

Abstract

During the last 20 years, with the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), an emerging interest has appeared in Digital Community Engagement (DCE) in the process of cultural heritage management. Due to a growing need to involve a broader community in the Historic Urban Landscape approach, social media are considered one of the most important platforms to promote the public participation process of urban heritage conservation in the context of rapid urbanization. Among the growing literature on DCE, which has delivered a general overview of different digital technologies and platforms to enhance heritage conservation, a few articles have been done on taking stock of the utilization of social media in this process. In addition, the broad attention on the World Heritage Property management in Chinese community engagement is mainly clustered in policy, economy and diversity aspects. Little research has been done on systematically reviewing the practices of community participation within Chinese cultural heritage, nor defining the role of digital technology played in it. To fill this gap, the research aims to explore how ICTs can contribute to community engagement and further influence sustainable cultural heritage management.

Community participation plays a core role in sustainable urban development and inclusive cultural heritage management. Based on the evolving definition of community participation from the Historic Urban Landscape approach, this work starts with a review on the conceptualization of community participation with a discussion on the role of the community played in participatory management. Following that, Chapter 2 aims to fill the research gap by providing a more comprehensive picture of the functionalities of social media platforms and their impacts on sustainable urban development through a systematic literature review. Chapter 3 focuses on the illustration of the world-widely applied digital tools concerning community engagement promotion highlighting that social media is one of the vital tools to engage a wider range of audiences in conservation practices.

Taking five World Cultural Heritage Sites as case studies, Chapter 4 contributes a methodology to evaluate online participatory practices in China by analysing the open data obtained from the Chinese social media Weibo. It discovers that, to a great extent, the participatory activities in Chinese urban heritage conservation practices emerge at the relatively primary levels. Moreover, residents have shown particular interest in buildings, facades, and temples in the cultural heritage sites by sharing and posting massive images. Chapter 5 supplemented an online survey and on-site interview to the previous study for understanding the value of community participation to obtain a more sustainable way for integrations about cultural heritage. It focuses on the identification of criteria for the evaluation of DCE and proposes the multivariate evaluation model.

To conclude, online urban heritage practices offer a platform for local citizens, especially grassroots, to collaborate with heritage institutions and professionals. Social media practices may have a wider resonance when they combine broader communication and collaboration methods. Using social media platforms to unveil interplays between digital and physical heritage conservation is feasible and should be widely encourage

