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The symbolic violence of heritage consultancy: experiences of heritage consultation processes in Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area, Norfolk Island

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ABSTRACT

Despite the significant growth of heritage consultancies in many countries over the last few decades, there is little scholarship that engages empirically with the experiences of those consulted. This article examines community attitudes towards heritage consultancy undertaken in relation to Norfolk Island's Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area (KAVHA, or simply Kingston). Underpinned by critical cultural justice inquiry, the article analyses consultation processes as experienced by Pitcairn Settler descendants and others with long and deep connections to Kingston. Key concerns raised by participants include: the number and frequency of heritage consultancies; feeling fatigued, hopeless and that their voices are not being heard; the sense that consultancies are perfunctory with predetermined outcomes; and the inappropriateness of recommendations. Such problems stem from structural issues with Australia's heritage consultancy industry and result in significant cultural injustices, cultural harm and symbolic violence for Kingston's core community. A more culturally just approach to heritage consultancy must recognise that the core community of a living heritage site is not simply one of the many groups of stakeholders, but rather the experts in and custodians of their own heritage. This recognition must also translate into action via agency and power in decision-making processes related to living heritage management.

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Introduction

Heritage consultancy is characterised by contractual relationships intended to serve corporate and government agendas (Gnecco 2018). As has been noted by Shepherd (2015, 760–1, original emphasis), while heritage consultants 'work for the corporations and state agencies that hire them, a strong normative strand in [consultants'] discourse suggests that they *really* work on behalf of local communities, threatened environments, and so on'. This 'moral rescripting' results in little room for debate about heritage consultancy's 'social, political, environmental and epistemic consequences', which would undermine the perceived 'self-evident good' of this work (Shepherd 2015, 761). Despite the significant growth of heritage consultancies in many countries over the last few decades (see e.g. Ndlovu 2014; Nelson 2023; Shepherd 2015; Zorzin 2015), the work of heritage

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consultants has ‘receive[d] very little critical attention’ (Gnecco 2018, 281), with limited scholarship that engages empirically with the experiences of those consulted.

When critiques of heritage consultancy occur in the literature, they reveal a ‘schism’ between the theoretical knowledge of academics and the practical concerns of consultants (Gnecco 2018, 285; see also Sneddon 2021, 145). In this article, we do not set out to reproduce such a schism. As such, we acknowledge heritage consultant Andrew Sneddon’s (2021, 145) argument that the work of academics will struggle ‘to remain relevant to twenty-first century cultural heritage management’ if it fails ‘to be more responsive to’ the work of practitioners. However, part of being responsive to heritage consultancy practice is critique. Therefore, this article begins from the premise that there is an urgent need for a critical review of the practices of heritage consultants in terms of the experiences of their ‘stakeholders’ and the impacts of heritage consultancies on the people being consulted.

Drawing on data from the Australian Research Council-funded project, ‘Reimagining Norfolk Island’s Kingston and Arthur’s Vale Historic Area’ (2021–2024), this article examines Norfolk Islander attitudes towards heritage consultancy undertaken in relation to Kingston and Arthur’s Vale Historic Area (KAVHA, or simply Kingston), one of eleven sites in the Australian Convict Sites UNESCO World Heritage listing. The article’s specific focus, then, is a case study of the impacts of Australia’s heritage consultancy industry on one community. Australia’s heritage consultancy industry began in the 1970s following ‘the introduction of heritage laws’ (Wheeler 2016, 42) which led to ‘a significant amount of consulting work carried out for government agencies and statutory authorities’ (43). The 1980s was ‘marked by a gradual expansion and increasing professionalisation’ of the industry, including the development of industry bodies with a vision to ‘hold consultants to account for their work’ (43). The 1990s to the mid-2000s saw significant private sector expansion with an increased demand for consultants fuelled by heritage becoming connected to ‘planning systems’ in Australian states and reductions in heritage specialists employed across government agencies (44). From 2006 to 2016, ‘government agencies . . . sought to introduce simple, “one size fits all” standards’ for heritage management and assessment ‘that can be easily followed and easily checked off and approved by government’ (45). Today, Australia’s heritage consultancy industry continues to be process-oriented. Despite the article’s focus on Australia, the findings within have transnational resonance given the extent to which the heritage industry in the West is shaped by global forces and heritage trends.

Underpinned by critical cultural justice inquiry, the article aims to analyse consultation processes as experienced by Pitcairn Settler descendants and others with long and deep connections to Kingston. The article begins with an overview of literature that critiques heritage consultancy, particularly in relation to tokenism and profit generation. We then outline some key details about Norfolk Island’s history, political context and the role of heritage consultancy on the island since 2016. After a brief description of our project’s methods, we present findings regarding both negative and positive experiences of heritage consultancy reported by participants. The article discusses how the significant problems raised by participants stem from structural issues with the heritage consultancy industry in Australia, which result in cultural injustices and cultural harm for Kingston’s core community. The article’s contribution to critical heritage studies is an empirically-grounded critique of heritage consultancy and the conceptualisation of industry practices as symbolic violence.

Heritage consultancy, Tokenism and structural impediments to genuine community engagement

It is widely acknowledged in the heritage industry and academia that, to be ethical and effective, heritage interpretation and management approaches should seek to be inclusive of multiple stakeholders. In Australia, the internationally influential Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 2013) features guidance relating to community participation in Articles 12 and 26.3. However, the ways in

which these values are embedded in practice varies widely. For example, tokenism is commonly referred to within the small body of literature that exists critiquing the extent to which the community consultation practices of Australia's heritage consultancy industry are genuine. In Australia, Brown (2016, 25), in observing the consultation process for the NSW Aboriginal Cultural Heritage law reform, noted the tokenistic approach that aligned closely with the NSW Government's (2009, 31) own definition of consultation – 'used to seek information, advice or an opinion, permission or approval for a proposed action' – as opposed to negotiation – 'used to confer with others in order to reach a compromise or agreement'. In this context, the Aboriginal participants had little to no power or authority over decision-making processes. Brown (2016) describes this as a top-down process and one that 'stands in contrast to notions of genuine engagement', 'requir[ing] a relationship built on trust and integrity ... [and a] sustained relationship between groups of people working towards shared goals' (Hunt 2013, 1 cited in Brown 2016, 25).

Perhaps the most robust critique of heritage consultation processes comes from Sutton, Huntley, and Anderson (2013), a collaboration between two heritage consultants and an Aboriginal stakeholder. They focus on the experiences of Aboriginal stakeholders in the Hunter Valley's (NSW, Australia) numerous environmental impact assessment (EIA) processes. What is particularly insightful about their work is that beyond the finding that there is 'a lack of genuine consultation and community engagement' (Sutton, Huntley, and Anderson 2013, 6), they also highlight their observations of the impacts of tokenistic consultation on stakeholders. They note that for Aboriginal people participating in these processes, impacts include 'feelings of disempowerment' and 'distress ... caused by a perceived threat, significant transformation or the loss of a place or places' (Sutton, Huntley, and Anderson 2013, 6). Sutton, Huntley, and Anderson (2013, 8) report Aboriginal stakeholder groups expressing 'the view that "no one listens to what we have to say ...". The disempowerment and distress experienced is reported to cause some groups to refuse participating altogether since the process is seen as 'unjust, or compromised from the outset' (Sutton, Huntley, and Anderson 2013, 9).

Zorzin (2015, 797) traces these poor experiences of community consultation in Australia to the commercial nature of heritage consultancy with its 'primary aim [for] the generation of profit'. Practicing consultant Andrew Costello (2021, 47) calls for heritage consultants to be more critical of the industry's embeddedness in neoliberal and capitalistic frameworks, heritage consultancy's political function as 'a form of statecraft' and its implications for the lives of the communities it impacts. Costello (2021, 48) suggests that these critical lines of inquiry are more advanced in academia 'and have not always transitioned effectively to' industry practice, stating that consultants 'are typically less able than their academic counterparts to negotiate the terms of collaborative consultation ... or set the agenda or scope for how a project is managed and conducted' (see also Guilfoyle et al. 2011; Wheeler 2016). In a paper co-authored by heritage consultants and Traditional Owner stakeholders, Guilfoyle et al. (2011) suggest this may be the case because commercial projects are 'often driven by narrow timeframes and specific scopes of work' (26) as well as 'the fact that the terms and conditions of development briefs are dictated by the client and the regulatory authority' (31).

Implications of structural inequalities are also observed by Costello (2021, 50) in terms of the 'cultural crumbs' that consultants provide local communities in the form of 'reports, videos, school booklets or displays in a local museum', while framing involvement in consultation processes as a "privilege" of being able to participate in the "management" of their own heritage'. Costello's (2021) example highlights the limitations of 'consultation' in regard to keeping the community at a distance from actual decision-making. Writing on a specific NSW guideline for Aboriginal consultation, Costello (2021, 54) observes that 'Consultation under the code is not a true sense of collaboration or genuine engagement, but a limited set of comments on outcomes that are largely predetermined'. Costello (2021) proposes that improvements for the sector can be sought by 'establish[ing] frameworks for genuine information exchange by being creative and going beyond

the formal guidelines and exchanges as prescribed by legislation' (49), including through attempting to 'produce a more holistic understanding of the cumulative impacts of development' that results from consultancies (54). Similarly, Guilfoyle et al. (2011, 31) argue that community-based approaches to cultural resource management do 'not necessarily require a formalised, legislative framework' but rather 'a critical need' for heritage consultants 'to not settle for the status quo, and take a more applied approach, incorporating holistic approaches into their own operations'.

The literature on Australia's heritage consultancy industry highlights that despite community consultation being widely enshrined in charters, codes and guidelines, in practice there is a highly unequal power dynamic between consultants, their clients and communities which leads to a lack of trust in the process.

Research background

KAVHA is located on the south-east coastline of Norfolk Island, a remote island in the South Pacific Ocean approximately 1,470 km south-east of Brisbane, Australia. KAVHA was central to all four of the human settlements documented on the island: a Polynesian settlement (c.1150–1450); a British colonial settlement (1788–1814); a British penal settlement (1825–1855); and the current Pitcairn settlement (1856–present). Although the World Heritage listing for KAVHA places its emphasis on the former British settlements, the area is a rich living heritage site. The entire population of Pitcairn Island – 194 descendants of Polynesian women (from the islands of Tahiti, Huahine and Tubuai) and British men (including the HMS Bounty mutineers) who settled Pitcairn in 1790 – were re-settled on Norfolk Island in 1856, with Kingston becoming their home. Their descendants – who make up a quarter of the island's population of 2,200 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022) – are an ethnically, culturally and linguistically distinct group of people. According to Gonschor and Nobbs (2021, 228), the Pitcairn settlers 'meet all international requirements to be recognised as Indigenous people'. However, their indigeneity is not recognised as such by the Australian Government. The Pitcairners relocated to Norfolk Island under the impression that they were to hold the land in common as its sole occupants and that the British Crown had ceded the island to them. However, a long history of tensions between the Pitcairners and the colony of New South Wales ensued, with their right to self-determination eroded by the Commonwealth of Australia's Norfolk Island Act 1913, which identified that the island be administered as a Territory under Australia's authority. In 1979, a degree of self-government was afforded to the islanders before the Australian Government overturned these accommodations in 2015. At the time of writing, a new governance model for the island was being devised with an intent to restore democracy (Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories 2023).

The changing political landscape on Norfolk Island has had implications for KAVHA's governance. During the years of self-government (1979–2015), site management was overseen by a KAVHA board comprising two elected Norfolk Island representatives and two Australian Government members. This shared responsibility for decision-making in KAVHA was removed when self-government was abolished; at that time, the Australian Government took sole responsibility for heritage management in Kingston. The Norfolk Island Council of Elders and Norfolk Island People for Democracy (2022) have argued that this change to KAVHA's governance works to 'dispossess or diminish the continuous usage, occupation and connection rights of the Norfolk people' in relation to Kingston. For Pitcairn settler descendants, KAVHA is a living heritage site and they are its core community, holding a 'strong sense of ownership/custodianship for heritage' and 'see[ing] the caring for heritage as [their] own inherent obligation' (Poulios 2014, 21). As such, changes to KAVHA and its governance have significant impacts on their well-being.

Norfolk Islanders have not been the clients for heritage consultancies in KAVHA since the 2016 adoption of the Heritage Management Plan (HMP), a document commissioned prior to the loss of self-government and dissolution of the KAVHA Board (see Jean Rice Architect, Context Pty Ltd, and GML Heritage Ltd 2016). Since 2016, there have been at least 15 (based on publicly available

documents) heritage consultancy projects involving 19 different consultancy firms, all of which were commissioned by the federal government's Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts. At the time of our research, the Australian Government had commissioned consultancy firm Conrad Gargett (supported by Tract, SMA Tourism and GML Heritage) to produce a Site Master Plan (SMP) for Kingston. The SMP was informed by three rounds of community consultation, including a 'Community Drop in Session' (Round 1), 'online feedback form' (Round 2) and attendance at a 'draft Master Plan exhibition' held at No 11 Quality Row (Round 3), with people also invited to submit feedback by email throughout the process (Conrad Gargett, Tract, SMA Tourism, and GML Heritage 2023, 5). The SMP was driven by a consultancy team comprising architects, including a landscape architect, a tourism development specialist and a cultural heritage management specialist.

Methods

The Reimagining KAVHA project aimed to explore the role living heritage sites like KAVHA play in resisting or reinforcing cultural injustices. Cultural justice refers to 'doing justice to and through culture – valuing cultural infrastructure, rights, identities, materialities, institutions and work, and attending to matters of power, representation, participation and access' (Cantillon, Baker, and Evans 2024, 2). Informed by critical cultural justice inquiry – 'a conceptual, methodological and practical framework for addressing cultural injustices in research and practice' – the Reimagining KAVHA project sought to "do research otherwise" – resisting extractivism and instead emphasising building relationships, engaging in dialogue and co-creating resources for hope and action' (Baker, Cantillon, and Evans forthcoming). The project received ethics approval from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 2020/297). Participants provided informed consent for their contributions to be used in research outputs and, due to the small island context posing significant challenges to anonymity, for these contributions to be attributable to them.

The project team includes two residents of Norfolk Island (Sarah and Chelsea) and one resident of the Gold Coast, Australia (Zel). Chelsea is a Pitcairn Settler descendant, while Sarah is of British descent and Zel is of European descent. Sarah and Zel are both employed as academic staff at Australian universities, and Chelsea works as an elected member of the Norfolk Island Governance Committee. The project used a qualitative multi-method approach (see Baker, Cantillon, and Evans forthcoming), deploying methods such as interviews and arts-based workshops with more than 60 participants. While at the beginning of the project we did not ask participants specifically about their experiences of heritage consultancy, issues with these processes were raised frequently in interviews and workshops. Subsequently, probing questions about heritage consultancies became a routine part of our conversations with participants. In particular, in September 2022, our series of mapping workshops (see Baker, Cantillon, and Evans 2023; Cantillon, Baker, and Evans 2024) coincided with Round 3 of the SMP consultation process. Unsurprisingly, many participants chose to comment on the Draft SMP's proposals while engaging with our planned activities which focused on their routes, customary practices and emotions relating to Kingston.

Interview and workshop transcripts were divided among the project team and analysed to identify participant experiences of and views on heritage consultancy. Sarah then conducted an audit to ensure all reference to heritage consultancies had been captured. The data was then collaboratively re-analysed by the authors to draw out specific themes. Finally, Sarah and Zel audited the thematic analysis with the intention of grouping themes according to participants' negative and positive perspectives on heritage consultancy projects conducted about KAVHA.

'Consultation is the biggest dirty word': cynicism of heritage consultancies

Participants reported a proliferation of heritage consultancies focused on KAVHA. Gaye, a landholder in Kingston and a member of the Council of Elders, described a 'plethora' of

consultants (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 51). Lisa, a member of the Norfolk Island Museum Trust and former director/curator of Norfolk Island Museum, referred to the situation in KAVHA as a ‘consultants feeding frenzy’ (interview, 15 June 2021). Lisa observed that over the past decade, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts ploughed considerable funds into ‘bringing all these consultants in to upgrade’ existing plans in a process of continual renewal and to also produce even more plans, each with a different focus to the extent that ‘you lose track’ (interview, 15 June 2021).

Participants expressed frustration that, despite there being so many past reports from consultancies, it appeared as if these older documents were not being properly engaged with by consultants or the Department in newer projects. As Gaye put it, ‘They haven’t read the back files’ (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 56) and this had resulted in conflicting guidelines being imposed in rapid succession on landholders in Kingston. Another participant bemoaned that ‘there’s so much knowledge in those reports that is not being used’, beseeching the Department to ‘instead of continually spending money on consultants, utilise what knowledge you have’ (anonymous, interview, 12 June 2021).

The proliferation of consultancies and their resulting documents and recommendations has resulted in significant consultancy fatigue among participants. Ken, former member of the Council of Elders, commented, ‘We’re meeting out, consulted out’ (workshop, 21 September 2022), while Gaye observed that, ‘you don’t just get tired, you get snitchy and cynical’ (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 55). Chris, an elected member of the Norfolk Island Governance Committee, noted that the ‘flood of consultants and advisors and ad hoc changes’ causes people to get ‘overwhelmed’ to the extent that many no longer have the fortitude to contribute to consultations (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 95). Lisa describes this sense of hopelessness as nevertheless accompanied by a desire to keep resisting:

It’s hideously wrong, and it’s so distressing that it comes to the point where it’s another round of consultations and you lose your emotional capacity to contribute ... because you think, ‘Why bother?’ after a time, even though you have to maintain your rage, or at least show them that we’re not going away. (interview, 15 June 2021)

Emotional capacity to engage with consultants is eroded not only by the number of consultancies over time, but also emerges from a feeling that people’s voices are not being heard or are not adequately reflected in the final reports. There was a general sense that ‘consultants don’t pay *any* attention whatsoever’ (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 59, original emphasis). For example, Russell, a long-term resident and member of the Norfolk Island Historical Society, spoke of his frustration at not receiving acknowledgement of his contributions to the recent SMP consultation sessions, with Ken noting the consequences of this dynamic:

Russell: They ask for suggestions and when you make a suggestion there is no response at all ...

Ken: After a while you do think ‘what’s the point?’, you really do.

Russell: Exactly. What is the point? Taking the trouble to go there and talk to them. I mean, it’s pretty simple [for them] to ... [send an] email [saying] ... ‘your response is appreciated or under consideration’ ... Anything. As long as you get something. (workshop, 21 September 2022)

These were not isolated experiences. Gaye described being at a consultation session where an attendee voiced concerns about a recommendation. It was reported the response from the consultants was ‘Perhaps you should have come to the earlier consultation’, to which the attendee replied ‘We’ve been to all four, thank you’ (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 55).

When the draft recommendations were later on display, it became clear to Gaye that the concerns shared in consultation sessions had been disregarded:

when I went in there to look at the display . . . I was absolutely furious. Furious! And with what has happened to us in the last five years [with the loss of self-governance], there is so much fury that has had no outlet, and so you can find that in the middle of a beautiful spring day you're in tears. . . . So, I went down . . . and I looked at these things already heartbroken, and saw this stuff and thought, 'You haven't thought. You haven't thought'. (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 57)

This encounter encapsulates the very real emotional toll of the work presented by heritage consultants on participants and their perceived impacts of unsuitable recommendations on deeply meaningful living heritage. It also highlights how future engagement in consultation processes might become undesirable given the emotional weight of participation. As Chris observed, 'Why would people contribute when they feel their past contributions continue to be ignored? Not less valued than they should be[-] useless. That's pretty disheartening' (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 95).

The issues raised above stem from the fact that 'the customer is the Commonwealth [government]' (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 91). Since the community are not the consultants' clients, there is little scope for Norfolk Islanders' key concerns to be captured in consultancy projects. For example, David, a member of the Council of Elders and former Chief Minister of Norfolk Island, spoke of how challenging it had been to link heritage management issues to broader problems with governance (Buffett, Baker, and Cantillon 2023, 30–31). Chris echoed this sentiment:

We explained to the Commonwealth, 'This is a problem. Governance is a problem. Can we do something about it?' 'Well, we can't really, because we've still got these consultations [for the SMP] and that's going to be your opportunity to talk about it'. . . . [Then t]he consultant[s] say, 'Well it's not in our terms of reference'. (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 95–96)

Despite 'strong representations by NIPD [Norfolk Island People for Democracy] and the Council of Elders in terms of governance' during the consultation process, Chris reported that the draft SMP recommendations displayed in Kingston featured only a brief mention of governance, with overwhelming attention given to recommendations such as 'putting a look-out here and an interpretation centre there and commercialising this and that' (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 96). The dissatisfaction being expressed here is not simply about the inattention to governance, but the extent to which recommendations were far removed from community priorities:

I don't know where they were getting that information, because it wasn't guided by our community . . . This idea of commercialising Kingston just seems inconsistent with the community that I know. And inconsistent with the community that's kept Kingston the way it is for 165 years. (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 90)

Given these circumstances, it is unsurprising that participants often talked about consultation with scepticism and sarcasm. For instance, one exchange between participants captured the disbelief that the consultancy process is genuine:

Joshua: Not so much 'consultation' going on. . . .

Emily: They've told the community, ticked the box, that's sorted. (workshop, 10 July 2022)

This was echoed by Tim, a resident of KAVHA, who stated that 'community consultation' is 'bandied around like the essence of virtue. But it isn't really. The results aren't reflective of true consultancy' (Pearson and Evans 2023, 7). Questioning about the very notion of 'consultation' further highlights that Norfolk Islanders are not at the heart of the design and outcomes of consultancies and reinforces the sense that their voices are not heard. Consequently, it was common for participants to express the belief that heritage consultancy related to Kingston is perfunctory. Peter, a local business owner, spoke strongly on this matter, stating 'consultation is the biggest dirty

word . . . [it's] another word . . . for manufactured consent. . . Consultation means nothing to me' (Christian-Bailey, Poacher, and Evans 2021, 58).

Several participants also noted their belief that consultancies had 'pre-determined outcomes' (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 90). Gaye stated that 'before even visiting' the island, consultants 'saw clearly in their minds' what the outcomes would be (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 59). Similarly, George, a former Chief Minister of the Legislative Assembly, observed in relation to the SMP that 'what it looked like to me was [consultants] who've never been here, and they've [the Department] said [to them] "can you do us a plan with all of this?"' (workshop, 22 September 2022). For George, the resulting recommendations are 'just nonsensical' (workshop, 22 September 2022). Chris described the consultation process on Norfolk Island as a 'circular discussion' which, 'irrespective' of the community's contributions, only serves to 'legitimise a decision already made' (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 90).

What emerges from the 'tick box exercise' of consultation is very real ramifications for living heritage. A number of examples of the inappropriateness and potential cultural harm of recommendations were cited by participants. Referencing the SMP and its proposed cafe and wine bar in the Pier Store, Gaye described how improper this would be given it was where 'they used to make coffins. And if you're of an old island family, it could be taboo to eat in there'. For Damien, a local firefighter, the cafe and wine bar would disturb the rhythm of fishing, a customary use of the pier – 'it'll make it feel invasive' (workshop, 21 September 2022). Damien was not against a cafe or wine bar in Kingston, but rather was critical of the consultants' lack of cultural understanding in the proposed venue. Hearing culturally inappropriate recommendations being proposed during the consultation sessions for the SMP, Gaye's distress is evident:

This made me really angry and say very nasty things to the consultants. And when I left there, I think my parting shot was, 'Well, with a bit of luck and a fair breeze, I'll be dead soon and I won't have to look at it', which was nasty, but it was how I was feeling at the time. . . . I was devastated. (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 59)

Even when not yet tangibly implemented, it is clear that these kinds of recommendations cause real harm to Kingston's custodians.

One of the core issues causing these negative experiences is the positioning of heritage consultants – rather than the core community – as the experts. Consultants approach their work on Norfolk Island with particular values and paradigms, or, as Gaye put it, 'they're bringing in the latest trend idea of the moment' (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 52). Bethany, a collections officer for Norfolk Island Museum, recalled consultants 'came through and looked at the museums' and, while the staff already recognised 'a lot of display aspects . . . need[ed] work', the consultants' feedback 'was pretty much like a slam down' (interview, 2 June 2021). However, what might be appropriate changes for museums in Australia does not necessarily resonate for the island. For example, the museum's wooden display cases were regarded by the consultants as not modern and in need of updating. Bethany argued:

But that's not the case on Norfolk, because you've got new display cases being made out of wood, because it is Norfolk Island pine, it is readily available . . . And there's ramifications for collection material, because of wood being chosen. But you shouldn't impose glass and clean metal lines because it's actually not the Norfolk aesthetic. And it's okay to be different. . . . we want to provide the best possible display conditions, but you don't want to wipe Norfolk out of that interpretation. (interview, 2 June 2021)

Bethany's point is that while consultants come with an idea of a global standard, what really needs to be taken into account is how that intersects with the local context. Gaye offered another example in relation to the SMP:

Consultants are saying they're ... going to put Perspex ... around the Golf Club veranda ... it's the finest collection of Georgian buildings in the southern hemisphere. It's been given World Heritage status. If you're going to do anything to improve it, don't make your improvements in 2022 plastic – sorry, Perspex – sorry, glass. This is not an improvement. (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 59)

As Damian argued in relation to the SMP, 'progress is not necessarily the answer to everything' (workshop, 22 September 2022).

Chris identified that the problem lies with consultants seeking to 'chang[e Kingston to be] consistent with [their] view of the world' (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 97). But as Gaye commented, the consultants' approach fundamentally lacks an intergenerational sense of continuity:

The managers and consultants who are coming in now, appear to be thinking in terms of three to five years. When you talk to a person who's living on Norfolk Island, they're thinking in terms of generations. ... you're not just caring for you, you're caring for what your children are going to have, or what your children's children are going to have ... (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023b, 33)

Gaye's observations underscore how Norfolk Islanders are the experts in caring for and acting as custodians of Kingston and that their views should underpin decision-making regarding Kingston. As Gaye noted,

This area has been here for 200 years. We've kept it in a state that allowed it [to] become a World Heritage Area. Please do not offend us or be offensive enough to come in and tell us how to look after it, because that's actually what we've been doing all this time. (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 52)

There is more than offence at work here. As Tim explained, undertaking a consultancy project about Kingston 'might look good on [a consultant's] resume' and their recommendations might 'make perfect sense to them', but they won't be the ones 'liv[ing] with it' – and enacting consultants' recommendations 'could be absolutely devastating for us' (Pearson and Evans 2023, 8). Here, Tim succinctly highlights the significant imbalance in what is at stake for each party.

Contextual factors leading to more positive experiences of heritage consultancy on Norfolk Island

It is clear that there are substantial problems with how heritage consultancy projects have unfolded on Norfolk Island. However, there were certain contextual factors raised during our fieldwork that elucidated how a better experience of consultancy can be enabled. For example, Duncan, a former member of the KAVHA Advisory Committee, felt that the 2016 HMP reflected 'extensive community input' (D. Evans and Evans 2022, 55). Dean, a former member of the KAVHA Community Advisory Group, supported this view, noting that while many consultations on Norfolk Island do appear to be more of a 'ticking a box' exercise, the consultation for the HMP 'was very good' – 'I think they actually listened to what people were telling them' (interview, 9 June 2021). Heritage consultant Chris Johnston (2023, 251) writes that the process of consultation for the HMP was a response to the World Heritage Committee's request 'that efforts be made to strengthen and develop consultation with private landholders and other stakeholders' in the KAVHA World Heritage site 'to develop a shared approach to conservation and management'. Johnston (2023, 251) describes how an 'open, transparent, and thorough process increased trust in the project and the team'.

It is not necessarily the case, then, that heritage consultancy has no place on Norfolk Island, but rather that it needs to be undertaken as a genuine partnership that elevates the community's own expertise and self-determination. Participants referred to how this more productive dynamic had sometimes been apparent in the past when Kingston was co-managed by the Commonwealth of Australia and the Norfolk Island Administration. At that time, Puss Anderson, 'an islander' (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023b, 33), worked as Kingston's heritage manager and had been in that role

for many years. Kane, a former member of the KAVHA Works Team, mentioned that during this period, there were useful annual contributions by a heritage architect and consultant, Eric Martin, who advised Puss and the KAVHA Works Team on conservation and maintenance of built heritage (Anderson and Baker 2022, 61). This approach ‘worked so well’ (Lisa, interview, 15 June 2021) because it featured Norfolk Islanders in prominent decision-making roles and saw the same consultant return regularly, providing a sense of continuity and trust.

The participants stressed the importance of having a strong advocate such as Puss who was open to hearing the community’s perspectives on proposed changes or their concerns about how Kingston was being managed. As Gaye reflected:

He was the sort of person that you could go to and say, dem torken baut faensen orf em kriik, en daas riili maad aidiya kos . . . gwena baek ap em worta, dem wiids gwena groe . . . dem worta gwena trikl thruu. En lornge auwas fas hewi rien de hoel lot gwena wohsh aut iin Emle Bieh teken orlem rabish lorngefet. En bai de wieh daa kohman gwena swohmp en ai nor gwen el get hoem.¹ And he would think that through, you know? (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023b, 33)

Because Puss had power in decision-making processes – enabled by the governance structure of KAVHA at the time – he could push back on any recommendations made by consultants that were not aligned with the community’s priorities:

He was worth his weight in gold, because what [consultants would] come over and dream up . . . he had absolutely no difficulty in saying, ‘No, that’s not going to work. We’re not doing that’. (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 54)

Gaye is speaking to an approach to heritage management in Kingston that, while not totally autonomous of the Australian Government, fostered trust in the heritage management process. Compared to the more recent experiences Gaye and other participants described, particularly in regard to the SMP, such a context reduced the risk of cultural harm resulting from culturally inappropriate changes being enacted based on consultants’ recommendations.

Cultural injustice and symbolic violence enacted by heritage consultation processes

While there have been some positive experiences with heritage consultancy in KAVHA, participants overwhelmingly reported negative experiences. Chris pointed out that the issues are not with individual consultants themselves:

The consultants that I’ve had an experience with have been fantastic, really interested, keen, respectful. Yet, the decisions that they actually make, I can’t believe they come out of what the community’s told them. (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023)

Clearly, respect demonstrated in interactions during the consultation process does not translate into the types of recommendations that are subsequently put forward. What this points to is serious systemic problems in the consultation process on Norfolk Island – and elsewhere, as highlighted by the literature. Participants’ negative experiences of consultancy processes are indicative of structural issues related to heritage consultancy’s embeddedness in neoliberal, capitalist statecraft, with its emphasis on development, commercialisation and profit (for themselves and for their clients). For example, commercialising heritage is explicit in Kingston’s SMP, which participants noted is out of alignment with community priorities. The examples from Kingston share similarities to Sutton, Huntley, and Anderson’s (2013) observations of consultancies in the Hunter Valley, particularly in relation to Aboriginal stakeholders’ experiences of disempowerment, distress and hopelessness – even about perceived threats rather than actual changes or loss – and the feeling that consultation processes are compromised and unjust. Likewise, Costello (2021) reflects that Aboriginal stakeholders are distanced from decision-making in heritage management while simultaneously having their participation in consultation framed as a privilege. Part of the problem is that rather than being acknowledged as the site’s core community, Pitcairn settler descendants and others with long

and deep connections to Kingston are positioned as ‘stakeholders’ – a term that relegates them to just one of many groups who hold a stake in the site’s management rather than custodians who should actively control the decision-making process to determine the appropriate care of their living heritage (McNiven and Russell 2005, 236). Terms like ‘stakeholders’, ‘interest groups’ and even ‘consultations’ are delimiting and stand in the way of an inclusive practice that ‘address[es] questions of legacies, origins, memory, indigeneity, cultural rights, . . . citizenship, . . . entitlements, restitution, and so on’ (Shepherd cited in Haber and Gnecco 2007, 410).

What our participants’ reflections point to is that heritage consultancies focused on Kingston are culturally unjust. Participants’ extensive commentary about the SMP and earlier consultancies highlight issues of non-recognition, cultural domination and disrespect (Fraser 1995) by heritage consultants and the Department as the client. Non-recognition is demonstrated in the sense that Pitcairn Settler descendants and others in the community with long and deep connections to Norfolk Island are not the clients setting the terms and scope for consultancy projects; often, they feel that their voices are not heard and that their views are not adequately represented in reports. Cultural domination is evident in how participants’ own knowledge of how to care for place is subjugated in favour of the ‘expert’ advice, guided by industry trends, of consultants. Disrespect is deeply entwined with these experiences of cultural domination and non-recognition, leading participants to feel that they are not taken seriously as Kingston’s custodians but rather are patronised as ‘little island people’ who ‘don’t really get it’ (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 60).

There is a violence observable in the unfolding of the cultural injustices of heritage consultancy on Norfolk Island. Hutchings and La Salle (2015) characterise the discipline of archaeology as inherently violent. While the majority of heritage consultancies that were referred to by participants were undertaken by architects rather than archaeologists, archaeologists do make up a significant proportion of individuals in the heritage consultancy industry in Australia and worldwide. The violence of heritage consultancy, whether archaeological or otherwise, emerges from it being embedded in ‘a firmly colonialist project driven by capitalism to produce narratives that remain elitist, racist, and pro-growth, development, and progress’ (Hutchings and La Salle 2015, 706). Hutchings and La Salle (2015) describe two aspects of this violence, noting that the work of archaeologists ‘constitutes a social violence’ (707), with their being complicit in the neoliberal statecraft of governments, and that it is a ‘slow violence’, with harm being incremental and the ramifications often not observable for decades to come (716). Hutchings and La Salle’s (2015, 716) concern is that archaeologists ‘forget’ the discipline’s ‘ongoing legacy of violence’, viewing the slow, social violence as beyond their control ‘and part of the permanent structure’ of the industry in which they operate. The individual consultant’s role in enacting slow, social violence on descendant communities then becomes invisible to them (Hutchings and La Salle 2015, 716), eclipsed by the framing of their work as an ‘ethical practice concerned with the welfare of descendant communities’ (707).

With Hutchings and La Salle’s observations in mind, we argue that in the Norfolk Island context the cultural injustices experienced by participants at every stage of the consultancy process can be understood specifically as a form of symbolic violence. Ojha, Cameron, and Kumar (2009, 367), drawing on Bourdieu, define symbolic violence as ‘a situation in which powerful actors continue to enjoy unchallenged privileges in accessing resources and power, through which they dominate social interactions, including deliberative practices’. In the Norfolk Island context, consultants and their clients determine the conditions, methods, documentation and analysis of consultative processes. The consultants act with the knowledge that their client, the Commonwealth of Australia – not the local community – then holds the power to action, adapt or reject consultants’ recommendations. As noted by Peter above, the deliberative or consultative process then becomes a way to manufacture consent. Being able to say consultation has occurred affords legitimacy to the outcomes regardless of the extent to which those outcomes reflect community desires.

Symbolic violence is compounded by the democratic deficit experienced on Norfolk Island more broadly – i.e. no self-government since 2015 and a regional council under administration

since 2021 – which brings the power imbalance of consultants/clients and community into stark relief. As Chris explained, the ‘real problem’ is that the consultants are not ‘advising elected representatives of Norfolk Island’ (Magri, Cantillon, and Baker 2023, 91). David noted the current governance arrangement in Kingston has removed Norfolk Islanders’ investment in consultants’ recommendations which, due to the community not being the ‘decision takers’, rarely ‘hit the mark’ and create ‘a procession of difficulties’ (Buffett, Baker, and Cantillon 2023, 30–31). Another way in which the power imbalance was highlighted was through a reflection on the financial disparities between consultants and community members. Gaye, for example, noted that Islanders are ‘on an average salary ... of about [AUD]\$55,000 a year, and you’re getting in consultants who are on an average of [AUD]\$200,000 a year, and they’re telling us “you will upgrade this” ... [but] that’s five years salary for us’ (Evans, Baker, and Cantillon 2023a, 52). As such, participants highlight how access to resources and power are central components of the symbolic violence they experience in the heritage consultation process.

While the symbolic violence of consultancies – such as that relating to resources and power – may be considered a form of ‘soft’ violence, it ‘insidiously touches and threatens’ the ‘values, culture, lifestyle, spaces or world views’ (Piquard 2016, 69) of people with long and deep connections to KAVHA and violates the rights to custodianship of Kingston that reside in the core community of this living heritage site. For example, there is symbolic violence in the disconnect Chris identifies between respect – consultants acknowledging the challenges the local community is experiencing regarding matters of governance during consultation activities – and non-recognition – whereby challenges the community felt had been respected in interactions with the consultants were not then reflected in recommendations presented in final reports. Those reports instead reflect the consultants’ and client’s world views and desires which, as participants described, are at odds with community needs and understandings of what custodianship and care for the site requires. As participants expressed, over time and following ongoing experiences of symbolic violence, there is a considerable erosion of emotional resilience for the individual as well as cultural harm to the collective that arises from the discrete phases of consultancy projects where disconnects occur. This is encapsulated in the affects that pervade participants’ reflections on the consultancies they have experienced: offence, distress, overwhelm, heartbreak, anger, rage, fury, devastation. What is also evident is the compounding distress and cumulative impacts of symbolic violence over time from the proliferation of consultancies and the implementation of their recommendations. The compounding distress and cumulative impacts of the heritage consultancies on Kingston also highlight Hutchings and La Salle’s (2015) slow, social violence in process.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted four key issues reported by participants in relation to heritage consultation in KAVHA. Firstly, concerns were expressed about the sheer number of consultancies that have taken place over recent years, many of which participants felt did not adequately engage with previous findings. Secondly, this saturation of consultancies and their resulting documents has led to significant fatigue and feelings of hopelessness among our participants, who reported that their voices are not reflected in resulting recommendations and that the emotional toll of this has flattened their desire to contribute to subsequent consultancies. Thirdly, since the community is not the client for which the heritage consultants work, participants relayed they had little faith in the idea of consultation on the island, believing consultancies are perfunctory and have predetermined outcomes, leading to end results that are culturally inappropriate. Finally, it is problematic that heritage consultants are positioned as experts over the core community. As our participants observed, trends and global standards in heritage management practice are not necessarily appropriate for the local context and, in particular, lack the care and intergenerational sensibility that is the basis of their custodianship. While participants noted that there have been some positive experiences of consultation processes, these were when consultancies

were meeting specific briefs about the extent of community consultation, such as from the World Heritage Committee in terms of the HMP, or within specific governance contexts and heritage management arrangements. What has emerged from the discussion is that structural issues of the heritage consultation industry, combined with current governance arrangements in Kingston and Norfolk Island more broadly, lead to cultural injustices being experienced by the community. In Kingston, heritage consultation processes amount to a form of symbolic violence that causes cultural harm to the community.

In Kingston – and elsewhere globally – heritage consultants and their clients need to ‘*duu baeta*’,² a Norfolk phrase that captures the indignation felt by participants in relation to how all phases of consultancy projects are carried out. Wheeler (2016, 47) argues that the heritage consultancy industry ‘need[s] to, and can do, much better’ than ‘tick box process-oriented assessment work’, and ‘government heritage agencies’ should ‘support innovative and interesting work’. Over time, the rigidity of process-oriented assessments have seen ‘questions of ownership, access, rights, authority, and so on’ fall by the wayside with ‘discussions around ethics and the rights of descendent communities’ now positioned outside of the consultant’s remit (Shepherd 2015, 762). Indeed, to be more culturally just, heritage consultancy must make these questions central to future practice.

It is not the case that the consultancy firms commissioned to do work relating to Kingston do not see the place for a political ethics to guide their practice. Indeed, the consultants guiding the SMP explicitly acknowledge the challenging political and social context of the commission, the discontent of Kingston’s core community, and questions around the ownership of the site (Gole et al. 2023). Yet, as noted above, acknowledgement of the issues is not enough if what is learnt is not then reflected in recommendations put forward in final reports and planning documents, nor embedded in how subsequent heritage consultancy projects are designed and undertaken. In this respect, the onus for changing, for doing better, is not just on heritage consultants, but on the clients who hire them – particularly governments, for whom there should be a greater ethical imperative (as opposed to, say, developers) to protect their citizens and constituents. Based on this article’s case study of Kingston and Arthur’s Vale Historic Area, we argue that an approach to heritage consultancy that is more culturally just would understand from the outset that the core community of a living heritage site is not simply one of many groups of stakeholders, and this understanding must translate into action. Core communities are the custodians of their own heritage, deserving not only recognition and respect, but also agency and power in decision-making processes.

Notes

1. Translation: they’re talking about fencing off the creek and that’s a silly idea because . . . it’ll back up the water, the weeds will grow, . . . the water will trickle through. Then with the first heavy rain the whole lot will wash out into Emily Bay taking all of the plant litter with it. And by the way, the Common will turn into a swamp and I’m not going to be able to get home.
2. Translation: do better.

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