Theorizing democratisation of heritage

This paper seeks to critically investigate ways that democratisation of museums/heritage are articulated in a selected body of literature and policy documents. To enhance the discussion I will give examples of how the issues are expressed in museum exhibitions. The reason for this is that the democratisation of heritage is complicated to explain and is often addressed in polemic to old (i.e. colonial) values or articulated as an enhancement of the social conditions of culture. It is often expressed as something that should be achieved, and rightly so. However research have acknowledge that democratisation is complex and intertwined with past and present political powers that are at the same time rejected and affirmed (Reddy 2007; Gable 2006; Rodéhn 2008, 2010). This complexity is, however, often overlooked when writing about, and defining, democratisation of museums/heritage. Definitions often involve new and equal representations of social memory, diversity of society and neglected groups; representing community- and national values; challenging the political environment and encourage critical thinking (Galla 2003; Pal 1998; Simpson 2006, McGee 2006; Witcomb 1998; Mason & McCarthy 2005; Cameron 2005; Maguire 1998). I have identified that scholars adhered to a universal definition and a Eurocentric canon when writing about the democratisation of museums/heritage. Thus I will try to make suggestions how to diversify the discussion and how the heritage sector can benefit from this.

Keywords: Democratisation, museum, heritage, politics, Eurocentric

References


