

HERITAGE AS SPRINGBOARD FOR CREATIVE ENTERPRISE

Creativity as a driver of long-term economic growth

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Abstract. Opportunities to present and re-use heritage places to achieve both conservation and economic benefits may sometimes be constrained by a lack of imagination, inventiveness and resourcefulness. This paper explores the notion that creative thinking about, and engagements with, heritage places can foster community attachments and enrich visitor experiences in balance with financial returns. Considering Montague Island, Kurnell, La Perouse and Goat Island in the context of National Parks in the Australian State of New South Wales we recognise that nature is a dominant attraction for visitors. We draw on a concentric circles model to show that with nature-culture at the core, significant heritage places, inclusive of their landscape settings, can be developed and presented to satisfy conservation objectives, to shape new forms of cultural identity and stimulate economic growth. We argue that even relatively modest financial investments in research, planning, consultation and facilities can provide cultural and commercial benefits.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the nexus between heritage, development and creativity via a series of case studies in the context of New South Wales (NSW) National Parks. Notwithstanding the fiscal constraints, each case study project was a strategic State government priority of considerable importance. The projects were underscored by heritage conservation practice and development proposals that were designed to simulate and ultimately realise economic growth, place revitalisation and sustainable social and civic engagement. While innovation and creativity have informed the approaches and resulted in many direct and in-direct benefits, at this stage none of the case studies demonstrate that long term economic growth or self sustainability has been achieved although this is still the aim. In each example what is clear is that economics and development cannot be disassociated from the values we attribute to places and are deeply entangled with issues of social equity and civic identity. As such, economic growth needs to take account of the multiplicity of non-price cultural values that are inextricably part of the 'worth' of heritage.

In this paper we are principally concerned with 'public goods' in the economic sense (a good that is non-rival and non-excludable¹). Our interest is in places that are in public ownership for society's continuing benefit. We recognise that economic value is derived from use and non-use values. Use

values may be direct such as income and commercial activities and in-direct such as community and social interaction, aesthetic qualities and cultural identity. Non-use values associated with heritage may include the existence value or intrinsic value of places and the related belief that heritage should be conserved for present and future generations.

2. Heritage and creative practice

There is a considerable body of recent literature canvassing the relationship between economics and heritage conservation (e.g., Mason 1999; Australian Heritage Commission 2001). There is less that considers the relationship between cultural heritage, creativity and heritage as a form of cultural capital that can generate environmental, economic and social benefits with some notable exceptions (Throsby 2000; Bianchini *et al.* 1994; Landry 2005, 2011b). Creativity is marked by the ability or power to create to bring into existence, to invest with a new form, to produce through imaginative skill, to make or bring into existence something new.² In practice heritage can be given new

¹ Non-rivalry means that consumption of the good by one individual does not reduce availability of the good for consumption by others; and non-excludable means that no one can be effectively excluded from using the good.

life and be presented to, for, and by different audiences. It is not something of and for the past.³ It can and does take on new and interesting meanings and forms: film sets (e.g., Bare Island in Botany Bay as a backdrop in the film 'Mission Impossible'); concert venues (the Foo Fighters on Goat Island; 'All Tomorrow's Parties' as part of the Sydney Festival on Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour); places of celebration or mourning (at locations linked to the visits by explorers James Cook and Jean François de Galaup, Comte de Lapérouse, at Kurnell and La Perouse in Botany Bay); art installations (the Sydney Opera House as canvas for Vivid's 'Lighting the Sails') and community celebrations and activities (e.g., 'Walk for Reconciliation' in 2000 when 250,000 people walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge to demonstrate their support of Indigenous Australians). These forms of activity demonstrate the potential of significant heritage sites to creatively engage with contemporary culture and generate social, economic and political benefits.

Creativity "hints at curiosity, imagination, looking at things afresh, bringing unconnected things together in unusual ways, having initiative" (Landry 2011a). It can be characterised by originality and expressiveness and by a sophisticated bending of the conventions of practice. Creativity is also a process by which society can maintain and advance economic growth and achieve improved standards of living and cultural and civic empathy. Conversely (in Australia at least), heritage, its conventions and associated planning controls can sometimes be characterised as an impediment to creativity and development which can inhibit economic growth and the expression and realisation of truly creative contemporary responses.

In essence, opportunities to present and re-use heritage places to achieve both conservation and economic benefits may be constrained by a number of factors. At publicly owned sites in Australia these factors typically include diminishing resources and the political context of the day, combined with rigorous legislative and policy constraints and divergent community views regarding the interpretation of a place's values and stories.

Moreover, in Australia as in other countries, 'history wars' have seen deeply divisive public debates regarding the interpretation of our national history and heritage emerge. Put simply, on the one hand the debate is championed by positivists to whom our history is one of triumph, progress and heroism. The counter position interprets the national story as imperial and exploitive with grave implications for Australia's Indigenous people (e.g., Atwood 2007; Bawley 1997). These contrasting philosophical positions on the past have significant consequences for heritage places and their development and creative interpretation.

Creative solutions to addressing economic and conservation requirements are often lacking or challenged in such

contexts. Caution and conservatism are often perceived to be the most prudent responses when public resources are tight. This is further compounded when views are polarised. Public spending on heritage may also be construed as an extravagance, especially when health, housing, public transport and education are perceived as imperative.

The profusion of heritage charters and declarations at the international/national levels, and legislation, policy and guideline documents at the local level, are necessary protective measures but also potential barriers to the realisation of creative forms of heritage management. Statements of significance for example identify and articulate the heritage values of the place, yet they do not indicate how such values and qualities can be creatively realised for visitors. While it may be argued that this is not the intended role, to ignore how to 'translate' significance is to potentially reduce the availability of heritage places to the very people for whom they are being conserved.

Too often statements of significance become a development control. In these instances, instead of facilitating access to heritage significance the statements tend to privilege fabric conservation and advantage certain claims to place over others. Conserving significance may therefore become prescriptive and conservative in approach. Thus the most readily available form of engagement for the visitor is technical and processual in nature rather than truly interpretive, unexpected, challenging, or engaging. In circumstances in which publicly owned heritage places are struggling to find an appreciative audience a more creative approach to developing a wide range of visitor experiences may be required in order to develop a supportive constituency and provide much needed funds for ongoing conservation.

Conservation should be reclaimed as a creative process which aims to have inspired and engaging outcomes. To conserve should not equate to conservatism. It is the role of the heritage practitioner to both preserve the values of places whilst at the same time broker creative outcomes for them. In the case studies presented we outline the ups and downs of heritage as a springboard for creativity and long term economic growth that is fundamentally connected to the politics of place, civic cohesion and identity.

3. Conceptualising creativity in heritage conservation

Governments have begun to recognise the role of creativity

² Meaning derived from definition in Webster's Dictionary.

³ See Attwood (2007: 9) for a discussion on the continuum of history.

as a key resource in driving innovation and promoting competitive advantage in a globalised world (Landry 2011). Although much of the literature on the 'creative economy' places cultural or 'creative industries' (e.g., film, music, performing and visual arts) at its heart, heritage conservation and 'heritage services' are often enmeshed within the creative economy concept (Throsby 2008).

Connections between the 'creative economy' or cultural capital and heritage conservation should be much stronger than the current literature would suggest. We have provided examples above which illustrate how heritage places can be given new vitality and form through creative engagements which serve to draw such places into the contemporary psyche. Among other things, what these examples show is that creative engagement with heritage places is strongly tied to the location and landscape setting of the heritage item (e.g., Sydney Harbour) in the first instance, and in some cases with the physicality of the heritage structure (Sydney Opera House; Sydney Harbour Bridge). In these instances, it is the setting and material macro-structure of heritage places that are appropriated for creative engagement: heritage values and conserved physical fabric are not appropriated, or at least considerably less so.

Creative exceptions to this are historical reenactments which are still a popular form of site interpretation and often aim to bring together the physical elements of a site with the theatrical potential (Figure 1). Artists in residence programs are another creative endeavor used successfully in National Parks to link the history of a place and its physical manifestations with a tangible creative output such as an art work, piece of music or a performance piece. Commissioned art works and performance pieces can also directly link the stories of a place to performance and performance location.

The connection between heritage places and the creative economy can be represented in a concentric circles model (Figure 2). The structure of the model places the



Figure 1. Goat Island: Re-enactors take a break. (Photo: NPWS).

bio-cultural landscape setting and recreational/public good at its core with the heritage place itself situated outside the core. Creative processes link the circles in the model.

4. Applying the conceptual framework: case studies

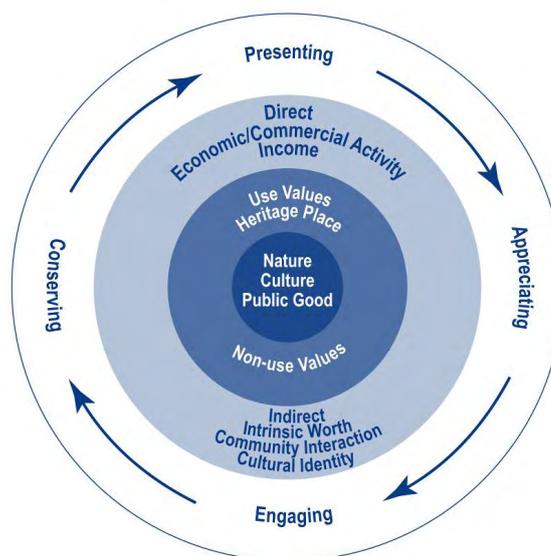


Figure 2. A concentric circles model for creative heritage practice.

In the following case studies the landscape or setting is central, albeit implicitly so, to engagements between the creative industries and creative approaches to heritage management.

4.1. MONTAGUE ISLAND

More than 170 lighthouses encircle the Australian coast.¹ Along the coast of NSW are 37 light station complexes, of which ten are managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Constructed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the NPWS group is distinctive for the Victorian Georgian towers and the cottage complexes (Graham Brooks et al. 1999). The light stations are situated in extraordinary, mostly isolated, coastal or island settings with magnificent vistas of surrounding landscapes and seascapes.

Montague Island is *Barunguba*, a creation figure in the belief system of the *Yuin* Nation. The island, which is 82

¹ Lighthouses of Australia Inc. <<http://www.lighthouse.net.au/lights/index.asp>>

hectares in area and 9km from the mainland coast, is located 300km south of Sydney. The light station was designed by the Government Architect James Barnet (1827-1904) and commenced operation in 1881. The lighthouse is built of locally quarried granite and the residences, consisting of Head Keeper's cottage and semi-detached cottages for the two assistants and their families are constructed of rendered brick (Figure 3). The light station was staffed until fully automated in 1985.

The island became a wildlife sanctuary in 1953. Management of Montague Island including the light station cottages and



Figure 3. The Montague Island light station. (Photo: NPWS Narooma)

other support buildings was transferred from the Australian Federal Government to the NPWS in 1987 (the Australian Maritime Safety Authority operates the navigational aid) and in 1990 the island was dedicated as a Nature Reserve under the NSW *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NPW Act)*.¹ The primary purpose of reserving land as a nature reserve is “to identify, protect and conserve areas containing outstanding, unique or representative ecosystems, species, communities or natural phenomena” [NPW Act 30J(1)], though the management principles for this category of protected area include “the conservation of places, objects, features and landscapes of cultural value” [NPW Act 30J(2)(b)]. Educational ‘nature’ tours have been carried out on Montague Island since 1991. From 2005, the focus of visitation expanded to include ‘voluntourism’, conservation-volunteer vacations. Montague Island is currently marketed as an eco-tourism destination that promotes remoteness, the colonies of seals, little penguins and sea birds, whale watching, and cultural heritage. Visitors can choose from part-day nature observation guided walking tours, ‘Montague Nature Escapes’ – a two-night hosted eco-tour (fully-catered, fully-guided visits

undertaken in partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia² and self-guided group stays of two to four nights. The latter experiences have been enabled by the adaptive re-use of the five-bedroom Head Keeper's Quarters.³ Since the nature-driven eco-tourism enterprises have been undertaken, the management agency, NPWS, has

¹ Montague Island Nature Reserve is an IUCN Category II National Park. Category II protected areas are large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities.

² Montague Nature Escapes, operating since 2005, has been the recipient of a number of tourism awards (e.g., 2007 & 2008 Australian Tourism Award for Ecotourism).

³ Montague Island NSW.
<<http://www.montagueisland.com.au/>>

developed and implemented a system of use capacity limits as well as environmental and economic impact monitoring. Table 1 provides a summary of financial impact data for selected years. These dates represent an extension of the Montague Island tourism project from single day visits to options for overnight stays facilitated by the renovation of the Head Keeper's Quarters.¹ One particular benefit of the financial impact monitoring has been to demonstrate to the local community the role of conservation as a basis for tourism and economic gain for the region (Eagles et al. 2002: 28).

The particular focus of management and tourism on Montague Island is wildlife and ecosystem conservation. The island's designation as a wildlife sanctuary in 1951 and a Nature Reserve from 1990 emphasises this point. In and of itself, the 1881 light station is not the key tourism attraction though it has a powerful historic and aesthetic presence for visitors. The light station accommodation enables, supports and sustains extended stays on the

island so that visitors have opportunities to enjoy the landscape, ecology and history and partake in voluntary research and re-vegetation works. In other words, the light station creatively supports sustainable long-term eco-tourism and the promotion of bio-cultural landscape values benefits tourism in a way that 'nature' in and of itself does not. Re-use of the light station has also served to reinvigorate visitor interest in the cultural heritage of the island and this has led to studies investigating community attachments to the place, for example through an oral history project with past occupants of the light station (Kijas Histories 2011). Thus the modest financial investment in adaptively re-using the light station living quarters supports long-term sustainable business and tourism goals for Montague Island and natural and cultural heritage conservation.

Table 1: Montague Island: Financial impact of tourism

YEAR	FINANCIAL IMPACT (AU\$)
1998	Nature tours grossed \$200,000 from 4,300 participants. Visitors' expenditure to the island contributed an estimated \$1.4 million in gross regional output to the regional economy, which was linked to \$965,000 in gross regional product, including household income of \$468,000 paid to the equivalent of 19 people in the local economy. Source: Eagles et al. 2002: 28.
2008/09	174 unpaid volunteer days equating to \$27,840 worth of in-kind labour. The areas of work covered by volunteers, including undergraduate students from Charles Sturt University, included extensive seabird habitat re-vegetation works involving extensive plantings of native species. Source: DECCW 2009.
2009/10	Tourism grossed \$137,857 from 4,227 participants. These figures represent 193 day tours (3,809 visitors), 16 hosted conservation tours (157 visitors) and 4 self-guided (34 visitors). The 'short break' domestic market comprised over 90% of visitors (68% are in the 40-69 age range), with international visitors mostly participating in hosted eco-tours. Source: OEH 2011.
2016	Business/tourism aims of the management authority are: to increase short-term tour visitor numbers by 25% to 5,045 per year; and to increase eco-tour visitor numbers by 30% to 21 tours per year. Source: OEH 2011.

¹ Work is currently being undertaken to adapt and renovate the interior of the Relief Keepers Quarters (and proposed for the Assistant Keepers Quarters) in order to re-introduce a former use for an underutilised assets; to generate funds for ongoing maintenance of the structures; and to increase visitor numbers.

4.2. BOTANY BAY

Botany Bay National Park lies to the south of Sydney Harbour. It is a site of first contact between European explorers and Aboriginal people on the east coast of Australia, with rich significance to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The two sides of the bay (Kurnell and La Perouse headland) tell different stories with common themes. Approaches to interpreting the stories of the bay have developed using a ‘creative workshop model’ where eminent scholars and key practitioners are invited to explore future-orientated concepts, as well as more traditional community-workshop based approaches. The creative workshop model has allowed the expression of ideas which might otherwise be difficult to capture. The scope of these ideas relates to examining creative media such as digital technology, teasing out contested historical narratives and discussing how best to allow subjects to tell their own stories unmediated in a public space. This creative workshop model provided a springboard from which to creatively engage with contemporary culture and realise ongoing financial and community benefits. On the south side of Botany Bay within Kamay Botany Bay National Park is Kurnell. A site of contested value, Kurnell is significant as the first landing place of Captain Cook in 1770 and the birth place of the British colony. Yet to the Australian Aboriginal community the site has a fundamentally different value and is associated with colonialism and dispossession (Nugent 2005). A major project undertaken by NPWS to creatively revitalise the site endeavored to realise its potential to become a meeting place for the exchange of stories and meanings about Australia’s foundation and contemporary identity. The multi-million dollar project, included landscaping, architectural designs and interpretation, resulted in a number of tangible changes to facilities and the interpretive themes and messages being communicated. One of the key challenges in this project was to achieve change that demonstrated value for money and articulated the past with balance and empathy. This necessitated some fundamental changes to the dominant narrative of the place which was focused on Cook and exploration. The Aboriginal experience of the encounter was given new emphasis through both physical installations and via refreshed interpretive content which engaged creatively with Aboriginal people to present their connections to land through experiences and stories (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Kurnell: Interpretive content that balances narratives of exploration and Aboriginal experience. (Photo: Godden Mackay Logan).

On the north side of Botany Bay a different story is told. Like Kurnell, La Perouse headland is a place of exceptional significance to the local Aboriginal community. La Perouse was also the last landing place of Comte de Lapérouse before the expedition’s ships were lost in the Pacific Ocean. The suburbs surrounding La Perouse have one of the highest French populations in Australia and the headland precinct has a large number of visitors per year. Conversely, the Laperouse Museum established in an old cable station in 1988 as part of Australia’s bicentenary to interpret the French and Aboriginal stories, has very low visitor numbers.

An ambitious scheme to refresh the museum and the exhibition and make connections to the headland landscape has been developed over the last years. The landscape plan (NPWS 2011e) aims to invite people into the museum and to explore the area (Figure 5). The museum site, however, is heavily contested. Despite low visitor numbers and a lack of visitor interest in the existing displays, there is strong opposition to the proposed changes. In this instance the creative response, linking the heritage assets to the recreational use of the precinct, updating museum displays and presenting multiple view points and stories, has been vociferously opposed and the project hangs in limbo as a result. NPWS established the project in the context of its broader strategic mandate to increase visitation and revive under-utilised heritage assets. The agency supported a project methodology based on inclusion and participatory practice. Yet it is the value-laden politics of place attributed to it by a section of the community that has ultimately jeopardised the potential for creativity and investment at La Perouse. Temporarily at least, the opportunity to establish a vital sustainable future that resonates meaningfully with local, national and international audiences is in question.



Figure 5. La Perouse headland: View from Bare Island to Macquarie Tower. (Photo: Godden Mackay Logan).

4.3. GOAT ISLAND

Goat Island is one of eight harbour islands within Sydney Harbour National Park. Comprised of 6 hectares with significant natural vegetation it has deep associations with Sydney's Aboriginal history. It includes significant archaeological remains and over 30 standing buildings and structures. Sydney Harbour National Park is largely discontinuous fragments of public land with a considerable urban interface. The park provides highly valued recreational opportunities such as walking, swimming, dining and on park accommodation.

The common Aboriginal name for Goat Island is *Me-mel* (although there are a number of variations on this name) which it is suggested means 'eyes' or a 'place from where you can see far.' In the early 1830s, with the displacement of much of Sydney's Aboriginal population, the colonists established a sandstone quarry on Goat Island to supply stone for the construction of Sydney's buildings. But within a short period the island was required for other uses.

An increase in Sydney's population saw a growing need for the safe storage of gunpowder away from the main population centre. Goat Island was considered the ideal location. A wharf, powder magazine, cooperage, soldiers' barracks and kitchen were built by the late 1830s (Figure 6). During the same period a station was constructed at the northern end of the Island to house the colonial water police. Today this core of convict built structures forms the main heritage precinct on Goat Island and survives with a remarkable degree of intactness.

Goat Island continued to be an explosives repository until 1900 but by that time its role had diminished. Throughout most of the 20th century Goat Island became the administrative, domestic and operational base for various Sydney Harbour management authorities. By the time the island was transferred to the NPWS in 1995, it had had a chequered maintenance and conservation history and had little public profile or recognition. More significantly public access to Goat Island has been limited for much of two centuries.

Goat Island offers an escape in the middle of a modern city and it is evident from consultation that the community supports the need to improve the amenity of the island and enhance access and visitor opportunities.

A significant project to revitalise the island and open it up for public access has been underway since 2004. In the initial phase of this project over AU\$6 million of public funds was spent on repairing, replacing or removing wharfage and undertaking essential repairs and conservation works (NPWS 2011a).

In addition to these works, the project has included a visioning exercise to imagine what could be. The need to capture a sense of escape and discovery has been central to that vision (NPWS 2011c). While Goat Island offers exciting commercial and creative opportunities, it is evident that further significant investment in infrastructure, conservation and commercial activity will be required to realise the vision for the place. The island needs to develop new revenue streams to fund maintenance and management over the long term and provide a level of return on commercial investment activities. This will not be without its challenges.

With limited public funds available, choosing between heritage conservation works and ways of improving public access which will be critical for attracting private sector investment is difficult. And whilst this access may in part relate to the heritage values of the place, much of the motivation for accessing the place relates to its prime harbour position and the opportunities for short term uses for functions, events and celebrations (NPWS 2011b, 2011c, 2011d).

The island has for some years played a significant role in hosting visitors to view the New Years Eve harbour fireworks. It has also been a popular filming location including for the hit Australian TV series *Water Rats* and as a backdrop to a recent music video for international rock band the Foo Fighters (Figure 7). Many of the short term creative uses of the island for which there is a demand show few direct connections to the cultural and heritage significance of the place. However these uses have minimal impacts on the heritage values of the place and provide the opportunity to provide access to a wider audience than might not otherwise visit.

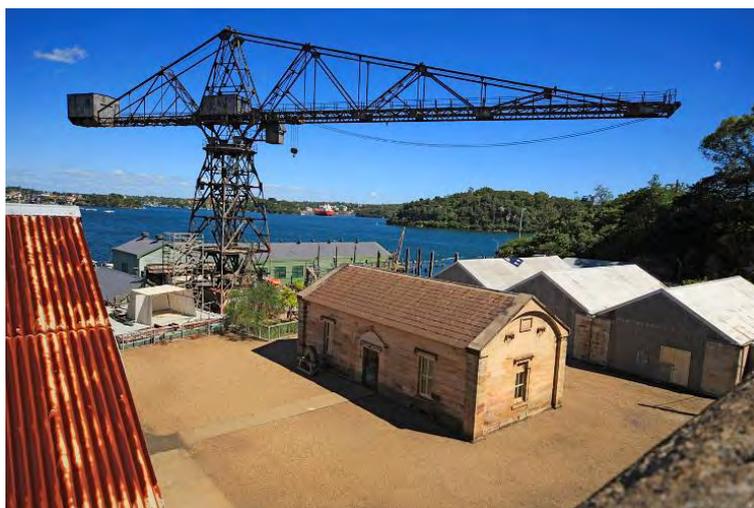


Figure 6. Goat Island: View across 1830s explosives magazine precinct to ship yard. (Photo: NPWS)



Figure 7. Goat Island: Backdrop for Foo Fighters concert. (Photo: NPWS).

New tour products and short term uses generally require low start up investment (compared to say the adaptation of historic buildings or redevelopment of new buildings) and pose less financial risk. Thus commercial tours have recently been licensed to operate on the island. In 2011 the ‘Crave Food Festival’ offered children’s activities during weekends in October. In addition instead of undertaking detailed interpretation or access works, the NPWS is now concentrating on developing short term opportunities for leasing parts of the island for functions and events and just presenting the island in its current condition.

The principal longer term development opportunities identified in the economic analyses for the island (NPWS 2011d) relate to the provision of tours, the development of food and beverage opportunities, hotel accommodation and function and venue opportunities.

The global financial crisis has created caution in the tourism industry and attracting investors may be difficult. In the mean time the island needs to achieve a critical mass of users not only to be economically viable (Bianchini et al. 1994) but also socially and culturally relevant. The forward plan is to work towards developing an audience and a community of interested users via creative one-off or short term events in order to develop awareness of the place (Figure 8). This “strategic incrementalism” (Landry 2011b) sees small steps being taken towards achieving a bigger vision for the island in which there will be a vibrant and creative visitor experience.

The significance of the place is indisputable but the location, access and history pose particular challenges to both the delivery of public benefits and the realisation of opportunities for private investment.



Figure 8. Goat Island: Island hopping - building a community of interest. (Photo: NPWS).

5. Toward linking the creative economy with the heritage economy

Understanding and investing in the past enables us to glimpse what we were and how we see ourselves in the present. Heritage sites when managed creatively can also be a catalyst for long-term economic growth and sustained community engagement. Through a number of examples, we have demonstrated that heritage sites and conservation can facilitate, encourage and promote creative endeavour. Events and innovative temporary uses can introduce new audiences to heritage and help communicate heritage values. In the case of Montague Island, nature-based tourism at a cultural heritage site has generated revenue and encouraged public interest in conservation. In contrast, at Botany Bay, the recent NPWS projects have identified creative responses and new economic opportunities though have been met with considerable community concern.

It is clear that heritage practitioners (architects, archaeologists, historians, conservators) should look 'outside the box' of fabric-centred conservation toward the creative economy in order to revitalise and energise public engagement with heritage spaces. The challenge is for all of us to be willing to relinquish our privileged role as experts to one of brokerage; facilitating linkages with the creative industries.

In order to achieve a more creative practice, heritage practitioners should be open to addressing traditional barriers established by conservation practice itself. By moving outside the prescriptive system of heritage practice, we can more overtly engage with the idea that heritage can deliver economic outcomes. The challenge is to address the myriad of values (e.g., tangible and intangible, price and non-price) and to recognise that it is

the environmental, historic, social, aesthetic and educative values of heritage that transcends economics and benefits present and future generations. As demonstrated by the concentric circles model, with nature/culture and public good conserved at the core the opportunities and benefits may be economic but go much deeper to environmental and cultural sustainability.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge stimulating discussions with many of our co-workers in the Office of Environment and Heritage (NSW) and Godden Mackay Logan. Richard Davies and Penny Spoelder provided useful comments on a draft of this paper. Preston Cope provided feedback on the Montague Island case study. Cecile Knowles, Graphics Consultant (GML), prepared Figure 2. The opinions expressed in the paper do not necessarily reflect those of our employers, the Office of Environment and Heritage (NSW) and Godden Mackay Logan.

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