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## **Practice barriers towards intangible heritage within the UK built heritage sector**

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## **Practice barriers towards intangible heritage within the UK built heritage sector**

For historic buildings to endure as testimony to society, physical residue of the past must always be altered to some degree. Consequently, the overarching characteristics of built heritage practice maintains a sincere focus on material authenticity and decay prevention to encourage safeguarding of built heritage assets. However, in order to accommodate increasingly influential critical heritage perspectives within the built heritage paradigm, a more intangible, people-focused and participatory point of departure is required for determining how a building should be altered. Utilising a transdisciplinary approach, this research focuses on understanding the perceived barriers at play which limit practitioners from integrating intangible heritage within their role. Analysis of sixteen interviews with UK-based practitioners are structured into five thematic barriers: 1) role complexity; 2) non-physical qualities; 3) unclear domain relationship; 4) uncertain definition; 5) participatory problems. To overcome these barriers, three high-level strategies are proposed: 1) advancing intangible heritage in conservation concepts and methods; 2) supporting practitioner dissemination of intangible heritage; and 3) practitioner participation in intangible practices. By assembling these strategies into an overarching model, attention is placed on conceptual and methodological shifts as impetus for empowering practitioners to both disseminate and participate in intangible heritage practices related to physical heritage sites.

Keywords: building conservation, intangible heritage, built heritage, heritage practice, heritage management

### **Introduction**

Built heritage is on a trajectory of reassessment and redefinition, which is signified by a growing interest in accessing and acknowledging its more-than-physical qualities. This is reflected within the discourse of critical heritage theory, which is concerned with questioning heritage norms through the widening of methodological approaches and dialogue between experts and non-experts (Association of Critical Heritage Studies

2012). Consequently, Western built heritage assessment and management procedures are receiving growing criticism for their role within a paradigm that conceptualises listed buildings as objective representations of authenticity (Djabarouti 2021; Jones and Yarrow 2013, 6; Su 2018, 920). This friction is intensified when framed within a UK context, which has its own established approaches towards heritage that pushes back against these critical notions. Accordingly, intangible heritage is characterised as ‘... “irrelevant”, “difficult” and [therefore] incomprehensible...’ (L. Smith and Waterton 2009, 297); and its position subsidiary to issues concerning the physical fabric of sites (Pendlebury 2013, 715; Fredheim and Khalaf 2016, 474; Jones 2017, 24).

By addressing this friction from the perspective of an increasingly commonplace binary attitude towards heritage (i.e. tangible and intangible), and contextualising it through engagement with those who work with listed buildings in the UK, the objective of this research is to understand what the *perceived* practical barriers, complexities and limitations are for safeguarding intangible heritage when working with built heritage. Correspondingly, a transdisciplinary position is adopted, whereby ‘real-world’ issues are targeted through collaboration across academic and practice knowledges (Wickson, Carew, and Russell 2006, 1050; Lawrence 2010, 127). A key issue for this research has been complexities surrounding the conceptualisation of intangible heritage within the material-focused UK built heritage industry – a research quandary that reflects a very real-world dilemma for practitioners. For example, I have suggested elsewhere that the term ‘intangible heritage’ (hereafter IH) may actually have its own particular definition and nuanced themes when employed within the built heritage sector itself (see Djabarouti 2020). Equally then, there are likely to be related practitioner insights that

illuminate why IH is not used as the primary point of departure for assessing, conserving and altering listed buildings in the UK.

Whilst this research is positioned broadly at the interface between tangible and IH domains, it goes beyond a theoretical inquiry into domain relationships – a topic already covered in great detail elsewhere. Instead, it considers the problematisation of IH to be primarily a practice-based issue. Thus, in communicating with practitioners, it attempts to elucidate real-world perceptions that may influence the direction of academic thought, by offering clarity to the following questions: what are the perceived barriers that incite resistance to IH within UK built heritage practice? And what broader strategies can be employed to enhance recognition of IH within the built heritage sector?

The article begins with an historical overview of prevailing modes of built heritage practice in the UK, to establish why industry reinforces the idea of heritage as a noun, or object. Next, it outlines the departures that a critical outlook makes from these viewpoints, and in what way it works towards the notion of heritage as a verb, or process. Following this, results from sixteen interviews with practitioners reveal the following five thematic barriers that prohibit the integration of IH within UK-based built heritage practice: role complexity; non-physical qualities; unclear domain relationship; uncertain definition; and participatory problems. The study proposes three high-level strategies to overcome these barriers, which are assembled into an overarching model. As the UK is utilised as a context that is representative of a Western European approach towards heritage, it is anticipated that the barriers uncovered may also claim a broader scope of contextual relevance.

## **From physical objects to physical sites**

The foundations of building conservation are built upon seventeenth and eighteenth-century antiquarian studies that concentrated on the conservation of art objects and concepts relating to ‘aesthetics’, ‘history’ and ‘truth’ (Delafons 1997, 9; Jokilehto 2005, 8). The eventual formalisation of antiquarianism as a branch of scholarship in England can be attributed to emerging sensibilities of patriotism (Glendinning 2013, 42), with the destruction of the built environment during the Industrial Revolution prompting a widening of the antiquarian scope to include historic buildings (H. Silverman 2015, 71). Further destruction across the two twentieth-century world wars served to heighten the sense of fragility and desire for permanence in relation to the historic built environment (L. Smith 2011, 11), whilst also instigating a surge in international conservation charters and guidance (Fairchild Ruggles and Silverman 2009, 4).

Specific practical modes of building conservation that are utilised today (i.e. restoration, preservation, reconstruction) are products of the ‘antiquarian approach’ (Mydland and Grahn 2012, 575), and carry with them residual ideas that were originally developed to address movable objects – particularly ideas relating to objectivity, aesthetics and expert authority (Winter 2013, 537). From these early activities between people and objects, notions of inherent value and expert knowledge emerge (L. Smith 2006, 29), with individuals such as Cesare Brandi helping to refine a conservation approach that focused on celebrating the inherent ‘artistic’ and ‘aesthetic’ values of historic buildings (Muñoz Viñas 2005, 6, 68). The strength of these ideas saw them become commonplace in art and conservation education during the late-twentieth century. For example, H. W. Janson’s (1986, 9) [1962] seminal reference text *History of Art*, states art ‘...is meant to be looked at and appreciated for its intrinsic value’.

Similarly, the Preface to Harold Plenderleith's (1969, vii) equally influential text, *The Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art*, places the object of conservation at the centre of the framework, with various peripheral concerns, actions and objectives working together to achieve a stable, refined object, ready for admission into a 'collection' of heritage items. Plenderleith's work is noted by Jokilehto (2018, 285) as crucial in the development cultural heritage conservation. Glendinning (2013, 399) also notes it as a major source of inspiration for Sir Bernard Feilden, who went on to write their own *magnum opus*, the *Conservation of Historic Buildings* (see Feilden 2003) [1982] – a standard reference text for both the education and practice of building conservation.

### **Material authenticity and decay prevention**

From these origins, it is unsurprising that immaterial cultural practices are understudied within building conservation in the UK. IH not only defies Western training traditions (Wain 2014, 54), but also challenges legislation that classifies heritage in ways that align with the requirements of material sites (Pendlebury 2013, 709; DeSilvey 2017, 81). Practical guidance is therefore underpinned by the idea of material authenticity as the departure point for considered change. In the UK, this is evidenced within the structuring of the ICOMOS *Guidelines for Education and Training in the Conservation of Monuments, Ensembles and Sites* (ICOMOS 1993), which underpins key conservation training routes (see IHBC 2008, 2; RIBA 2020, 7; AABC 2019, 1). This document is a self-defined product of the *International charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites* (the Venice Charter) (ICOMOS, 1964) (see ICOMOS 1993, 1), meaning building conservation expertise has a direct lineage to a specific version of authenticity that the Venice Charter promotes (H. Silverman and

Fairchild Ruggles 2007, 4; H. Silverman 2015, 73; Pendlebury 2015, 431) (see Figure 1).

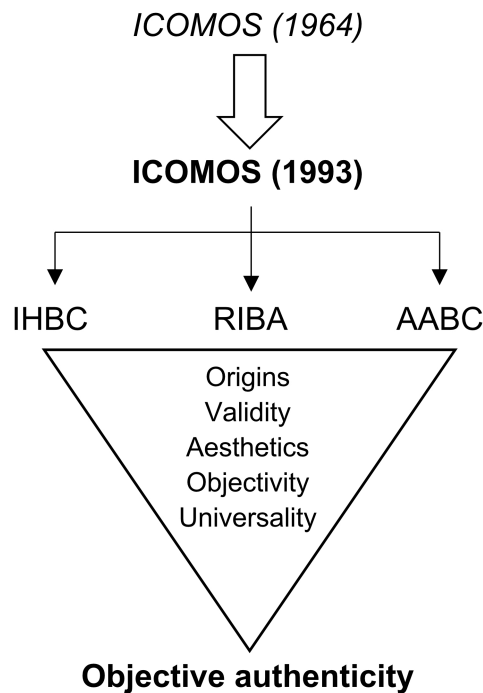


Figure 1 – Structuring of objective authenticity within architectural conservation guidelines in the UK. Author original image.

Accordingly, building conservation is a term that principally relates to the practice of decay prevention (Feilden 2003, 3; DeSilvey 2017, 3). Certainly, within the context of a Western building conservation ethos, limiting decay is of paramount importance (L. Smith 2006, 286), hence why the majority of legislation and guidance are structured to address it. A spectrum of technical methods have ultimately been developed to address decay in order to extend the lifespan of listed buildings (Feilden 2003, 22). Fundamental to the justification of these practices is the Western understanding of cultural memory being inherent within the original, unchanged state of the building (DeSilvey 2017, 19;



Jokilehto 2018, 420; Boccardi 2019, 7).

### **Intangible heritage and the conservation paradigm**

Within comparatively recent ideas of heritage, issues of representation and universality that stem from an overreliance on physicality have been problematised (Harrison and Rose 2010, 239). This has made space for shifting understandings which dispute *inherent* qualities of built heritage assets – preferring instead to re-theorise heritage as a practice that is produced by contemporary society (Glendinning 2013, 424; Jones and Yarrow 2013, 6; Su 2018, 919). This re-evaluation supports people-focussed initiatives (Glendinning 2013, 431; Jokilehto 2018, 2); a growing concern for public engagement and participation (Avrami 2009, 178); and works in direct correlation with the reconceptualisation of heritage as an intangible construct (L. Smith 2006, 3; L. Smith and Akagawa 2009, 6; L. Smith and Waterton 2009, 291; Glendinning 2013, 418). From the unique perspective of this cultural shift (see Littler 2014), heritage is created and sustained through action and practice, rather than *acquired* from a pre-determined collection of inherently significant things (L. Smith and Akagawa 2009, 7). The literature concerned with this reconceptualisation asserts that material heritage sites have no inherent value or meaning without input and engagement from people and society (Blake 2009, 45; Lenzerini 2011, 111; Kamel-Ahmed 2015, 69). Thus, in order to align with these ideas, contemporary theoretical approaches towards built heritage conservation must be conceptually capable of offering a more articulated framework for managing IH within the context of physical change.

In the UK, shifting sentiments such as these have made implicit impact since the early 2000s, with (then) English Heritage's *Power of Place* publication (Historic England, 2000) being instrumental in supporting the need for a more local and

multivocal conception of heritage (see Clark 2019, 258). As the title suggests, at its core was the concept of ‘place’, borrowed from the periodically updated *Burra Charter* (ICOMOS 2013) [1979]. As such, it brought into the UK built heritage sector a focus on ‘values’ that were originally developed to better support non-Western perspectives on heritage (Walter 2020, 57) – such as cultural memory, oral history and stories (see Historic England 2000, 25-26, 42).

Whilst the document improved the representation of heritage that is less fabric-oriented and technically driven, what it did not do is address the more complex paradigmatic strain that these novel ideas placed on existing conservation theories and concepts. The friction created by this dilemma is perhaps best articulated at an international scale through the 2008/09 argument between former ICOMOS presidents Michael Petzet and Gustavo Araoz; with Petzet backing the core (original?) ideology of international monument conservation, and Araoz conversely supporting the need for a revised conservation paradigm that transcends the focus on preserving physical fabric (Orbaşlı 2017, 162; Walter 2020, 25). This argument was some five years after the release of UNESCO’s *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (hereafter the 2003 Convention), which articulates an understanding of heritage as ‘...constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment...’ (UNESCO 2003, 2); and utilises the umbrella term ‘intangible cultural heritage’ for heritage that is immaterial and dynamic (UNESCO 2003; L. Smith and Waterton 2009, 293; Lenzerini 2011, 118; Jokilehto 2018, 2;). Whilst the physical fabric of historic sites is not explicitly mentioned within the convention, the definition of IH does include ‘...instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces...’ (see UNESCO 2003, 2), which could conceivably include buildings of heritage value. This

reflects the fact that IH is often connected to and impacted by the physical things of life (Harrison 2015, 309; Hill 2018); hence why so many have attempted to elucidate the intersection between tangible and intangible heritage domains (for example, see Bouchenaki 2003, 4; Byrne 2009, 230; Kamel-Ahmed 2015, 67; Pocock, Collett, and Baulch 2015, 952; Taylor 2015, 73).

Despite acknowledging the importance of physical things within the 2003 Convention, a conceptual disconnect remains prevalent between listed buildings and IH. This is proliferated through the regulations that define heritage (Wells 2017, 26) and the heritage discourse(s) that adopt the predisposed binary (i.e. ‘tangible value’ and ‘intangible value’) (see L. Smith and Campbell 2017) – both of which stem from the overarching conflict between essentialist and social constructionist mindsets that Petzet and Araoz characterise respectively. Set within a Western conservation ethos, this friction has sustained a highly documented domain bias in practice that positions IH as a subset of tangible heritage (Pendlebury 2013, 715; Fredheim and Khalaf 2016, 474; Jones 2017, 24). It is interesting to note how this hierarchy exists within a values-based heritage model that explicitly calls for the consideration of intangible qualities (Avrami et al. 2019, 1). Yet in many ways, the values-based methodology actually *sustains* the conceptual disconnect, by calling for the well-ordered segregation of so-called tangible and intangible ‘values’ (reflected within Historic England’s (2008) guidance). What then, might be the perceived practice barriers in place that sustains this hierarchy and maintains this conceptual disconnect? Whilst the theoretical and political barriers might be well considered within the literature, the real-world practice barriers are less researched and evidenced – especially from the specific perspective of UK-based built heritage practitioners.

## Practitioner perspectives

To address these matters from a UK practice-based perspective, sixteen interviews were undertaken in 2019 with built heritage practitioners primarily from the North of England. Recruitment sought practitioners who had at least five years' experience working with built heritage assets. An interview method was chosen because it provides an opportunity to gather narratives from specific 'social worlds' (Miller and Glassner 2004, 137). From the perspective of this study, the 'social world' is the built heritage sector and the narratives are a construct of the practitioner's experiences and perceptions of IH from within their professional remit (both general and project focused). The questions asked during the interviews are outlined in Table 1. Whilst these were used as a guide, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed interviewees to drive discussions in directions that reflected their experiences (e.g. the use of specific projects to validate particular viewpoints).

Table 1 – Semi-structured interview questions.

No.	Question
1	Do you think practitioner considerations of intangible heritage are reflected in policy and guidance?
1a	If yes, how and why are they reflected?
1b	If no, how and why are they not reflected?
2	What do you think would be the ideal approach towards recognising intangible heritage related to historic and listed buildings within policy and guidance?
3	Does current professional guidance made available to you make it clear how you should identify, interpret and safeguard intangible heritage in relation to historic and listed buildings?
4	Could you give me any examples of intangible heritage related to historic and listed buildings, and do you think it is possible to rank these examples?
4a	If it is possible to rank these examples, what might be the method to do this?
4b	If it is not possible to rank these examples, why not?
5	How involved are local people/ communities/ community groups in your built heritage projects?
5a	How involved do you think communities should be?
5b	What do you think community involvement should include?
5c	What stage of the project do you think this involvement would be preferable?
6	How do you think local communities could be better engaged during the conservation and/ or adaptation of historic and listed buildings?

Interviewing ended when repetitive data emerged (i.e. ‘theoretical saturation’) (see Glaser and Strauss 2000, 61; Bryman 2012, 420). Although Guest et al (2005, 74) state twelve interviews is normally sufficient to reach saturation, there were a number of factors that indicated the research may demand more, such as: the complexity of IH for the sample (G.W. Ryan and Bernard 2004, 12); the semi-structured nature of the interviews (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2005, 75); and the heterogeneity of the sample (i.e. profession, expertise) (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2005, 76). Indeed, many interviewees held completely different educational and professional credentials, reflecting the multifarious interdisciplinary nature of built heritage practice (Jones 2009, 11; Djabarouti and O’Flaherty 2020, 423). It was anticipated that this would also be reflected in their perceptions and engagement with heritage, as well as their views on IH. An overview of interviewee roles is given with Table 2.

Table 2 – Overview of sample role within the built heritage sector.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Number</b>
Conservation architect (AABC, IHBC, RIBA, or multiple)	6
Architect (works on heritage schemes, not accredited)	2
Historic building surveyor	2
Planner (with heritage specialism)	1
Heritage consultant	3
Archaeologist (with heritage specialism)	1
Governmental heritage role	1

Interviews were transcribed and coded, with content analysis employed using qualitative data analysis software. A final tactile round of ‘cutting and sorting’ analysis was also employed for deeper narrative ordering of themes (Gery W. Ryan and Bernard 2003, 94). The thematic barriers uncovered serve to structure the results section. These are: role complexity (“its hard enough”); non-physical qualities (“we have to see things to believe them”); unclear domain relationship (“quite practical implications”);

uncertain definition (“hard to put into words”); and participatory problems (“token gesture”) (see Table 3).

Table 3 – Five coded barrier themes developed from the data analysis.

Order	Coded theme	Sample descriptor quote
1	Role complexity	<i>‘It’s hard enough’</i>
2	Non-physical qualities	<i>‘We have to see things to believe them’</i>
3	Unclear domain relationship	<i>‘Quite practical implications’</i>
4	Uncertain definition	<i>‘Hard to put into words’</i>
5	Participatory problems	<i>‘Token gesture’</i>

### ***Role complexity: ‘it’s hard enough’***

Interviewees did feel it was important to increase awareness of IH in relation to historic and listed buildings. For example, interviewee 487627 stated that built heritage professionals ‘...don’t definitively talk about IH, but it does crop up a lot in a more implied way than explicit way’. Two implications of increasing awareness of IH were highlighted. Firstly, it was felt an inevitable expansion of their own role would occur, which would likely require:

- (1) More in-depth research of buildings (historic, archival)
- (2) More consideration of the ongoing narrative of a building
- (3) More primary research (e.g. interviewing people)
- (4) More input into historic environment records

Along with this, an increase in role complexity was noted as a concern. As one interviewee stated:

...it's hard enough doing detective work on a listed building using the fact-based data . . . as soon as you throw into the mix notions of intangibility, and its use, and significant people who may have been or lived there, or, hidden histories, if that's how you're interpreting it – then it makes that detective work way harder, on top of something that's already hard enough.

(Interviewee 870507)

Commercial constraints within the built heritage sector were also highlighted as problematic. Interviewees believed the increased complexity associated with safeguarding IH would be a time consuming and expensive exercise, and therefore not valued by clients:

If the point of this is trying to acknowledge hidden histories and intangibility, then there is an element of uncertainty; and the one thing you don't want on any construction project is uncertainty, as you know, because it affects programme and cost.

(Interviewee 870507)

To overcome this, practitioners felt they would firstly need to teach relevant stakeholders (namely clients and contractors) about IH. As Interviewee 901781 declared, '...we have a duty of care to educate our clients on certain things and to make sure they are aware'. Yet in relation to their own academic education, they conflictingly felt that whilst IH is taught on some relevant academic courses, it is not taught often and sometimes not at all:

I think it is absolutely essential, but it is something at the moment that isn't taught, it is something that isn't really addressed in conservation courses.

(Interviewee 214600)

Overall, interviewees felt if IH was better embedded within the education of built heritage professionals, it would provide them with the skillset to educate stakeholders

on a heritage project about it, leading to an increased awareness of IH across project teams.

***Non-physical qualities: ‘we have to see things to believe them’***

IH was described as an inherently difficult domain to address within the built heritage sector, primarily due to it being: non-physical; non-scientific; unquantifiable; subjective; and concerned with feelings. Interviewee 477549 described it as ‘...the thing that you can’t touch or physically see’. Its inherent lack of physicality appeared to cause the biggest complexity, with one interviewee stating, ‘...we have to see things to believe them’ (Interviewee 214600). It was therefore considered logical to attribute significance to the physical fabric, because ‘...it is easier to protect, and it is easier to comprehend of course’ (Interviewee 421225).

Interviewees suggested IH would be valued more if made objective, particularly within the built heritage sector, as it would ‘...quantify it in such a way that a builder can actually do repairs...’ (Interviewee 214600), as well as allowing it to ‘...feed into something professional which makes it recognised’ (Interviewee 334986). Methods suggested to achieve this included:

- (1) Ranking the importance of people, things and events
- (2) Establishing criteria to score intangible qualities
- (3) Perceiving IH as a social value dataset

A fourth method suggested was increasing the type of interpretation methods on projects in order to make IH more visible. However, it was felt that interpretation methods would need to be modernised to achieve this:



You're relying on people leaving interpretation boards and I think it needs to be a bit more accessible and bit more interesting. Not everybody wants to go to a museum and read a load of interpretation boards, they want to learn in different ways, and use social media, and have different outlets – there are so many ways to learn now.

(Interviewee 421225)

Whilst the majority of interviewees felt a more objective approach towards IH would be desirable, this was mostly noted as unachievable in practice – particularly when considering that ‘...things change over time, our interests in things change over time, the rarity of things changes over time’ (Interviewee 552297). As Interviewee 552297 paradoxically concluded, ‘I think in its basic measure, it cannot be measured’.

Along with its lack of physicality and quantifiability, the variance in professional perception of IH was also noted as problematic, as it ‘...depends on how you come to heritage and the role that you do’ (Interviewee 487627). For example, Interviewee 613193 said ‘...archaeologists have a much better link to IH and those sorts of things’ (Interviewee 613193); and Interviewee 373838 stated, ‘...when you're appointed as an architect to survey a building and tell the owner what needs fixing, it [IH] is less at the forefront of your mind’. Hence, concerns ultimately gravitated towards how interdisciplinary teams can agree upon what IH necessitates safeguarding.

### ***Unclear domain relationship: ‘quite practical implications’***

Asking built heritage professionals to discuss IH naturally led to considerations of the relationship between the two heritage domains. All interviewees stated that both are of equal importance, but their relationship was disputed. Some stated IH is not dependent on tangible heritage, remarking that ‘...IH does not have to be a building as well’ (Interviewee 509240). Conversely, others stated IH cannot exist without a tangible

heritage counterpart, as ‘...the non-physical very often needs the physical to latch on to it’ (Interviewee 214600). Overall, interviewees suggested some form of crossover between intangible and tangible heritage. Some stated IH simply provides meaning to tangible heritage, whilst others stated building materials themselves have innate intangible significance and ‘...there is cultural evidence in the fabric, it is not just physical evidence’ (Interviewee 613193).

Due to this perceived crossover between the two heritage domains, interviewees did feel IH could be impacted by changes to a building; and despite it being less reliant on physical fabric, it was felt it could have a positive impact on built heritage, through both an increase in protection measures and the broadening of what typically qualifies as architectural heritage:

It could have quite practical implications because it might mean that there would be... more of an impetus than there is at the moment to retain something which isn’t of massive obvious aesthetic value, or conventional architectural historic value.

(Interviewee 334986)

The unsettling of traditional tenets that this represents was further represented in relation to materials themselves, with one interviewee questioning the idea of truth being inherent within materials:

...the truth of materials is a hang-up people still have today. But really it’s just in my view, an idea, and shouldn’t be an absolute rule. And why can’t you pretend that one material is another?

(Interview 373838)

Hence, by focussing on IH, interviewees were inclined to deliberate over unconventional trajectories for the conservation of buildings and their materials,

evidencing a body of knowledge that is not normally exercised or associated with their expertise.

***Uncertain definition: ‘hard to put into words’***

It was unanimously agreed that policy does not clarify how to identify IH associated with buildings. Instead, it was believed that ‘...the majority of policies and procedures are geared up for the bricks and mortar – the historic fabric’ (Interviewee 647876). The following reasons were often given for this:

- (1) It lacks a legal definition
- (2) It is difficult to legislate something you cannot see
- (3) It is hard to include something subjective in policy

As one interviewee stated, ‘I don’t think there is any sort of real consistent process for safeguarding the IH values of sites at the moment’ (Interviewee 334986). Resulting from this lack of representation in policy, IH was generally an implicitly understood concept noted as being ‘...quite hard to put into words’ (Interviewee 477549); and also that some professionals ‘...might not use the word [label] *intangible heritage*...’ (Interviewee 421225).

Despite this ambiguity, it was highlighted by some that guidance does make implicit reference to IH. ‘Communal value’ within Historic England’s (2008) *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* was consistently mentioned. The *National Planning Policy Framework* was also noted as having ‘...more focus on the communal aspects...’ (Interviewee 487627) in comparison to its predecessors. The National Lottery Heritage Fund’s (2019) *Strategic Funding Framework* was also specifically highlighted as being ‘...very much focused on the community values and

what that means, rather than a total and utter focus on bricks and mortar’ (Interviewee 487627). Overall, IH was noted by interviewees as primarily a community-centred domain, with one interviewee remarking ‘...things like community engagement and communicating to people what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. . . [are] those more intangible parts’ (Interviewee 373838).

***Participatory problems: ‘token gesture’***

As IH was related back to communal themes by interviewees, community input was often highlighted as a way to understand the IH of a building or a place:

If you don’t get people on board and you don’t get those intangible links, you lose that. And that’s the bit that gets lost. The bricks and mortar – they stay. . . The intangible links you lose those if you are not careful, because you have got to speak to people.

(Interviewee 647876)

It was suggested that people can help make IH, as ‘...without its people it [a building] is just a tangible asset...’ (Interviewee 550931). Engaging communities was also noted as able to make a project more commercially successful, with Ditherington Flax Mill (Grade I Listed) used as an example where its *Friends of Group* ‘...played an important role in looking at the building, what people wanted to see from it. . . [so] the benefits from that group were immense’ (Interviewee 261067). Interviewees stated communities themselves would also benefit from a raised awareness of IH, as it would encourage more ‘communal’ considerations in consultations; more support for *Friends of Groups* of buildings; and more education for communities about different types of heritage and values.

It was noted that particular built heritage projects are more likely to receive community involvement. Examples given were: public buildings; contentious projects; and larger scale projects. However, community engagement was generally noted as an afterthought – being labelled as a ‘tick-box exercise’ (Interviewee 706747); ‘token gesture’ (Interviewee 421225); and ‘add-on’ (Interviewee 901781). It was noted that policy does not demand community engagement and generally displays a lack of interest in communities:

I am quite passionate about people having the opportunities and the process being open and democratic, and right now I don’t think our planning system is that, on a whole host of things.  
(Interviewee 706747)

Alongside this, interviewees also felt it was difficult to involve communities. A number of issues were highlighted as the cause of this:

- (1) Some demographic groups are harder to recruit than others
- (2) Some communities simply do not wish to be involved
- (3) Some clients do not want community engagement
- (4) Communities can be ostracised by technocratic jargon
- (5) Non-local professionals can struggle to engage communities

As a result, there was a general perception of a disconnect between communities and professionals; as well as between communities and policy. To overcome these disconnects, interviewees suggested community engagement should be more explicitly embedded within legislation; communities should be engaged *before* the conservation and design stage; and the conservation process itself should be more accessible for communities. Overall, it was stressed that communities need better opportunities to be

involved in the heritage process, with the following suggestions made to achieve this:

- (1) Increasing public access to buildings (e.g. open days, tours)
- (2) Encouraging personal connections (e.g. memories, photographs, objects)
- (3) Performance and process (e.g. craft skills and ‘living heritage’ re-enactments)
- (4) Offering a transparent construction process (e.g. access to construction sites, tours, traditional skills demonstrations)

### **Towards an intangible outlook**

It is evident from both the literature and empirical research that immaterial manifestations of culture must bend to established sector-specific understandings and processes which are centred around physical materials and sites (Wilks and Kelly 2008, 130; L. Smith and Campbell 2017, 39). Accordingly, a lack of *physicality* is at the root of the issue, which creates sensitivities relating to misalignments with commercial constraints. It also predetermines the perception of IH as an *ancillary* consideration and therefore responsible for additional role workload and complexity. Yet whether it was perceived as too hard; too obscure; or a subsidiary consideration in formalised mechanisms, there was equally a resounding sentiment of interest and desire to see more IH safeguarding in practice – an observation which implies that professionals *do* recognise their practice is based on a refined (narrow?) scope of what heritage is and how it is understood. It also highlights the need for research and guidance that can help practitioners overcome the perceived barriers and improve recognition of IH within the built heritage sector. This paper proposes three overarching strategies to help achieve this: 1) advancing IH in conservation concepts and methods; 2) supporting practitioner dissemination of IH; and 3) practitioner participation in IH practices.

*Advancing IH in conservation concepts and methods*

IH is often associated with physical sites, which in turn become culturally charged markers for ongoing heritage consumption (Byrne 2009, 246; Harrison 2015, 309; Kamel-Ahmed 2015, 68). Equally, the spatio-temporal qualities of historic sites support the ongoing development of contemporary life patterns, rituals and social practices (Abdelmonem and Selim 2012, 163; Kamel-Ahmed 2015, 71; Plevoets and Cleempoel 2019, 28). To accommodate these perspectives within conservation processes, a revised conceptual model is required that supports practitioners towards intellectualising heritage as a dynamic process or practice in relation to physical sites (Harvey 2001, 320; L. Smith 2006, 65; Skounti 2009, 75; Winter 2013, 536; DeSilvey 2017, 50; Jones 2017, 22). This could be as a process of remembering and forgetting (Edensor 2005, 126; Rigney 2008, 345); a process of knowledge transfer (García-Almeida 2019); or perhaps more pertinent to the scope of this paper, the conservation and management of heritage as a socio-cultural process itself (Avrami 2009, 179; Pendlebury 2015, 431; Fredheim and Khalaf 2016, 469). Unquestionably, the latter places more emphasis on how built heritage professionals situate their *own* practices within this broadening of heritage, as well as emphasising the need for IH to still relate to practitioner life experiences and professional objectives.

Formalised frameworks for supporting and administering this conceptual shift will in turn create fertile ground for relevant methodological shifts in relation to how alterations to the physical fabric of listed buildings can impact IH (and vice versa). Certainly, conservation processes will require strategies that re-frame the point of departure for building alterations from the perspective of IH, rather than continuing to uncritically and unquestioningly subscribe to the usual philosophical approaches which have not changed in over a century (Buckley 2019, 62). This aligns with the views of

Erica Avrami (2009, 177) who believes that the field of conservation ‘...requires [a] new emphasis on the social processes of conservation and a reorientation of the underlying principles of practice’. This can be further framed within the ‘revolution of common sense’ in conservation that Muñoz Viñas (2005, 212–13) outlined four years earlier, whereby the role of the built heritage practitioner must become one that prioritises ethics over evidence, and context over canon (see Muñoz Viñas 2005, 202; also Orbaşlı 2017, 164).

### ***Supporting practitioner dissemination of IH***

There is a clear lack of support that built heritage practitioners receive from formal policy and legislation on the subject of IH, which acts as a barrier to a deeper and more formal engagement with such complex immaterial phenomena (Wells 2017, 26). This reduces both awareness of, and methods for, engaging with IH when working with physical sites. The result is a fated scenario that sustains perceptions of IH being time consuming, costly, and complex, despite there being no actual initiatives implemented to address these entirely manufactured barriers. A consequence of this – and a concern for practitioners – is a lack of engagement from commercial stakeholders that this creates. Consequently, practitioners acknowledge a duty to both engage with and teach stakeholders about IH. However, there is undoubtedly a problematic lacuna within conservation training concerning the nuances that are specific to this understanding of heritage (Wain 2014, 54; Orbaşlı 2017), which ultimately short-circuits the good intentions of this knowledge transfer process. Coupled with this is a lack of educational training on IH. For example, of all the professionals interviewed, only one noted they had undertaken a full post-graduate educational ‘module’ on IH – a symptom of a broader fact that there is no requirement for post-graduate credentials within



accreditation guidance and certainly no requirement to demonstrate an understanding of how to engage with the more-than-physical qualities of physical sites.

Without support from education and policy in the UK, IH will continue to be perceived as obscure, complex and consequently outside of the remit of built heritage practice; its connection to physical sites will remain highly complex and contested (Kearney 2009, 220); and it will remain a significantly under-researched topic in general (Hassard 2009, 163). The issue at hand then, is not so much that of an overbearing expert authority (L. Smith 2006, 29; Winter 2013, 537), but rather a need to provide formalised resources and support for practitioners to understand, champion and disseminate the relevance of IH in relation to the conservation and adaptation of built heritage.

### ***Practitioner participation in IH practices***

To alter a building is to wholeheartedly change the trajectory of its ongoing narrative, its contemporary function, and any future interpretation. Critical understandings of heritage question the exclusive performance of this task by professional expert groups (L. Smith 2006, 29; Winter 2013, 541). Instead, it is suggested the professional point of departure should be derived from sustained community input (Avrami 2009, 178; Blake 2009, 45; Lenzerini 2011, 111) – especially with those who are underrepresented (Pocock, Collett, and Baulch 2015, 965). This reflects a realigned focus that places the anchoring and scaffolding of community identity *before* concerns of an architectural and/ or materialistic nature. However, the inability to *formally* involve and engage the public adequately within built heritage practices has led to a reliance on informal participatory practices and fringe activities.

These informal solutions are centred around methods which support a more processual conception of built heritage (e.g. events, social interactions and knowledge-sharing practices (R. Smith 2009, 21; Longley and Duxbury 2016, 1; DeSilvey 2017, 170; Jones 2017, 25). Therefore, in order to assist in sustaining IH practices, built heritage professionals *themselves* must also commit to their own intangible practices directly in relation to the heritage site – whether that be through tours, talks, lectures, events, workshops, or similar approaches. Whilst these methods can operate as a means to tell stories related to sites (Pocock, Collett, and Baulch 2015; Djabarouti 2020; Walter 2020), they more importantly function as hands-on methods that encourage the enrichment and enhancement of these stories through participatory practices (Jones 2017, 22; Orbaşlı 2017, 165; Walter 2020, 138). Integrating IH within the built heritage paradigm may therefore lie not so much in the common desire to elucidate the relationship *between* tangible and IH, but rather in the capacity for practitioners to reinterpret their role as one which actively changes and recreates heritage (Littler 2014, 103).

### **Closing remarks**

This study has extracted real-world perceptions related to the integration of intangible heritage within the remit of the built heritage practitioner. By focusing on *perceived* barriers, three broader strategies are proposed, which if utilised together, may encourage more prominence of IH within the built heritage sector. It is likely these approaches will offer most impact if structured in a way that gives precedence to conceptual and methodological shifts, which will empower practitioner dissemination of IH to project stakeholders. Equally, it will also encourage the use of participatory methods within their professional remit, by encouraging practitioners to orchestrate their own intangible

practices in relation to built heritage sites (see Figure 2). Whilst critical perspectives about built heritage practice are becoming increasingly commonplace within heritage and conservation courses, their impact within practice is still largely imperceptible, despite the good intentions evidenced by this study. This paper has attempted to illuminate why this may be, which not only highlights the perceived practice barriers in place, but also highlights broader issues related to education and training, and their complex interrelationship with professional practice (an interface that warrants targeted investigation from the perspective of IH). Certainly, from the specific scope of this study, if people *do* heritage, then people *are* heritage. The implications of this reconceptualisation are just as pertinent to the evolving role of the built heritage practitioner, as they are to the users and performers of heritage.

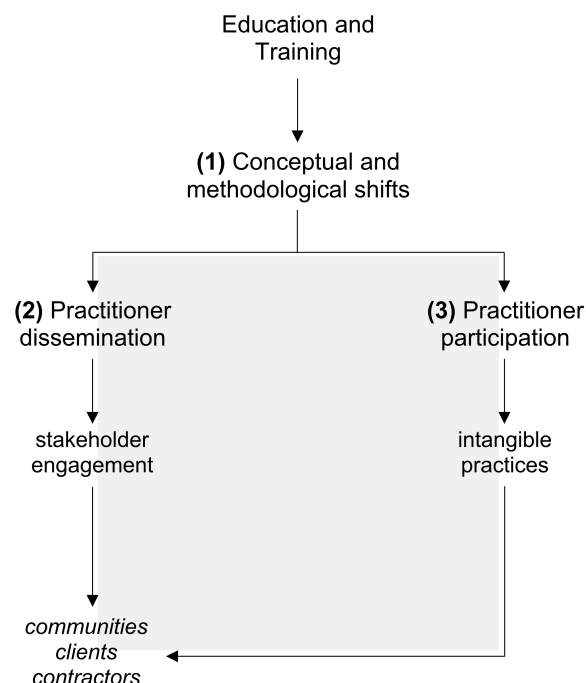


Figure 2 – Structuring of approaches for overcoming barriers towards intangible heritage within the UK built heritage sector. Author original image.

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