An Integrated Approach to Heritage Communication: bridging the gap between the tangible and the intangible

For tourism in WHSs, there is a growing need to communicate their heritage values in a way that explains its significance to a broader audience within a local, national and international context. But there exists a gap between an international community’s (heritage professionals’) emphasis on the appreciation of a WHS’s OUV and local community’ (local residents’ and domestic tourists’) preference for understanding the site from the perspective of its intangible values. It is within this context that this study was conducted to explore if a more integrated approach to heritage communication can be developed. The study is based on the case of West Lake, a cultural landscape of World Heritage status. The study first analyses the relationship between its tangible and intangible heritage, finding out that its physical asset exists as a cultural matrix for its ICH to develop while its ICH has both sustained the renovation of this WHS and broadened its influence among the potential visitors. Owing to the inextricability of its tangible and intangible heritage, an integrated approach has been taken by the management committee of this WHS to interpret its OUV from both the tangible and intangible aspects. A data analysis on tourists’ review suggests that the official interpretations, especially those about ICH resources, play an essential role in affecting tourist’s experience in the WHS and their understanding of the values of this site. The study, however, also notices that the official interpretation of West Lake tends to marginalize some local ICH values which have not been fully recognized in its WH listing. Thus a suggestion is also proposed for developing a more inclusive communication strategy to encourage the participation of local community and thus bridge the gaps between the professional and the non-professional, the international and the local, and the tangible and the intangible.

Key words: ICH, integrated approach, WHS interpretation

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