

Engaging in design activism and communicating cultural significance through contemporary heritage storytelling: A case study in Brisbane, Australia

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Purpose: This paper discusses the role of contemporary storytelling in preserving built heritage, as a mechanism for extending the useful life of buildings.

Design/methodology/approach: The authors adopted a qualitative action research approach to consider the role of storytelling. A creative, multi-method approach (i.e. a 'Brisbane Art Deco' publication and associated marketing campaign) was used as a case study to explore the contours of such an approach and its efficacy in engaging the community.

Findings: This paper highlights the potential of contemporary approaches to heritage storytelling, including utilising digital technologies, to engage a diverse range of people that may not have otherwise participated. The authors propose the value of taking a creative and whole-of-society approach – such as that used in this case study – to heritage storytelling.

Research limitations/implications: The case study discussed provides a phenomenological insight into one version of 'contemporary heritage storytelling'. The findings have immediate implications for prioritising research into storytelling for the preservation of built heritage.

Practical implications: The case study demonstrates opportunities for community engagement through storytelling and highlights potential strategies to effectively contribute to a greater societal value of cultural heritage.

Originality/value: This research contributes to theory and practice around the management of cultural heritage, and highlights the usefulness of employing such a strategy to reach and engage a broader audience.

Keywords: built heritage, cultural significance, interpretation, communication, design activism, heritage storytelling

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Introduction

At the same time as the focus on sustainability in the built environment intensifies, there is a renewed awareness of the importance of cultural heritage and preserving historic buildings (Carroon 2011; Young 2012). Adaptive reuse is increasingly discussed as a preservation strategy for built heritage and means of extending the useful life of buildings (Bullen 2007). It is well acknowledged in the literature that the built environment is a critical component of a city's cultural heritage and contributes to the cultural identity and sense of belonging of the inhabitants. There are also significant economic benefits including the effects of cultural tourism which boosts the local and national economy (Tweed and Sutherland 2007). There is generally also a higher labour intensity associated with preservation and the benefits to the economy therefore include more local jobs and subsequent household income. This is in contrast to new construction whereby the economic benefits are less pronounced and equally split between materials and labor (Rypkema 2005). The adaptive reuse of historic monuments as public buildings is often cost-effective and helps rejuvenate the economic base of older parts of the city (United Nations Development Programme 2013).

Within Australia, current practice in managing built heritage involves producing and/or referring to a conservation management plan that is guided by best practice frameworks including the Burra Charter and ICOMOS guidelines. The Burra Charter acknowledges that the cultural significance of a heritage place includes an appreciation for its aesthetic, historic, scientific and social value (Ahmad 2006; Australia ICOMOS 2013). These conservation management plans therefore include a description of the history, use, associations, and fabric of the place. This collective insight into the underlying intangible values contributes to the internal stakeholders' understanding of a place's cultural significance (Australia ICOMOS 2013; Kerr 2013). However, the sharing of those stories with external stakeholders is often ad hoc and champion-based.

The ICOMOS 14th General Assembly and Scientific Symposium focused on the connections between place and meaning, and Bouchenaki (2003, 2) acknowledged that: 'Physical heritage can only attain its true significance when it sheds light on its underlying values'. Munjeri (2004) claims that: 'cases abound where sites and monuments have been vandalized or neglected through failure to make people associate themselves with such physical manifestations'. It is clear that tangible sites and monuments can only be understood and interpreted through the stories told about them (Munjeri 2004). Prior research by the authors found that information captured in existing conservation management plans often serves as a foundation for both creative internal concept development when designers (predominantly architects and interior designers) are working on such projects; *and* for communicating with and engaging external stakeholders (Wilson, Desha and Miller 2014).

Driven by a need for a different approach to business-as-usual heritage conservation in a local context, this paper begins with a discussion on the theoretical notion of storytelling and the role of contemporary incarnations as a mechanism in facilitating social change and redirecting practice. The authors then reflect on the contours of a single case study that employed such a 'contemporary heritage storytelling' approach, and evaluating its efficacy in reaching a broader demographic and raising the public consciousness about specific places. The paper draws on concepts from heritage and design fields to present this particular approach to heritage storytelling that interprets and communicates cultural significance creatively. The authors use this single phenomenological example (reflecting on a single case in

relation to the phenomena being studied) of a recent publication and related digital strategy to illustrate the potential of such an approach in promoting the redirection of current practice and creating conditions conducive to heritage-rich built environments.

A review of storytelling

Stories enable us to communicate complex concepts in a short period of time, and provide the reader with the opportunity to connect a concept to their own personal experience (Heylighen, Martin and Cavallin 2007). It is through such interpretation that tangible historic places begin to have meaning, and the notion of storytelling is therefore a fundamental pillar of the heritage field given that it is concerned with interpretation. This paper focuses specifically on the practice of storytelling and communication in relation to tangible built heritage, and presents the contours of a specific case study.

Heritage storytelling

Prior research by the authors has highlighted that the social history surrounding buildings (alongside the more factual aesthetic and architectural aspects) in adaptive reuse building projects is considered, both, in the creation of relevant design concepts *and* the communication of that significance to the broader community (Wilson, Desha and Miller 2014). Designers working on such projects (generally architects and interior designers) often view themselves as storytellers to some degree, and use stories to: uncover, collate and communicate the historic details of buildings and the surrounding place (documenting how the building came about, its significance, and its surrounding context); engage other members of the design team and clients in the design process (using narrative to explain design elements); and evolve the existing story (adding a layer to the existing building fabric) (Wilson 2014).

Additionally, heritage building projects (particularly those that are publicly funded) are often costly and gaining public support is a recognised challenge. Emerging research indicates that there are multiple benefits to heritage storytelling given that it is used, both, in the creation of design ideas *and* the communication of those concepts to internal and external stakeholders. It is also an effective means of drawing the community's attention to the broader cultural significance of a specific heritage place (and thus establishing 'buy-in' through greater understanding). It is understood that heritage storytelling can contribute to long-term cultural, environmental and economic outcomes through facilitating cultural connectedness, participatory engagement, behaviour change, increased resilience, risk management, and sustainable tourism (Wilson 2014).

In advancing knowledge, understanding and significance of twentieth century heritage in particular, the International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C) (2011) acknowledges that 'archival research' and 'interpretation and promotion' are critical considerations in the conservation planning process and the promotion and celebration this heritage with the wider community is essential. They highlight the importance of the research and development of inventories of such examples and the components that contribute to their significance. Further, they appreciate that the sharing of this archival documentation enhances the 'understanding and enjoyment of users and visitors' by assisting in the interpretation of such places (International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C) 2011, 4).

A recognised challenge in the heritage field, is engaging the younger generations to ensure that stories, lessons, and skills are carried forward, and much contemporary

research into heritage conservation focuses on how to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. A key topic discussed at the 2014 Australia ICOMOS symposium was how narrative could be used by advocates to inspire support. The symposium participants emphasised the power of influential communication and telling stories that encourage a personal connection (Hood and Watson 2015).

Contemporary storytelling

New forms of media have created new ways for stories to be transmitted, and the use of digital technologies in particular is understood to be a vital component in contemporary storytelling in the twenty-first century. Modern narrative structures are also often multimodal and use several mediums including social media, music, images and video to create contemporary storytelling experiences. Using social media and digital technologies as the transmission mechanisms amplifies the distribution of a message and can foster new or renewed forms of human connection (Hampton, Sessions and Her 2011; Simon 2012). Transmedia storytelling across multiple media platforms is emerging as a strategy for communicating complex narratives by bringing together collective intelligence, facilitating participation, and delivering a unified message via various channels (Jenkins 2006).

Creativity is acknowledged as an essential component in approaching the many tenets of sustainable development, including heritage, given its power to find more imaginative and better development outcomes (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization 2014). In recent years, the notion of ‘design thinking’ from the field of design has emerged as a potentially ‘redirective practice’ for developing and deploying strategies for change (Fry 2009). More strategic than traditional design activities which focus on aesthetics, ‘design thinking’ is described by Brown (2008, 86) as ‘a methodology that imbues the full spectrum of innovation activities with a human-centered design ethos’. It is known as being particularly adept at addressing ‘wicked problems’ because it is transdisciplinary, integrative, and potentially transformative in exploring ‘what could be’ (Brown, Harris and Russell 2010). It is now widely accepted and understood that design has the potential to contribute more strategically to broader societal issues and considers a holistic view of the surrounding systems that influence the problems in focus (Brown 2008; Bucolo, Wrigley and Matthews 2012).

‘Social innovation’ and ‘design activism’ are concepts from the field of design that seek to intervene in current systems and promote an alternative vision for the future – often in relation to social movements across causes and disciplines (Thorpe 2008). In this context, design is understood to be ‘the act of deliberately moving from an existing situation to a preferred one’ (Fuad-Luke 2013, 5); while activism is ‘taking actions to catalyse, encourage or bring about change, in order to elicit social, cultural and/or political transformations’ (Fuad-Luke 2013, 6). At the heart of this design-led reconfiguration and transformation, is a participatory spirit and the concept of ‘co-creation’ (Julier 2008) which is understood to enable the diffusion of shared visions, scenarios, ideas and enabling solutions, and thus has the power to catalyse shifts in behaviour.

Design activism is understood to use ‘design thinking, imagination and practice...to create a counter-narrative aimed at generating and balancing positive social, institutional, environmental and/or economic change’ (Fuad-Luke 2013, 27). According to Thorpe (2008), activism may manifest itself as a demonstration artefact (revealing positive alternatives), an act of communication (making information visual), conventional actions (proposing legislation), a service artefact (providing humanitarian aid), events (conferences, exhibitions), or a protest artefact (confrontation). In

participating in such activism, Thorpe (2008) describes drawing on traditional activist actions such as strikes and boycotts, and also more passive and interpretive action such as using symbols of affiliation, and the formation of alternative versions. Fuad-Luke (2013) and Markussen (2013) propose that activism can be practiced in a designerly way by intervening into people's everyday life, and believe 'design activism' should be recognised as a practice of its own. Well aligned with this body of literature is another body of work from the design field that discusses the notion of 'futuring' which is described as an imperative activity within the design process that enables the designer (or 'change-agent' or 'design activist') to use 'connective thinking' to consider how a desired end result can be reached (Fry 2009; Shaw 2001).

The specific case study discussed in this paper drew on these futuring (Shaw 2001; Fry 2009), design activism (Fuad-Luke 2013; Thorpe 2008) and storytelling (Hampton, Sessions and Her 2011; Jenkins 2006) concepts from existing literature. Rather than through a traditional form of protest, and looking to the redirective power of design (through futuring and design activism), it was proposed that through the provision of engaging information, the project team could 'plant the seed' in the present for a tool that may be used in the future. Given that the concept of storytelling is already within the existing 'repertoire' of practice (Thorpe 2008) in the heritage field, the type of action that the authors opted to instigate was to develop a publication and associated marketing campaign with the intention of building a 'caretaker' community potentially resulting in an increased level of 'buy-in'. The authors propose that this publication has the potential to contribute to (and perhaps serves as the catalyst for) developing a vision for changing the status quo (Walker 2014). It is understood that it will serve as both a passive, propositional artefact empowering redirective practice in the present, and a resource from which decision-makers can draw from in relation to assessing the cultural significance of the featured places in the future.

Case study – the Brisbane Art Deco project

The first author was project manager for the Brisbane Art Deco project (Wilson 2015) and was therefore responsible for crafting, evaluating, and refining the interventions discussed in this paper. Given the nature of this approach, and the authors role as a 'meddler-in-the-middle' (McWilliam 2009), this cyclic and collaborative construction can be characterised as action research. The reflective philosophy used by the project manager throughout the development of the project enabled the iterative development of a solution that was understood to be both rigorous and relevant (List 2006; Schön 1983; Wilson et al. 2014).

The context for the project

Australia has just over 200 years of European built heritage, dating back to the arrival of the first colonial settlers in early 1788 (Hussein, Armitage and Too 2014). In a global context, the heritage buildings in Australia are considered to be reasonably recent with the majority of the heritage listed places on Heritage Registers being examples from the late nineteenth century, and few rarer examples surviving from the convict settlement period of the early 1800s (Queensland Government 2014). Although only a small proportion is protected, Australia is home to a substantial range of significant twentieth century built heritage and there is a growing interest and attention on its conservation (Art Deco & Modernism Society 2015).

Brisbane (in the state of Queensland) in particular, was the victim of 'state-approved vandalism' during the period in which the conservative Bjelke-Petersen

Government was in power (from 1968 to 1987) and is often described as having lost considerable character over the years (Radical Times n.d., 1; Brisbane Heritage 2013b). Demolition contractors, the Deen Brothers, became notorious as a result of their role in the demolition of as many as sixty of Brisbane's heritage buildings under the direction of the Bjelke-Petersen Government during the 1970s and 1980s. The people of Brisbane were particularly angered by the lack of consultation and unexpected conditions in which they were often demolished, especially in relation to the high-profile demolition of the Bellevue Hotel (1979) and Cloudland (1982) which were 'nocturnal demolitions' (midnight and 4am respectively) and attracted widespread outrage (Fisher 1991).

Public pressure to better safeguard Brisbane's built heritage continued to build, and 'with its overtones of wanton destruction, development bias, political connivance, arbitrary government, police power and irretrievable loss', the issue contributed to the election of a new government who introduced the Queensland Heritage Act and instituted the Queensland Heritage Council (Fisher 1991, 64). Despite these legislative measures, there is still significant public concern about the 'insidious destruction of older and more significant buildings' (Brisbane Heritage 2013b) and there continue to be many protest campaigns to halt the demolition of such buildings (Brisbane Heritage 2013a; Debritz 2012).

Brisbane has a somewhat controversial history in relation to the management of its built heritage given numerous significant heritage places have been demolished. Despite more stringent protection measures being in place in more recent times, a 'culture of demolition' is still evident and it is clear that a paradigm shift is necessary (Wilson, Desha and Miller 2014). As demonstrated by the past, the authors feel there is an ongoing threat to the survival of our heritage places, and when they are no longer viable for their intended purpose, it is anticipated that our decision-makers may, again, favour demolition over other alternatives. Considering the social, economic and environmental benefits of retaining heritage buildings and the significant costs and emissions from demolition, the authors understand that the practice of sustainable adaptive reuse can be seen as a best practice approach to the management of built heritage, as opposed to the alternative demolition and rebuilding of a new structure in its place.

The contours of the project

Having secured funding and support to undertake the Brisbane Art Deco project, a range of authors were sought to contribute written contributions. The project was developed and managed by a project manager. Emphasizing the multidisciplinary nature of the context, a balanced and representative range of potential authors across disciplines and with varied levels of expertise was approached and invited to participate. A total of 17 authors contributed articles – spanning architects, historians, heritage professionals, Art Deco enthusiasts, researchers, and those with specific connections to the places of focus. Two primary photographers were engaged to take modern photographs of the featured places; while several other community members and archives provided additional imagery. Project branding (and cover of the publication) was developed by a local design firm, while another local designer provided a series of custom prints inspired by the Brisbane Art Deco places for inclusion. Given the diverse nature of written contributions, a primary copyeditor and team of reviewers were engaged to review and edit the written contributions to achieve a cohesive collection of written material. A graphic designer was engaged to bring the content together in the format required.

The Brisbane Art Deco publication was intended to be part of a proactive strategy for steering decision-makers towards a preferred future (when such futuring inevitably occurs) by leveraging the weight of history, and strengthening the collective push from the present (Inayatullah 2008). In describing a specific ‘propositional artefact’ (a publication and digital campaign in relation to the Brisbane Art Deco project) that was developed within this context, this paper seeks to highlight its contribution to redirecting current practice and creating conditions conducive to the production of a future counter-narrative (as shown below in Figure 1).

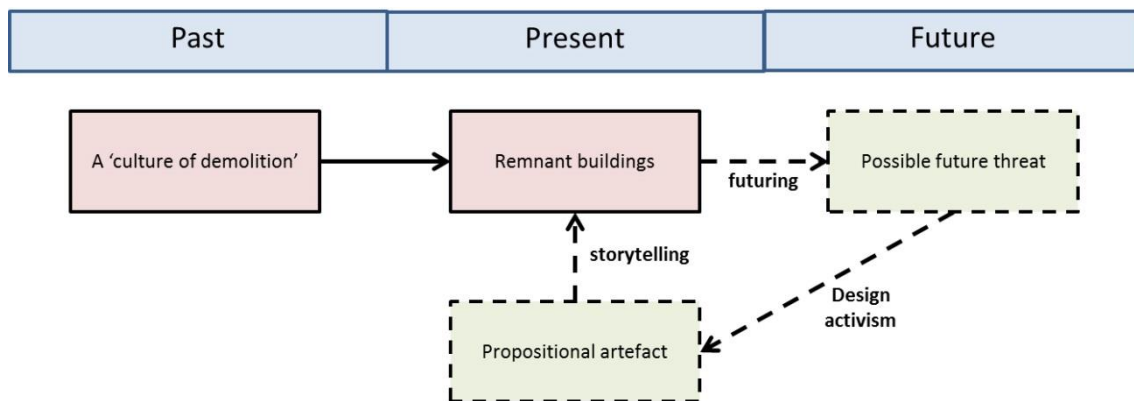


Figure 1. The ‘connective thinking’ narrative for the project and domains of literature.

It is difficult to predict what the actual outcome of the propositional artefact may be, however the intention is for it to redirect decision-making by expanding the present range of resources we can refer to in order to understand our cultural heritage, and to inspire the future development of a counter-narrative in contrast to the business-as-usual approach that currently favours demolition rather than adaptive reuse. In contributing to a paradigm shift in our local context, the approach discussed in this paper will serve in the present as a propositional artefact empowering redirective practice, and into the future as a resource from which decision-makers can draw from in relation to assessing the cultural significance of the featured places.

The digital campaign

While the publication was being developed, the project manager regularly posted digital images and snapshots of information (as shown below in Figure 2) so as to build a community and anticipation for the launch of the publication. A multi-pronged social media presence was maintained across Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and Twitter. A diverse range of over 2000 community members were brought together through various social media platforms and participated in sustained digital conversation about the topic of ‘Brisbane Art Deco’. The hashtag ‘#brisbanartdeco’ was used on Instagram, as were other related hashtags such as ‘#brisbane’ and ‘#brisheritage’, and less mainstream but topic-specific hashtags such as #Munsala and #lift, which collectively enabled the project team to, both, participate in existing conversations and also introduce the project to new audiences based on relevant keywords.



Figure 2. An example of one of the regular social media posts (Instagram).

The physical publication

The design and colour palette for the cover of the publication which was developed by a local design firm was inspired by our Brisbane Art Deco places and materials. The finishes on the cover (gloss and emboss effects) were selected to express the associative aesthetic and textural detail that is often found in Art Deco architecture. It was anticipated that the publication may be read by a diverse range of people including: locals, tourists, students, academics, historians, architects, designers, photographers; and the content and language in the foreword was therefore written by an invited contributor in an entry-level tone ensuring it could be read and understood by everyone. In the front matter of the publication, a collage of 'lost' architecture is displayed under the heading 'In Memory Of' (as shown below in Figure 3).

IN MEMORY OF

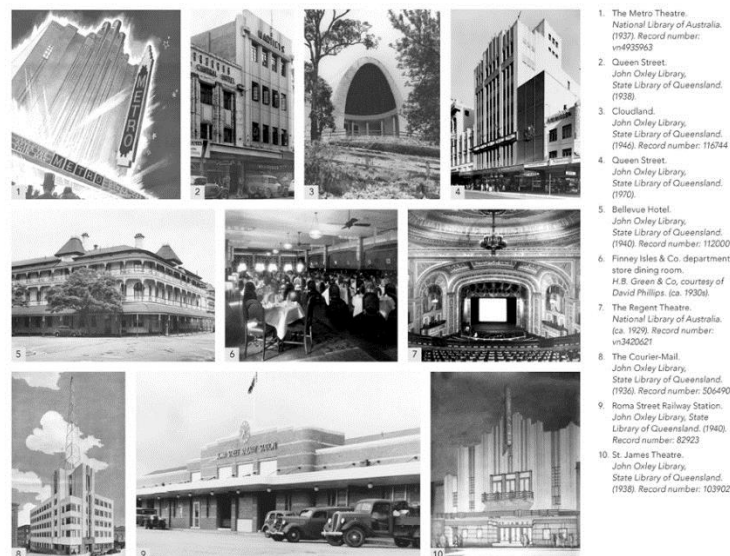


Figure 3. The 'In Memory Of' collage in the front matter of the publication.

In forecasting how the publication may read, the Contents page was arranged in categories (areas of Brisbane), and each place entry included the suburb in which it is located. The publication features a selection of 35 residential and commercial places that are still standing. Ten of the articles were of a significant length ('hero' - between eight and ten pages) and 25 articles were very brief ('snapshot' - between one and four pages). Each 'hero' article comprises a significant written contribution, full page modern photograph, selection of complementary modern photography and archive imagery, selection of key sources that were used in the research of the article, and selection of comments from community members on why they love these buildings ('Community Comments'). One community member reflected on their connection to one of the places in the publication, and recalled:

In the 1960s, a trip to Grandma's house included a bumpy ride across the Hornibrook Bridge – ka-bump, ka-bump, ka-bump – it really rattled our bones. In the late 1970s, we used to catch huge bream (and also splinters) under 'the big hump'... (Holian as cited in Wilson 2015, 51).

The snapshot articles focus on the tangible aspects of the place and are more of an architectural summary. The series of custom designed artistic prints developed by a local designer are used as page dividers after each of the hero articles in the publication.

Evaluation

It is difficult to evaluate how effective this project has been, however, publicly available testimonies and demographic data drawn from the suite of project-related social media pages including Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter offer some qualitative evidence of the project's impact and reach. Looking to the naturally occurring data afforded by digital technologies (Silverman 2013), the general feedback received after the publication was launched indicated that people were somewhat surprised at the range of surviving Brisbane Art Deco architecture that was identified – a Twitter follower remarked on discovering a new aspect of Brisbane after having read the book: 'Brissie, we hardly knew her...' (Doherty 2015, July 6).

This general qualitative feedback also included examples of specific sub-topics that the project followers had learned about as a result of the project. A Facebook follower acknowledged that they had learned something new as a result of the project: 'It's a great cladding material the Benedict Stone. I never knew its history until I went to the AIA talk the other week, thanks!' (Guthrie 2015, June 27).

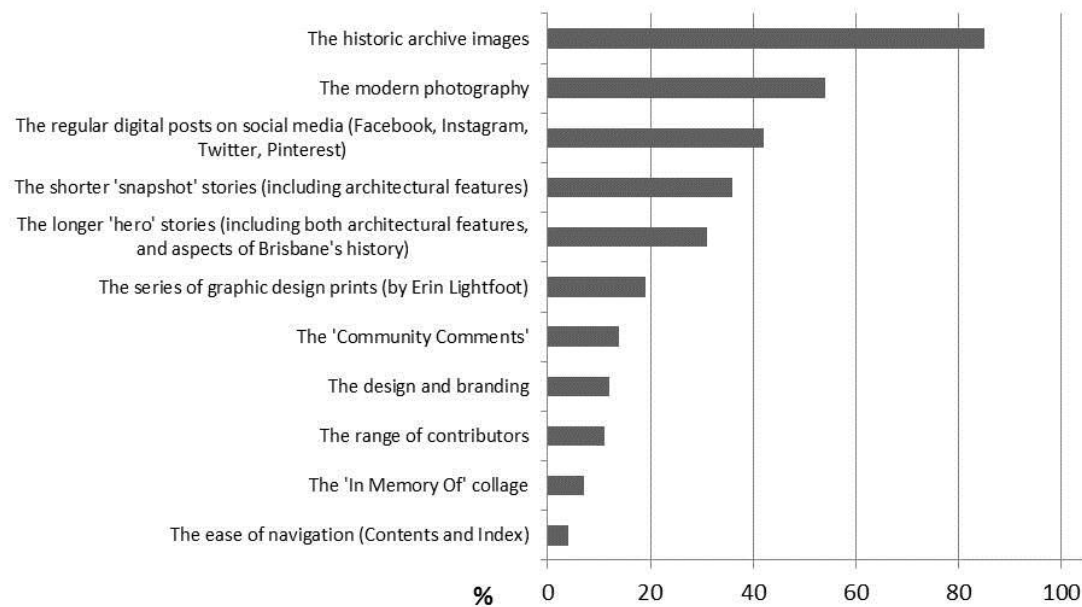
As the project progressed, project followers also started promoting the fact that Brisbane does have some significant examples of Art Deco architecture. A Facebook follower declared: 'We are blessed to still retain some wonderful Art Deco buildings and structures in Brisbane...' (Hill-Wright 2015).

After the publication was released, people who were already aware of the Brisbane Art Deco project were invited to complete a short survey. The survey was promoted via the Facebook social media page, the Twitter social media page, the Brisbane Art Deco website, and was also sent directly via email to those who had previously subscribed to receive updates on the Brisbane Art Deco project via the official website over the course of the project. The survey was available for completion over an 11-day period in August 2015. It comprised of five questions related to their demographic profile, affiliations and project-specific feedback. As an incentive for completing the survey, respondents could opt in or out of going into a prize draw to win

a copy of the Brisbane Art Deco book (RRP AUD\$34.95). Responses remained anonymous, and formal ethical clearance was obtained from the university human research ethics committee. Respondents were advised that submission of the completed survey would be accepted as an indication of their consent to participate.

There were a total of 105 respondents, which ranged in age from between 18-24 and up to 75 years or older, and the majority were aged between 45 and 54 years old (31%). Most respondents were female (61%). They reported working for a diverse range of organisations, including those in the field of Education (18%), and Architecture, Design, Planning and Surveying (10%) right through to those in the Automotive industry (1%), and Labourers (1%). Most respondents reported no affiliation with any chapters, groups, societies or institutes (69%). When considering what the respondents liked most about the Brisbane Art Deco book and project, the majority reported that the historic archive images (85 participants) were among their top three favourite aspects (as shown below in Table 1). Over half of the participants also highly valued the modern photography (54 participants), and just less than half of the participants indicated that the regular digital posts on social media (42 participants) were one of their favourite aspects.

Table 1. Survey results: Aspects of the Brisbane Art Deco book and project that survey participants liked most



The survey results indicate that the visual imagery (both historic archive and modern photography) was highly valued among the Brisbane Art Deco community. The use of visuals to support the telling of stories is not a new concept, however contemporary digital technologies have enabled a greater capacity for the sharing of images as the dominant form in engaging in narrative. According to a study investigating the use of visuals in social content, posts on Facebook that included images received 53% more 'likes' than posts that did not (Corliss 2012). Other social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest are primarily visual and known as 'image-intensive social software applications' that are central to communicating a vision and a powerful way to engage strongly with audiences (McNely 2012).

Digital technologies are also recognised for increasing accessibility and the subsequent capacity to engage otherwise somewhat excluded knowledge communities and members of society including the elderly, single parents and minority groups.

Engaging these under-represented members of society enables truly diverse participation and is thus more representative of our actual communities (Haddon 2000). Interestingly too, the indicative survey results show that the majority of the people participating in the Brisbane Art Deco community, did not have any affiliations with any chapters, groups, societies or institutes, and their participation was therefore an independent choice. It is primarily this digital presence across a suite of digital platforms that appeared to facilitate the formation of a more inclusive community and enable such a diverse audience across multiple knowledge communities to participate in the Brisbane Art Deco project than, perhaps, otherwise possible.

Discussion

With an understanding of the heritage context and drawing on the wisdom of storytelling, it is hypothesised that a contemporary approach such as this is able to engage a broader demographic in an otherwise undervalued topic. The Brisbane Art Deco project sought to build a greater sense of value in the broader community (strengthening the push from the present), by highlighting the significance of particular heritage places in Brisbane (drawing on the weight of history), in order to lay some foundations for the protection of these examples from demolition (acknowledging the pull of the future). Underpinned by theory, the strategic intentions of this contemporary approach to heritage storytelling includes connecting the past, present and future, linking the tangible with the intangible, and authentically capturing the significance to the community, through multi-platform transmission mechanisms (as shown below in Table 2).

Table 2. Emergent components of contemporary heritage storytelling.

Contemporary heritage storytelling	Connecting past, present and future
	Linking tangible with intangible
	Capturing community significance
	Using multi-platform transmission mechanisms

In seeking to provoke a ‘heightened public awareness of irretrievable loss’ (Fisher 1991, 58), the In Memory Of collage comprised a selection of Brisbane buildings that have been demolished. The selection includes three that attracted widespread protest at the time (and are not Art Deco), and other lesser-known Art Deco buildings. This collage was strategically positioned up-front in the publication (with the Introduction) so as to: symbolically enable readers to move beyond this idea of a past paradigm (Brisbane’s history of significant demolition), demonstrate an understanding of the local context (connecting with the audience), and to instil a sense of responsibility and stewardship (this could become the fate of the places in this publication). This serves to encourage readers to draw a parallel between the past and possible future – emphasizing the importance of redirecting current practice, and developing a counter-narrative.

In addition to physically dividing up the publication for readability, the primary purpose of the artistic prints was to demonstrate that the places in the publication continue to inspire people in the present (i.e. modern designers); and as a means of engaging a different demographic in the appreciation of the Art Deco style (and subsequently, the publication). Cultivating such associations and collaborating with

‘unusual allies’ is also understood to be an important aspect in keeping the notion of heritage conservation relevant in the twenty-first century (Hood and Watson 2015). Critically, the images that complement the written contributions include a diverse range of modern and archive photographs, illustrations, maps, newspaper clippings, and advertisements. This curated assortment of images visually tells the story of the written contributions, and links the past with the present in relation to these places.

The range of images also enables readers to metaphorically ‘paint a picture’ of the life and times in which the places once existed and continue to exist within. Importantly, it was a priority to include images that depicted people using the space or interacting with the place, to enable readers to better link the stories about the places with the tangible structures. The written content not only describes the aesthetic and architectural features of the places, but also delves into the associated social history and describes the time and place. By ‘connecting these dots’ for the readers through narrative and illuminating the multi-faceted connections of these places with society, we are able to highlight the social value inherent in them.

The International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C) (2011) affirms the need to use interdisciplinary expertise given the breadth of knowledge required to assess the full spectrum of tangible and intangible aspects and achieve balanced and practical solutions. Therefore, a diverse range of authors were engaged to contribute the written content which resulted in a variety of approaches that spoke to many sub-sectors of the community. This diverse dialogue enabled us to communicate broadly across various stakeholder groups.

The International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C) (2011) recognises that heritage sites may have a range of significances for different individuals or groups. It is also acknowledged that by articulating such ‘socially produced meanings’ we are able to collectively and continuously redefine the parameters of an historic topic (Simon 2012). In capturing a representative sample of such perspectives across a spectrum of everyday stakeholders, a diverse range of local people were invited to comment on what they love about the featured places. Individuals who were known to have a ‘personal affinity with the structure’ (Fisher 1991, 63) were primarily targeted to extract rich expression. The purpose of including these Community Comments in the publication was to present a selection of local names and faces that readers may know or be able to relate to, who were happy to declare that these places are important to them, and thus provoke contemplation from readers as to what these places mean to them. The comments ranged from the recounting of memories, to reflections on the tangible or intangible aspects of the place.

Conclusions

This enquiry is phenomenological, with the findings directly pertinent to the single case study explored. Based on a qualitative review of this specific case study, and given its strengths in engaging a broad demographic in this cultural heritage topic, there appears to be value in taking a creative and whole-of-society approach such as this to heritage storytelling. This paper highlights the potential of such contemporary approaches to heritage storytelling, including digital technologies, to engage a diverse range of people that may not have otherwise participated. The authors propose the value of taking a creative and whole-of-society approach such as this to heritage storytelling.

Discussed in the case study above, the use of visual imagery (both historic archive and modern photography) was a key means of connecting the past, present and future, and linking the tangible with the intangible. This creative approach to heritage storytelling appeared to resonate with the project followers, and the delivery of this

imagery and associated project content through multi-platform transmission mechanisms, particularly via digital technologies, engaged a significant number and range of project followers. It also enabled the community to participate in a conversation and co-create an authentic representation of the specific heritage places that were in focus. In contributing to theory, this paper demonstrates the potential applicability of design thinking in the field of heritage, and presents an additional typology of action in broadening the range of tools available to engage in design activism. This contemporary approach may be characterised as a proactive action for design activism.

This exploratory and foundational research contributes to theory and practice around the management of cultural heritage, and highlights the usefulness of employing such a strategy to reach and engage a broader audience. The contours of this case study add to experiential knowledge in the heritage field in relation to communication significance, and may be useful as a teaching tool and as a foundation for further exploration. It also promotes the possibility for other researchers to gather similarly meaningful data from other such projects for comparative analysis, and to further explore the contours of contemporary heritage storytelling.

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