

Competing discourses of built heritage: lay values in Irish conservation planning

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Abstract

Built heritage conservation has traditionally been shaped by professionals through an ‘authorised heritage discourse’, emphasising expert knowledge and skills, universal value, a hierarchy of significance, and protecting the authenticity of tangible assets. However, while the purpose of built heritage conservation is widely recognised to be broad, encompassing cultural, social and economic benefits, it takes place in the presence, and on behalf, of a wider public whose values and priorities may differ starkly from those of heritage power-players. Drawing on the perspectives of a range of built heritage actors in three small towns in Ireland, this paper contributes to these debates, exploring the competing values and priorities embedded within lay discourses of heritage. Based on critical discourse analysis of interviews with local actors, the paper identifies that collected memory and local place distinctiveness, contributing to a sense of local identity, are of central importance in how non-experts construct their understanding of built heritage. In the Irish context, this is particularly important in understanding social and cultural statutory categories of heritage interest. The paper concludes on the implications for policy and practice and, in particular, the need to more effectively take account of non-expert values and priorities in heritage and conservation decision-making.

Keywords: built heritage, conservation, planning, lay discourses, Ireland.

Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a fundamental shift in the social sciences away from positivist epistemological theories towards a greater emphasis on broader cultural meaning (Albet and Kramsch, 1999). For example, this ‘cultural turn’ is strongly evident within the geography literature, which has resulted in consideration of multiple competing discourses of ‘place’, notably including everyday ‘lay’ interpretations (Halfacree 1993; Jones 1995; M. Scott 2009). In the heritage field, this cultural turn has led to a reconsideration of the traditional professional understanding of heritage value as intrinsic and universal, towards the view that heritage value is a social construction imposed upon physical structures and artefacts. On this basis, structures and places can be subject to multiple and potentially competing representations of heritage value. In this context, Smith (2006) has observed that heritage professionals ascribe value to the historic built environment through an ‘authorised heritage discourse’ (AHD). This discourse tends to emphasise traditional craftsmanship, materials, design and artistic merit, and the preservation of these attributes as a cultural patronage in accordance with professional knowledge. However, historic structures and places can be subject to multiple and conflicting representations of heritage value, and not just those of professional experts. While Warren-Findley (2013) traces a ‘cultural turn’ in heritage theory and practice back to the late 1980s and 1990s, Smith (2013) argues that it has yet to be adequately explored. More specifically, Groote and Haartsen (2012, 183) point out that little attention has been given to the implications of *lay discourses of heritage*. These themes have been examined recently by Schofield (2014, 2), amongst others, who advocates ‘a new approach to cultural heritage, one that is participatory, bottom-up and fundamentally grounded in local concerns and interests’ (see also Cashman 2006; Smith and Waterton 2009; Robertson 2012; Bonnett and Alexander 2013). This paper seeks to contribute to these debates through a bottom-up perspective of conservation planning in Ireland, examining the role of lay discourses of built heritage, and their inter-relationship with the authorised heritage discourse.

A dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) is adopted (see Fairclough 2010; Waterton, Smith, and Campbell 2006), alongside photo-elicitation interviews (see Harper 2002), to understand competing values in relation to built heritage. Forty-five semi-structured in-depth interviews, incorporating visual prompts, were conducted with local heritage actors and stakeholders in three small but contrasting Irish

towns. Towns were selected as potentially interesting cases where professional and lay discourses of heritage are likely to have led to conflict, particularly (1) due to development during the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’ era and (2) due to their location at the rural-urban fringe, where contrasting rural and urban policy and lay concerns and priorities may clash (see M. Scott 2012).

The paper is structured as follows: firstly, the research is contextualised by examining the literature around professional and lay discourses of heritage. Secondly, the paper outlines the usefulness and application of critical discourse analysis in understanding the role of heritage meaning-making in conservation planning policymaking and practice. This is followed by an outline of the research approach, based on qualitative interviews, and employing photo-elicitation. The empirical material is then discussed in relation to contemporary conservation planning as social practice (encompassing policymaking, plan-making, development management, etc.). Finally, the paper concludes on the implications of competing professional and lay discourses of heritage in planning for the historic built environment.

Distinguishing lay and professional discourses

The research draws on Jones’ (1995, after Halfacree 1993) definition of lay discourses to assist in understanding competing representations of heritage in the case study material (see also Fazey et al. 2006, in relation to lay experiential knowledge). Jones (1995, 37-38) describes lay discourses as:

...all the means of intentional and incidental communication which people use and encounter in the processes of their everyday lives, through which meanings ..., intentional and incidental, are expressed and constructed.

However, while Jones’ work is focused specifically on lay discourses of ‘place’ and ideas of the community, this paper applies the concept to shed new light on competing discourses at play in the heritage field (cf. Groote and Haartsen 2012). This paper also draws on the concept of an ‘authorised’ heritage discourse – built on the shared assumptions, meanings and language of heritage professionals – the principal ‘experts’ in the heritage field (Smith 2006). With regard to the definition of professional discourses, these are characterised by (a) their specialist knowledge, and (b) the related dominant discursive style/identity, which

allows them to shape and control the discourse and its consequences (after Fairclough 2010). This specifically manifests itself as an emphasis on that which is measurable through professional skill and knowledge. Further, as Pendlebury (2013) observes, an authorised heritage discourse can tend to respond in different ways to wider social, economic or political forces, resulting in variants, or ‘sub-AHDs’. Therefore, the authorised heritage discourse discussed in this paper generally refers to ‘official’ variants embedded in Irish legislation and policy, as opposed to sometimes starkly contrasting variants which professionals may adopt in practice. It is also important to point out that while professionals’ education and the professional institutions associated with conservation planning may drive the authorised heritage discourse towards uniformity (though this often is not the reality), lay discourses may be underpinned by experiential knowledge, and characterised by a greater tendency towards multiplicity. Nevertheless, lay representations may be constructed in informal, but no less socially recognisable interactions than in conservation planning (e.g. community centres, churches or pubs, as opposed to pre-planning meetings or public consultations). While these categories of discourse are an essentialisation, and may overlap, i.e. lay discourses of heritage may at times be drawn upon by professionals, and vice versa, the two discourses ‘have content and consequences that are separable’ (Jones 1995, 38), and are useful in understanding the role of different actors in conservation planning.

To interpret the role of these competing discourses, this paper adopts a dialectical-relational approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see, for example, Fairclough 2010). The approach relates to ‘social practices’ – any stable form of social activity (regularised and formalised social situations/structures), for example conservation planning. In the dialectical-relational approach to CDA, discourse can both reinforce and transform hegemonic social structures (power relations) in social practices in three interdependent ways (after Fairclough 2010):

- Socially recognisable ways of interacting in language or text, also referred to as ‘genres’ (e.g. the language used by a heritage professional in a particular context; a policy document);
- Ways of representing (a meaning shared by a particular group, and embedded in the discourse of that group, e.g. amongst built heritage professionals), and

- Ways of being, also referred to as ‘styles’ (a social identity created through discourse, e.g. the dominant identity of built heritage professionals, through which they control a policy agenda).

These three elements become formalised and regularised to form an ‘order of discourse’ (Fairclough 2010, 358-359, after Foucault 1984), e.g. an authorised heritage discourse. Orders of discourse are also the discursive (semiotic) dimension of social practices. In the context of this paper, this can be seen in the role that lay and professional discourses of heritage play in conservation planning as social practice. Drawing on Fairclough’s approach, CDA considers three dimensions in parallel: (1) language/text; alongside (2) the discursive practices embedded therein (a, b and c, above); and (3) the way in which this can shape a particular social practice – such as conservation planning. This means that the language of local actors (including policy officials and stakeholders) is analysed to determine how discourse can shape and legitimise particular heritage meanings, and reinforce power relations between professional and subordinate groups. A key limitation with CDA lies in what can be inferred from the text or language subject to analysis. Specifically, intentionality and positionality cannot be definitively assigned on the basis of either the text / language, or of other factual information known about a text or informant. However, the effect of the discourse is the same, regardless (Waterton, Smith, and Campbell 2006).

Research approach

While a range of settings may be legitimate subjects for examination of the role of competing discourses in conservation practice, the Irish small-town context is particularly interesting. In Irish small towns, conflict in conservation planning may arise for three principal reasons. Firstly, many smaller towns have been subject to substantial growth (Central Statistics Office 2012, 11) and development during the period of sustained economic growth during which Ireland was often colloquially referred to as the ‘Celtic Tiger’. Secondly, smaller towns in the 1,500 – 5,000 population bracket have been to an extent abandoned between urban and rural policy stools (DoEHLG 2000, x), reflective of a more general tendency to prioritise sectoral objectives in planning policy (Campbell 2003; Hodge and Monk 2004; A. J. Scott et al. 2013). Thirdly, and finally, small towns within the urban fringe are under-researched as sites of conflict resulting from a colonial legacy of domination expressed through the built environment.

Towns selected should be places where built heritage conflict has occurred, and can be examined. The case study towns were therefore selected on the basis of two key criteria. Firstly, the towns must have been subject to a substantial amount of new development and growth in recent years, evidenced through archival material and census records. Secondly, the towns must have a substantial stock of buildings subject to statutory heritage protection. Selected towns therefore had a substantial number of protected structures and national monuments relative to other similarly-sized towns, and contained a designated architectural conservation area (ACA) or an adopted development plan proposal to implement an ACA. Protected structures are buildings or structures provided with heritage protection through inclusion in a list adopted by councillors as part of the local authority's statutory development plan. Protection is applied on the basis of eight categories of special heritage interest set out in legislation (Government of Ireland 2000 Pt.IV, s.51(1)). An ACA is a 'place, area, group of structures or townscape' (Government of Ireland 2000, Pt.IV, s.81(1), 100), where the area is of special interest arising from one of the same eight categories discussed above, or where the area contributes to the character of a protected structure. An ACA is similarly designated under a local authority's statutory development plan. In contrast, a national monument is designated under archaeological legislation separate from the planning system, and typically (though not exclusively) relates to structures or artefacts dating to before 1700 (National Monuments Service 2015). Only towns in the 1,500-5,000 population bracket were considered, as smaller towns are less likely to have experienced growth, and development impacting on built heritage. On this basis, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois; Ardee, Co. Louth; and Monasterevin, Co. Kildare were selected as the subjects of case study research. All three towns meet the selection criteria outlined above and also possess contrasting historical and physical characteristics: Ardee owes much to its medieval origins; Abbeyleix is a planned landlord estate town; and Monasterevin is notable for the large, redundant industrial buildings that dominate its centre.

Forty-five semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with local heritage actors and stakeholders in these towns. Individual stakeholders were identified and classified on the basis of the different kinds of knowledge they hold in relation to conservation planning (see Collier and M. Scott 2009), ensuring that as full a range of stakeholders are interviewed, each holding different kinds of relevant knowledge. The interviews also draw on the visual sociological technique of photo-elicitation (see Harper

2002), employing photo-montages and photographs selected by the researcher – a technique which has been under-used in examining public values in relation to built heritage in particular (Tweed and Sutherland 2007). Though Van Auken, Frisvoll, and Stewart (2010) argue that informant-selection of images can yield more accurate results, this has not been attempted in this research. The images are useful in two respects. Firstly, they help to break down barriers in the interviews resulting from professional vocabulary, knowledge and power. Secondly, they can also more effectively reveal informants' views on the intangible qualities of place than traditional interviews. Design of discussion topics, and selection of images, was guided by two sets of detailed research questions: the first set sought to identify competing representations of heritage and areas of conflict; the second set sought to examine how competing discourses have the effect of actually shaping meaning and, thereby, decision-making outcomes (either deliberately or inadvertently in the interests of particular groups). This facilitated analysis of the relationship between the authorised heritage discourse, and lay discourses of heritage (interdiscursivity – see Fairclough 2010) which examined not only the most numerically abundant representations, but also minority views.

Case study results: heritage, local identity and the action of discourse

Case study interviews reveal that identity plays a prominent role in lay discourses of heritage and, in particular, the construction of local identity. Specifically, in interviews with 33 informants, local collected memory and the character of the built environment were important in relation to built heritage – as non-expert values distinct from the authorised heritage discourse. Here, 'collected' memory is referred to, rather than 'collective' or social memory (Casey 2000; Smith 2006), which O'Keeffe (2007, 5-6) contends is 'dangerously essentialist' and implies that the individual carries a store of memory, and collective responsibility, over which he or she has no control. Instead, 'collected' memory is comprised of personal memories that have been subject to 'external programming', in other words, not collective 'memories of the event', but individual 'memories of its mediation', subject to the influence of media reporting, and others' memories of the same event. In the interview material, lay discourses not only challenge conventional heritage decision-making, but can also challenge conventional modes of conservation practice, themselves shaped by the 'official' authorised heritage discourse. The discussion here begins by examining, local collected memory, and character, in relation to built heritage conservation – two key discursive themes to emerge from the interviews, and both closely related to a sense of

(particularly local) identity. Note that these themes are not mutually exclusive: many informants expressed both sub-themes in their interviews. The paper then examines the ways in which discourse shapes and reinforces particular lay and professional meanings, and finally concludes on the results presented.

Lay discourses of heritage: local collected memory and character

The discourse of twenty-four informants indicated that, rather than designed architectural or aesthetic matters, particular local meanings may be of central importance to non-experts in constructing their understanding of heritage. The contrast with professional priorities is focused on by informant L37, a heritage professional, who discusses a former cinema in Ardee, now used as a rehearsal venue for the Ardee Concert Band (see figure 1).

It's funny, it's sort of perhaps in a way hypocritical. ... This is an old building and, as it's a cinema, it has strong associations. People feel very positively about it. Plus, it's also, it's currently being used by the Ardee Concert Band. ... So that building is big and bulky and massive and ugly, but it's been there a long time and it has acquired an air of respectability through its veneer of nostalgia, and it's in social use. ... So it could be a protected structure for its social and cultural value. (L37)

<Insert figure 1 about here>

Informant L37's obvious use of professional terminology such as 'protected structure', and 'social and cultural value', and their awareness of the irony inherent in an 'ugly' building potentially possessing significant heritage value, both help to establish their professional discursive 'style'. However, their discourse also establishes a representation of the building that emphasises its social value. More specifically, their discourse implies that the cinema is valued not just by one or two enthusiasts, but by the wider public in the town – those who have a 'collected' memory of film showings in the building, or who have an affection for its use as a rehearsal venue for the Ardee Concert Band. This meaning is 'collected' in the sense that it is not only derived from personal experience of attending film showings, but is discursively constructed amongst the wider public in the town. Many individuals have no personal experience of attending the cinema, but informant L26 suggests that *'there'd be*

war’ if it was proposed to demolish the building. This kind of meaning can only be ascertained by talking to people in the town, as argued by informant L31, a non-expert who sits on a local residents’ association, and with a wider role in representing resident interests at County level:

Does that street have a story? Does that house have a story? Are people, you know, you can’t protect everything, but maybe it has a very important story that the two of us looking at it don’t know what it is, and maybe it’s very important. So it’s up to ... the people with the heritage in the town to tell us, is that street important? (L31)

While these kinds of memories could be interpreted as simply a backward-looking nostalgia (see Cashman 2006; Bonnet and Alexander 2013), their meaning and implications are more complex. Nostalgia can be seen as negative and conflicting with contemporary development, but it can also be viewed more positively, as an ‘endemic facet’ of modern life, and associated narratives of loss and yearning hold the potential ‘to shape and enable a considerable range of social behaviour’, and can be an agent for ‘politically purposeful acts of social renewal and change’ (Bonnett and Alexander 2013, 392. See also Bonnett 2009 2010a, 2010b). Despite this potential, CDA suggests that a representation such as that in the above quotation may be either dismissed or overlooked by professionals. More specifically, in the various ritualised ‘ways of interacting’ within conservation planning, such as pre-planning or public meetings, the discursive ‘style’ of lay actors may place them in a deferential position relative to professionals. This can hinder the proper consideration of these lay representations in decision-making.

Similarly, collected memory may play a role in how the public value landlord estate houses, and other postcolonial architectural legacies in Ireland, as described by informant L22, a member of the local political community:

From a local point of view, people that were born, sort of bred, reared in the town or whatever, they would identify with [the local estate house] a lot more easily than maybe certain other people. (L22)

The comments of informant L14 similarly reflect a positive local collected memory of the town’s former landlords – and one that is at odds with the traditional Irish nationalist

narrative which associates estates and houses of the former ruling Ascendancy class in Ireland with colonial power and oppression:

It's fairly common knowledge that they were nice landlords and that's something that you're very conscious of. The people of the town knew that we were exceptional – that we were treated well ... [by] the landlords. So, em, yea [the estate] is generally viewed upon as a positive thing. Those families are still around so people still look up to them and they're still part of the community. (L36)

Although national identity plays a central role in heritage discourse (Parkinson, M. Scott, and Redmond 2015), local identity is much closer to people's daily experience. Results indicate that local collected memory and identity are more important heritage values at the local level in the three case studies, and are core components of lay discourses of heritage.

An important aspect of this form of local heritage value, and another characteristic which sets it apart from traditional professional assessments of heritage value, is that the scale of the community of interest may not be central to the meaning ascribed to a building by non-experts. Specifically, a building's historical interest is often typically related to a broader context of significant individuals or events, i.e. a building is valued according to a hierarchy of interest, where a larger community of interest imparts greater heritage value (cf. Greer 2010). However, for non-experts, 'collected' memories of personal experiences, can be of more significance. This kind of heritage meaning may belong to relatively small communities of interest, but may provoke vigorous opposition if the associated buildings are threatened, as it is deeply personal, and strongly related to their sense of identity.

The language used by informant L37 is also illustrative of the difficulty that heritage professionals have in rationalising the dichotomy that arises when a building of no architectural design significance is of considerable social or cultural value. Despite this, informant L37 is very matter-of-fact in their acceptance of social value. Though their narrative implies an understanding of social value as something of practical use to the community, it also implies some understanding of the intangible heritage importance of a building that contributes to a sense of local identity, particularly in the phrase: *'it's been there a long time and it has acquired an air of respectability through its veneer of nostalgia'*. This contrasts with the discourse of informant L29, discussed in the next section of this

paper, below. It is interesting that informant L37 – a heritage professional – should take such a view; they might be expected to defend professional values and priorities over competing perspectives, but instead, their discourse stresses the importance of lay representations of the built environment, and they take on the discursive ‘style’ of an advocate of non-expert values. This is illustrative of the tendency for individuals to draw on different representations in their interactions, and vary their discourse in response to both the specific issue being discussed and the wider social, political and economic context that frames it (cf. Pendlebury 2013).

Of those who discussed alternative, non-expert heritage values related to identity, 22 (48.9%) informants talked about the character or distinctiveness of specific elements of the physical environment around them within the context of local collected memories of their town. However, character and place distinctiveness are not understood in the sense embedded in legislation and guidance, underpinned by the ‘official’ authorised heritage discourse, where the place is considered to be of special interest according to one of the eight categories set out in Irish legislation (Government of Ireland 2000, s.81, 100). Instead, character is related to local identity – along the lines argued by Breakwell (1992). For example, the discourse of informant L32 featured a representation of the built environment that emphasised its physical distinctiveness, and connected this with particular collected memories:

When the main road was being redone ... in 1999 or whenever it was ... we lost a stream down the side of the town. Now, alright, that stream had been gone for forty years, even under the old road, but when I was coming here to school in the 1940s, early ‘50s that stream came down the Ballinakill Road and ran down the side of the road. There were bridges, slant bridges over it for walking in and out onto the pavement, onto the road. And that was closed up by the Council because it was regarded as being too dangerous – that people coming out of pubs would fall into it, or out of shops, falling in it ... so they covered up. Now I’m told – but this is only a recollection on my part – I’m told that at the time even Viscount de Vesci [former principal landowner in Abbeyleix and descendant of the town’s founder] wanted the stream left, but he didn’t succeed. ... Anybody I’ve talked to ... almost all would’ve loved to have seen that stream. (L32)

In this quotation, the discourse of informant L32 represents the character of the built environment in a way that is connected to something more akin to collected memory than simply local history. This is a representation that contrasts with those embedded within the authorised heritage discourse, and which professionals may have difficulty classifying as in any way ‘special’ under the social value category (Government of Ireland 2000, s.81, 100), particularly given its small community of interest. Nevertheless, it is arguably of importance, as the quotation reflects the discourse of almost half of informants interviewed. Given that policy currently reflects expert rather than lay discourses of heritage, heritage policy and practice are not properly representative of the full diversity of heritage discourses, and the contrasting representations embedded therein.

Lay discourses of heritage and the authorised heritage discourse

Seven informants acknowledged the existence of alternative, lay representations of the historic built environment, but simultaneously tended to downplay their validity as considerations in heritage decision-making. This reflects the tendency already discussed to regard the related phenomenon of nostalgia as backward-looking and in conflict with development and progress (Bonnett and Alexander 2013). In this context, there is a risk that competing lay representations of heritage are ignored or dismissed. Of these seven informants, six were heritage professionals, while one was a developer who dismissed public calls for protection of a building for local historical reasons, indicating that these kinds of arguments may be made by others, and not only professionals. Of the heritage professionals, informant L29 for example discusses non-expert input into the inclusion of buildings on the local Record of Protected Structures:

Funnily enough, [the town] had what I thought was sort of a funny conundrum ... [W]e actually had proposed a lot of deletions [from the Record of Protected Structures] in [the town] ... There were a lot of local things on the list from previous development plans. So we thought, okay, maybe [these should] be rationalised ... we're not protecting everything. We're showing a bit of balance here but, funny enough, the local things held more resonance to the elected members in [the town] and they didn't want them deleted – even, sort of, these examples here on the little back lanes. They're old corporation housing [built by the state]. So they put the

... social issues above what we were trying to rationalise on architectural reasons. (L29)

The discourse of informant L29 establishes their expert discursive ‘style’ and social identity: reasonable and rational, implying that the old corporation housing was not worth protecting. However, they do not dismiss the councillors’ views explicitly. While this may be because they are aware of the validity of councillors’ input into the process, they are also very likely cognisant of the provision in guidelines for protection of buildings of ‘social interest’ because they may be ‘an essential reference point for that community’s identity’ (DAHG 2011a, 30). So the competing representations of the built environment embedded in the discourses of non-experts are tolerated, but they are far from being fully endorsed: the narrative suggests the inadvertent action of the ‘official’ authorised heritage discourse, reinforcing professional control over decision-making.

Informant L7 (also a heritage professional) similarly acknowledges social interest – in other words, non-expert priorities. However, they try hard to rationalise non-expert heritage value, classifying it as something entirely separate from the ‘*architectural discipline*’, instead allied to ‘*popular culture*’. Here, they are referring to architecture in its broadest sense, and not only the narrower *architectural interest* – one of the eight categories used as a basis for protection in Ireland (Government of Ireland 2000, s.81, 100). Whether a deliberate or an unintentional, this pushes lay and professional heritage priorities even further apart:

*[It] is a collective sense of history or a sense of place of the town ... What’s more important to them is these vibrant uses... So, that sense of continuity or ... sense of people locating themselves within their own community... I think it suggests ... [a] sort of contemporary visual culture. ...it’s ... **not allied to a strict architectural discipline approach.** ... The shared focus really is memory, and then how that feeds into your identity and your cultural make-up [added emphasis]. (L7)*

Informant L9 – another professional – similarly acknowledges the existence of social value, but uses this representation in support of protection of the ‘big house’, that is, the former residences of the Irish Ascendancy, the elite and culturally distinct minority group that dominated Ireland socially, politically and economically, prior to independence:

And the built heritage is a relic to some extent of a wealthier people in the past. You mightn't have those wealthy families, but you might have the families that worked for the wealthy families, so there's a whole social history around how we appreciate our built heritage. (L9)

The buildings to which informant L9 refers are typically valued not primarily for their social value, but for qualities connected with craftsmanship, artistic skill, professional knowledge, and related to a hierarchy of significance – all core elements in the typical professional ‘way of representing’ the historic built environment. This representation has much in common with lay representations of heritage that emphasise local collected memory, as discussed above. However, whether deliberately or inadvertently, their adoption of this ‘inclusive’ representation has the effect of seeking support for the protection of these architectural exemplar buildings amongst a public who may have little appreciation of the buildings’ exemplar characteristics, and who historically associated such buildings with colonial power and oppression. Each of the examples discussed here illustrate clearly the potential for the ‘official’ authorised heritage discourse to reinforce existing power relations between professionals and non-experts in heritage decision-making. However, they also illustrate the way in which an elite discourse can lead to the inadvertent dismissal of alternative priorities.

Lay discourses of heritage: social and economic value

The discourse of four informants referred to character and place distinctiveness in a way that accords with lay representations of heritage, emphasising intangible heritage qualities of the built environment. Further, it links this representation with the potential for an economic or social dividend. It is logical that local political representatives and building owners might relate character and place distinctiveness with economic interests – and these are the categories of informant who used lay discourses of heritage in this way, and who feature in the below examples. It is also notable how the discourse does not focus on the priorities of heritage professionals (architectural design, authenticity of material fabric, etc.).

In this first example, informant L15 stresses their view of the importance of character, but also of development, pointing to photographs of a range of older buildings in the town core, not all of which were protected:

*But, yea, I think the likes of these kind of things in any town, not just in Ardee, **should be developed on**. The likes of these of buildings [pointing to mundane terraced buildings on the main street] and the castle here beside ... I think we're very lucky to have these kind of buildings in the middle of the town. Again it's all part of character as far as I'd be concerned. ... I think like Ardee needs character buildings like this. (Added emphasis. L15)*

Informant L15 has multiple interests, any combination of which may act as a motivation in their arguments. However, as elsewhere, regardless of this, and regardless of intentionality, their discourse emphasises 'character', and makes no mention of architectural details, authentic materials, outstanding significance, or other factors so central to the authorised heritage discourse. Further, they express the view that buildings of 'character' – according to their lay 'way of representing' the heritage of the town – should be 'developed on'. In the context of public consultations on planning and development in the town (a 'genre' – a socially recognisable 'way of interacting'), the priorities underpinned by this representation of character may conflict with those of professionals. However, the lay discursive 'style' is subordinate to that of professionals, and lay representations of character may be overlooked or dismissed. Informant L42 uses a lay discourse of heritage in a similar manner, in support of residential development in historic town cores, talking of prioritising the '*living heritage of the town*', as opposed to more traditional heritage qualities, such as architectural design interest, or artistic interest:

*[If there's] a merit in holding onto [an old] building ... I think we have to ameliorate and incentivise that... And, even more ... [we have to incentivise] residential, which is so important for the built heritage and **the living heritage of the town**. (L42)*

The discourse here reflects non-experts' focus on intangible concerns, as expressed elsewhere in the interviews. For example, Informant L10, a member of the local political community in Ardee, and not a heritage expert, similarly focused on intangible concerns. Their comments arose in the context of a discussion about a redundant former supermarket building in the centre of the town:

And, like, the concern about that building and many buildings that are actually closed now in the middle of Ardee; it's not so much about

architecturally – or heritage-wise – what one has lost or whether the streetscape is ruined, it's really more about the sense of community and liveliness and aliveness of the Main Street. (L10)

The discourse of informant N10 tends to exclude the intangible from the scope of built heritage, perhaps illustrating the way in which the authorised heritage discourse can tend to shape heritage meaning, not only amongst professionals, but how it can also influence – and narrow – the non-expert understanding of heritage. This is despite the fact that the qualities they mention could be considered a form of intangible heritage according to the definitions set out in the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (UNESCO 2003). This defines intangible heritage as including ‘practices’ and ‘cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’ (2). States Parties to this convention should ‘take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory’ (5). However, to date, Ireland has not yet ratified, accepted or approved this convention. In each of the above (and other) examples, lay representations of heritage are unlikely to become properly embedded in policy due to the established patterns of power in conservation planning, maintained through ritualised ‘ways of interacting’, and the power relations framed by the discursive ‘styles’ of professionals and non-experts.

Lay discourses of heritage: residential desirability and social standing

In the interview material, the discourse of only one informant made a link between their perception of heritage and a sense of residential desirability. While this equates to only a very small proportion of the forty-five informants, the consequences of the discourse in shaping heritage meaning are particularly interesting, and relevant to conservation planning. Specifically, informant L24 described different aspects of the built environment that they regard as contributing to character.

...it's a beautiful shop front and it's a lovely shop. And that's a touch of class. ...all of the shops on the main street with the old signage and maybe a bit of some of the Irish names retained and done out in old Irish lettering, or old English – whichever, you know. There's character to all of that, you know, and it warms a place. ... I mean, character is that, you know, Abbeylax is a desired town to live in. (L24)

While each of the physical characteristics they list as priorities are in accordance with official guidance, informant L24 specifically links character with residential desirability, and makes similar references on two further occasions in their interview, for example in the following quotation referring to Pembroke Terrace (figure 2):

There's a picture there of the old Garda station; RIC station. That's class. That's a touch of class, and from the stonework to windows to chimney pots. That's character and class that you don't find. (L24)

<Insert figure 2 about here>

Implicit in the discourse is a representation, according to which, each of these things contributes, not towards architectural significance (in its broadest sense) but to the desirability of the town to existing and potential residents. There is therefore an implicit correlation between the features they describe, and the perception of wealth or social class in the town or, at the very least, a desire to differentiate the town from other less desirable places in which to live, potentially maintaining property values, and possibly the social status – and identity – of those living in the town. This parallels research elsewhere internationally into the link between conservation and gentrification, the allure of particular places, and a middle-class sense of self-identity (see, for example, Lees 1994; Jones and Varley 1999). This representation of the town's built heritage again holds the potential to lead to conflict in conservation planning, though, for the reasons already discussed, the patterns of power maintained through discourse may tend to balance decision-making outcomes in favour of professionals.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a 'bottom-up' perspective, exploring the role of lay discourses of heritage in conservation planning as social practice at the local level. The local discursive terrain is complex, framed by multiple competing interests, and characterised by overlapping and heterogeneous discourses. However, analysis of the interview material demonstrates that lay discourses of heritage are characterised by two principal inter-related themes, each expressed in relation to the historic built environment, and closely linking heritage and

identity (cf. Waterton 2005; Moore and Whelan 2007; Graham and Howard 2008; Waterton and Smith 2010). These are:

- Collected memory – manifest in the stories told by stakeholders – these contribute to the discursive construction of place identity (Dixon and Durrheim 2000).
- Local place distinctiveness (character) – one of the four inter-related ‘principles’ through which individuals construct their identity (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996, after Breakwell 1992; Devine-Wright and Lyons 1997).

It is clear that representations rooted in the local context are of greater importance to non-experts in the three case studies than the established and better understood representation that relates heritage significance to the size of the community of interest – reflected in the NIAH (National Inventory of Architectural Heritage) ‘rating values’ of ‘International, National, Regional, Local and Record Only’ (DAHG 2011b, 21-22; cf. Greer 2010).

Though the notion of ‘lay’ and ‘professional’ (or ‘expert’) discourses is an essentialisation and, in reality, the discursive terrain is more akin to a spectrum of discourse which different actors use according to different influences, and in different circumstances, the consequences of the discourses are separable for the purposes of this paper (cf. Jones 1995, 38). The often competing, though sometimes overlapping, professional and lay heritage discourses evident in the interview material have the effect of shaping heritage meaning differently, and are therefore a cause of discord. Competing lay discourses of heritage challenge conservation requirements, and the notion that the primary purpose of conservation should be the maintenance of a tangible cultural patronage. Lay discourses of heritage can also emphasise the economic benefit that built heritage can bring. Despite these contrasts, CDA indicates, firstly, that lay actors may be subservient participants within the ritualised ‘genres’, or ‘ways of interacting’, found within conservation planning (e.g. pre-planning consultations or public meetings). Secondly, while the lay group may represent the built environment in shared but unofficial ways, their lay discursive ‘style’ or social identity can hinder the articulation of these representations in interactions with professionals, and thus can also hinder proper consideration of lay representations of heritage in conservation planning decision-making.

Given this context, and arguments that heritage should be an expression of the “richness and diversity of our past” (DAHG 2011a, 13), and “about the everyday, the everywhere, and

something for (and of) everybody” (Schofield 2009, 112), there is one key consequence for conservation planning: a need to better understand, and effectively take account of non-expert priorities in policy and practice. This is not currently being achieved. For example, although in the case studies local heritage professionals attempted to reconcile lay and professional discourses, they tended to overlook, and to imprecisely articulate, the more intangible aspects of heritage value that stakeholder interviews tended to centre on. This amounts to a significant policy deficit, on the basis that planning for built heritage is intended to represent the perceived ‘greater public good’, and has particular relevance for place-making processes and participatory practices. Significant change is therefore required in order to more fully achieve a breadth of heritage policy and protection, and a form of conservation practice, that properly encompasses representations of the built environment beyond those of professionals. As Bonnett and Alexander (2013, 391) argue, state-led conservation policy and practice can be ‘maintained in a complex and mutually sustaining relationship with more personal, less official, visions of the value of the past’. Lay discourses of heritage should therefore not be assumed to be simply conflicting and backward-looking, rooted in a fear of change, but can also be productive, and hold the potential to shape social renewal and change.

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Figures

Figure 1. Former cinema, Ardee.

Figure 2. Pembroke Terrace, Abbeyleix.