dictionary draws the etymology of the word "poor" from the classical Latin pauper, meaning "unproductive" (OED 2026). By including the "urban poor" as a productive component in his 1995 future-making assessment of Edinburgh's potential WH OUV, Stovel leads the way into alternative narratives of architectural production, revealing different ways of sharing and shaping space.

As this article will later address, such socially-minded heritage narratives would - over the following decades - come to dominate the discourse of the WH system in relation to sustainability.

But first, this study will follow the productive thread of Stovel's social argument in the context of Edinburgh's WH OUV, to examine the extraordinary nature of social interaction and urban dynamics within Edinburgh's pre-New Town Old Town.

In his "classic"[22] 1966 work, The Making of Classical Edinburgh, A. J. Youngson highlights that though Edinburgh's 1760s Old Town saw "great differences of wealth and clear distinctions of rank", there was very little "physical separation of social groups" (Youngson 1966, 236). The economic historian points out that, following the construction of the New Town, "charity took the place of neighbourliness and true sympathy", arguing that "unity of social feeling was one of the most valuable heritages of old Edinburgh, and its disappearance was widely and properly lamented" (Youngson 1966, 256)[23].

This particular concern about the impact of market-related transactional relationships (charity) over "true sympathy" (neighbourliness), brings to mind political philosopher Michael Sandel's extensive work on "things that money should not buy" (Sandel 1998, 95). Furthermore, this growing transactional dynamic - in the case of Edinburgh - recalls Meskell's earlier point about WH sites as "transactional devices", drawing parallels between heritage and neighbourliness as key intangible cultural artefacts vulnerable to commodification.

At this point, it is worth noting that describing the pre-New Town Old Town as a perfect unadulterated classless utopia would be naive, and one should not understate the range of parameters

which might have played a part in Edinburgh's extraordinary social history. As historian R. A. Houston suggests, such parameters might include "the complex motivations of individuals and groups" and the "mutual dependence between master and man, merchant and artisan, landowner and labourer, patron and client" which might have "created a community of interest which blurred distinctions of birth, wealth, and lifestyle" (Houston 1994, 19, 385).

Nonetheless, prior scholarship consistently points to the extraordinary nature of Edinburgh's pre-1760 Old Town social and urban dynamics as a "Hotbed of Genius" (Simpson 2004, 61). For his part, Edinburgh conservation architect and vice-president of ICOMOS-UK James Simpson argues that "the density of Edinburgh, and the consequent creative social mix, made it the natural centre for what became known as the Scottish Enlightenment in the later eighteenth century" (Simpson 2004, 61).

This argument is further supported by historian Murray Pittock (2019), who writes that "Edinburgh's close vertical environment of stacked living complemented its horizontal one of urban propinquity to create [...] 'a city bustling with creative energy ... an incubation of the kind of ideas that could revolutionize urban life'" (Pittock 2019, 46). In his efforts to outline "a mechanics of the Enlightenment", Pittock draws similarities between Edinburgh and other "Enlightenment cities" sharing features of social and urban dynamics, including "extensive time spent in public places or outdoors, intensifying the velocity of the circulation of ideas" and "an associational life which to an extent transcended social divisions" (Pittock 2019, 23-24).

Pointing to Jane Jacobs' pioneering work on cities, Pittock argues that "the material conditions for the development of the Scottish Enlightenment in Edinburgh were similar to the conditions deemed necessary today for the growth and development of innovative ideas in cities" (Pittock 2019, 17).

Such present-day considerations resonate with political scientist Margaret Kohn's concept of the "carnival of the commons"[24], a "heterogeneous polity" in which "public spiritedness embraces those who are different" (Kohn 2004, 151). Pointing to the three qualities of 'public spiritedness' as "sharing, solidarity, and diversity", Kohn argues that the legitimate "desire for community [...] must be supplemented by public spiritedness" at the risk of falling into the trap of "amoral familialism", where the 'community' "group is conceived in an excessively narrow fashion" (Kohn 2004, 151). Along similar lines, the privatization of public space - Kohn warns - "narrows our sensibility by diminishing the opportunities to encounter difference" (Kohn 2004, 156).

What is arguably at stake in neoliberal capitalist economies - as sociologist Jon Dean and political economist Benjamin Kunkel put it - is "*the metabolism between humanity and nature*, the very relationship and interconnectedness between people and their social lives" (Dean 2015, 143 - *original emphasis*).

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[21] Though Stovel's typological description here refers to particularities of the historic Burgh of Edinburgh, the term 'Old Town' in broader social analysis can encompass the Canongate and adjoining Old Town areas.

[22] Pittock 2019, 22.

[23] Though this article focuses on examining this "unity of social feeling", discussion on reasons for its loss can be found in the work of Youngson (1966) and historian R. A. Houston (1994, 233).

[24] Which Kohn opposes to the "tragedy of the commons".

On purpose

This article has thus far provided cross-sectional architectural, social and axiological insights into heritage drawn from the Old Town's social history. In the challenge they pose to such common Edinburgh heritage narrative binaries as city/slum, élite/ordinary and rich/poor, such insights might yield more nuanced - and ultimately more productive - cross-pollinations, opening up micro-economies of spatial, temporal and social value.

In more general terms, such narratives point to architectural historian Joseph Rykwert's concept of the "feel and the fabric" of cities as "a tangible representation of that intangible thing, the society that lives in it - and of its aspirations" (Rykwert 2000, 6). Such considerations might in turn call for a reassessment of the aspirations, goals and purposes of our heritage systems, as of our cities.

Regarding purpose, the words of systems thinker Donnella Meadows spring to mind:

> "a system must consist of three kinds of things: *elements, interconnections*, and a *function* or *purpose*. [...] A change in purpose changes a system profoundly, even if every element and interconnection remains the same."
> (Meadows 2008, 11, 17 - *original emphases*)

Even if one considers the elements and interconnections of Edinburgh's WH inscription to be fixed, within the textual confines of the stated OUV, questions might be asked about the social and environmental purpose of the WH system itself, as it applies to Edinburgh's inscription.

As it proceeds into an uncertain future, the WH system might further explore the central roles of social history and productive community heritage in addressing the social component of polycrisis. Drawing upon sociologist Richard Sennett's reflections on the presence of history in neoliberal late capitalist society, "but no shared narrative of difficulty, and no shared fate" (Sennett 1998, 147), such efforts would serve to reemphasize the central role of communities traditionally outwith institutional influence within processes of ecological resilience, adaptation and - most importantly - transformation.

Sustainable development

Twenty years on from Edinburgh's WH inscription, the UNESCO WH Centre set out three "overarching principles" for sustainable action, in its 'Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective Into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention' (WHC 2015, 2): "human rights", "equality" and "sustainability, through a long-term perspective".

In relation to the principle of "equality", 'The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh' WH site emerges as a privileged space within which to use the lens of heritage to examine concerns related to "structural causes" of inequality, "including discrimination and exclusion" (WHC 2015, 2). As the above historical analysis demonstrates, exclusionary dynamics were not predetermined by the Old Town's urban fabric, quite the contrary.

Furthermore, as political scientists Patrizia Nanz and Klaus Dingwerth explain in their entry on 'Participation' in The Oxford Handbook of International Organizations, "enhancing the *opportunities for participation* is of little help unless complementary measures exist to enhance the *participatory capacities* of groups that are otherwise at risk of being excluded from the political process."
(2016, 1145 - *original emphases*)

Through its continuing mission, presence and development, The People's Story Museum arguably contributes such an enhanced participatory capacity, its location within an emblematic historic building directly linked to Edinburgh's rich social history (former jailhouse, council chamber etc) further enhancing its narrative and substantive power.

Conclusion

Recalling "unity of social feeling" as "one of the most valuable heritages of old Edinburgh" (Youngson 1966, 256), the WH 'Typology' of criterion iv (WHC 2024) clearly extends beyond the closes and wynds of Edinburgh's Old Town, to include the shared social narratives and dynamics which arguably spawned the Scottish Enlightenment.

The 2007 Christchurch Declaration saw States Parties to the WH Convention pledging "that they shall, as appropriate, seek the active involvement of communities at all stages" of the WH process (WHC 2007, 7). Such a pledge asks questions about the role of communities in heritage stewardship over time, and calls for a renewed understanding of the history of community and "unity of social feeling" across time and across urban WH sites, as inspiration for present and future generations.

As cautioned by Bandarin, Jyoti Hosagrahar[25] and Frances Sailer Albernaz, efforts in service of sustainable development should "give in neither to the single-minded certainty that they hold the property rights to universal truth, nor to the relativism that would allow them to condone practices that are contrary to human rights." (Bandarin et al 2011, 22)

Navigating the complex terrain between claims to "universal truth" and extreme relativism has been the challenge of the WH system since its earliest days. Time will tell whether the recent introduction of an explicit sustainable development perspective at the core of the global WH system serves to strengthen local efforts to integrate social history perspectives within urban WH narratives. In any case, it is eminently clear that the global WH system's current dynamics offer a critical opportunity to redefine the nature, meaning and purpose of heritage at a local level, to support the international community's efforts to tackle an increasingly urgent existential polycrisis, not least from a social perspective.

In relation to the 'Old and New Towns of Edinburgh' WH site's own future-making heritage practices, might an argument be made towards explicitly bringing "aristocrats, merchants and the urban poor" - interpreted in the broadest human and more-than-human senses possible - together under a single roof of heritage value recognition, as a strong and necessary response to the physical, political and economic causes and impacts of that very same polycrisis?

The time may have come for a revival of the people's story.

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[25] UNESCO WH Centre Deputy Director, since 2018.

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