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Elizabeth Brabec, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*
Gordon McLennan



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Using Locative Media in Heritage Landscapes: A review of current practice

Elizabeth Brabec¹, Gordon McLennan²

¹*Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA*

²*Vancouver, BC, Canada*

Abstract

Locative media projects are beginning to be recognized in various arts and humanities disciplines as a portal through which interpretive information can be connected to location. Projects can be accessed from two different perspectives: in front of a computer screen or on the ground with the aid of a GPS enabled smart phone. In either format, content in the form of narrative, video, images, historic documents, etc., can be connected with a specific GPS point location on a map or on a real site. However, while locative media holds the potential to create a visitor experience without negatively impacting the local community and their cultural landscapes, its utility, impacts and weaknesses have not yet been fully explored.

This paper reviews a series of six projects in the United States, Canada and the Czech Republic, to analyse the strengths, weaknesses, and hurdles to implementation of this emerging technology. While it holds promise for the interpretation of both tangible and intangible heritage, there are significant ethical and privacy issues to its implementation. The central case, of a project implemented in the Gullah community of St. Helena Island, South Carolina, illustrates the potential for the technology to become a conduit for the sharing of intangible heritage with younger generations. It also provides an illustration of the impacts of heritage tourism, and both the strengths and weaknesses of this approach for the interpretation of tangible and intangible heritage.

In conclusion the paper evaluates the types of heritage that can be effectively conveyed through this medium, as well as heritage that is not well suited to this approach (e.g. private home landscape) that causes issues of visual access for the public, and perceived intrusion for the community.

Keywords: locative media, heritage interpretation, cultural landscape interpretation