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Places of popular music heritage: The local framing of a global cultural form in Dutch museums and archives



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ABSTRACT

Through the prism of popular music, this article examines how the preservation and display of this global cultural form positions itself at the nexus of the local and the global, and in so doing mediates attachment to place. Springing from the increasing cultural legitimacy of popular music and the growing participation of fans and local communities in heritage practices, Dutch private and public heritage initiatives are analyzed to explore how the local histories and lived experiences of popular music reverberate in the framework of wider global cultural developments. The results of this study indicate that museums and archives give places meaning through three interrelated processes. They present local sociocultural histories, foster a sense of belonging and cultural pride, and seek to document the artistic legacy of places. Furthermore, it is found that despite the strong transnational dimension of popular music, the studied heritage practices strongly resonate with local and national cultural identities, as narratives of popular music and heritage are mediated by locally situated cultural gatekeepers. These findings are based on in-depth interviews conducted with archivists, collectors and curators from the Netherlands.

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1. Introduction

This article sheds light on the connections between popular music heritage and local and national cultural identity construction. Traditional notions of heritage as the exclusive domain of high art and tangible objects are progressively replaced with new conceptions that include contemporary popular culture (Moore, 1997). This follows from the blurring boundaries between high art and popular culture and the ensuing artistic legitimacy of cultural forms such as music and film (Bennett, 2009; Schmutz et al., 2010). Moreover, in recent decades, initiatives seeking to democratize heritage practices, such as community archives and the social history movement, have ensured a growing attention to ‘history from below’ (Flinn, 2007; Moore, 1997). Consequently, a burgeoning number of both private and public heritage practices engage with the contributions of popular music to the cultural landscape and everyday life of communities. Among these, exhibitions and archives typically frame popular music’s past from a local perspective, focusing on the music histories and identities of specific places (Brandellero and Janssen, 2014; Cohen, 2013). Yet globalization calls into question what is local, by pointing to contested processes of identity building (Morley, 2001) and of representation of diversity by heritage institutions (Khabra, 2014; Van den Bosch, 2007).

Our focus on popular music as heritage offers a unique vantage point to explore these processes. As local popular music traditions are combined with foreign genres, the global and the local continuously intersect (Kong, 1997). Responses to this have varied, from the indigenization of global cultural styles (Regev, 2007) to the reassertion of place-bound identities in light of a perceived threat by globalization to local cultural uniqueness (Achterberg et al., 2011). More specifically, Dutch post-war popular music and the wider cultural landscape have proven to be open to influences from other countries (Janssen et al., 2008; Schuyt and Taverne, 2004). We analyze therefore how locally based institutions negotiate their relevance in relation to the preservation of a global cultural form.

This article examines how museum and archives as heritage gatekeepers represent these connections between the local and the global and the ways in which they legitimize their heritage practices. In so doing, we address the following research question: *How do museums and archives engaging in popular music heritage practices give form to understandings of place and local cultural identity?* To answer this research question, this study draws upon interviews with curators, archivists and collectors. Heritage research to date has tended to focus on heritage practices solely from an institutional perspective (Smith, 2006). Therefore, this study examines both established heritage organizations and initiatives from the bottom-up. As amateur and professional curators and archivists in the Dutch field of popular music heritage often collaborate, this provides an apposite vantage point to explore the ways in which, independently and collectively, museums and archives give place meaning through their popular music heritage practices.

The article is divided into four parts. In the first part, extant literature on heritage institutions and the changing relations between heritage, identity and place are introduced. It then moves on to the methodology and a discussion of the different archives and exhibitions we examined. Next, we discuss the ways in which places are remembered through the popular music heritage practices of museums and archives. Finally, we analyze how museum curators and archivists negotiate the local–global nexus in practices of popular music heritage.

2. The changing practices and institutions of heritage

Heritage is the process through which the history of people and places is used to shape particular place-identities (Ashworth, 1994). Back in 1999, Stuart Hall remarked that the term heritage had “slipped so innocently into everyday speech”, deflecting from its contested role in providing structures and “analytic frameworks which classify, place, compare and evaluate culture” (1999, p. 3 and 8). Heritage functions on a structural and cognitive level. On the former, it operates through a complex set of institutions and practices dedicated to the preservation and conservation of artefacts and ‘things of value’. On the latter level, it participates in the active production of collective representations of the past by building on dominant and essentialised meanings of identities and narratives of place and projecting them onto what is preserved (Hall, 1999, pp. 3–4; Graham et al., 2000). Heritage institutions render identity concrete through the preservation of “the store of

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