PERCEPTIONS OF MICRONESIANS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAMS

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Historic Preservation Programs operating through Micronesia are strongly based on American concepts and practices and thus do not always satisfy Micronesian aspirations for preservation and on-going development of their cultures. Considerable, widespread dissatisfaction with current levels and practices of historic preservation is apparent right across Micronesia and is consistent regardless of ethnicity, culture, gender and age. Organisations and groups that currently have responsibilities for preserving elements of Micronesian culture (whether by tradition or appointment) are perceived to be failing those responsibilities.

Processes of Historic Preservation have not always been as formal as they are today and were usually previously included as an informal part of the normal activities of daily life. This is often still the case within those cultures that are more traditional in character. In Micronesia, external and largely colonial sources appear to have influenced local cultures to the extent that some elements of traditional lifeways are losing popularity and becoming less frequently practiced (O'Neill & Spennemann 2006a–b; 2007a–c). Consequently, the traditional, informal, processes of cultural reinforcement and development have been weakened.

The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) was a United Nations mandated territory assigned to the United States of America and comprised almost 15 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean. During the curi-ously labelled "Cold War" period of international confrontation, American strategists commonly perceived this area as being critical to the defence of U.S. interests, and the doctrine of "strategic denial" became fundamental to America's management of the territory (Petersen 2004; Chutaro and Heine 2003). As such, it was politically expedient for the U.S. to clearly demonstrate that it considered the TTPI part of U.S. territory. One way to do so was to implement elements of U.S. legislation locally and that involving Historic Preservation was one that was imported easily and quickly. Thus, as a development of American perceptions of geo-politics in the 1950s and 1960s, formal processes of Historic Preservation were introduced to the TTPI shortly after their implementation in the U.S. itself.

At first, responsibility for this was centred in what is now the CNMI but was then the

headquarters of the TTPI. The first Historic Preservation Office (HPO) in the TTPI was established in Saipan in 1974. It was assigned the daunting task of 'preserving' heritage throughout the region and a small staff was employed. A correspondingly small budget was allocated from the U.S. Historic Preservation Fund, which was itself administered by the U.S. National Park Service (NPS).

Significant political, lingual and cultural differences had long existed between the sub-districts of the politically constructed TTPI. Their re-surfacing in the 1970s eventually resulted in the emergence of several Micronesian political entities: Guam, the CNMI, the FSM, the RMI and the ROP. In a tacit recognition of the variety of cultures involved, the pragmatic decision was made to establish an HPO in each. It was also decided that a National HPO would be established in the FSM together with separate offices at state levels (Pohnpei, Yap, Chuuk and Kosrae). With the assistance and strong encouragement of the NPS, these individual HPOs have developed and are maintaining a strong ethos of working together to achieve their joint and several ends.

Ultimately, for any system of management to be successful, serious attempts at monitoring progress and performance must be included. In evaluating the success of so large, varied and complex a system as that forming the Historic Preservation program in Micronesia, it is imperative that Micronesians themselves have opportunity to assess its performance in their own cultural terms. This is particularly true when it is remembered that much of the program operating in Micronesia was developed from European concepts of historic preservation and was unilaterally imposed on non-European cultures, albeit with the very best of intentions. Does the program satisfy Micronesian desires for protection of those cultural elements they consider valuable? Do they do so while allowing the many cultures of Micronesia to remain truly dynamic? This paper will consider how Micronesians themselves perceive the effectiveness with which several organisations and groups preserve heritage within Micronesia.

EFFECTIVENESS OF KEY PLAYERS

Individuals, groups or associations and organizations can play key roles in ensuring historic preservation is effective and culturally appropriate. In Micronesia the strength of cultural "nurturing" has traditionally been the social reinforcement provided by traditional leaders and local communities (see for example Carucci 1988, 1997; Petersen 1997, Finsker 1997). Since arrival of European colonialism with its associated technologies and different cultural imperatives, this source of cultural 'enforcement' has been weakened by a combination of deliberate policy and accidental influences. Others have now become key players in maintaining cultural continuity, either by default or intention.

To ascertain Micronesian perceptions of the levels of success achieved by key players in historic preservation, a questionnaire was distributed to High School students and adults throughout Micronesia (O'Neill & Spennemann 2004, 2006a, 2007a–b). Among other issues, it asked respondents to rate the performance in preserving tangible and non-tangible heritage in Micronesia of three categories of organizations: local government departments, external authorities and local community groups.

Their responses were measured using a 7-fold Likert scale that ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", and a mean "index of agreement" was calculated for each organisation. The data comprise rankings ascribed by respondents to two questions regarding how effectively selected organisations and groups of individuals contribute to the preservation of traditional Micronesian cultures – tangible and non-tangible.

The data indicate that respondents generally agree that all of the organisations and groups specified in the questions contribute in some way to preservation of culture (Table 1). However, with the exception of HPOs and Museums, those responses appear muted and almost polite. It is clear that the responses for tangible heritage are consistently stronger than are those for non-tangible heritage and the data suggest respondents feel that more effort is expended on tangible heritage than non-tangible.

Table 1 Do these Organisations/Groups Preserve Heritage Effectively?

	Adults			
	Tangible		Non-tangible	
Group/Organisation	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
HPO	1.25	1.21	0.63	1.51
Museums	1.42	1.42	0.72	1.51
Nat Dep Education	0.55	1.59	0.26	1.57
Nat Dep Soc Serv	0.34	1.53	0.10	1.51
Local Communities	0.89	1.48	0.66	1.49
Traditional Leaders	0.84	1.53	0.66	1.54
U.S. NPS	0.65	1.56	0.28	1.50
	High School Students			
	Tangible		Non-tangible	
Group/Organisation	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
HPO	0.99	1.33	0.65	1.40
Museums	1.45	1.51	1.05	1.41
Nat Dep Education	0.87	1.42	0.85	1.28
Nat Dep Soc Serv	0.72	1.43	0.61	1.33
Local Communities	1.25	1.33	0.93	1.31
Traditional Leaders	1.27	1.45	0.82	1.46
U.S. NPS	0.60	1.52	0.56	1.36

Table 2 Are these Organisations/Groups More Effective Today than in the Past?

	Adults			
	Tangible		Non-tangible	
Group/Organisation	Mean	SD	SD	Std Dev
HPO	1.25	1.21	0.63	1.51
Museums	1.42	1.42	0.72	1.51
Nat Dep Education	0.55	1.59	0.26	1.57
Nat Dep Soc Serv	0.34	1.53	0.10	1.51
Local Communities	0.89	1.48	0.66	1.49
Traditional Leaders	0.84	1.53	0.66	1.54
U.S. NPS	0.65	1.56	0.28	1.50
	High School Students			
	Tangible		Non-tangible	
Group/Organisation	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
HPO	0.65	1.33	0.40	1.40
Museums	1.12	1.51	0.80	1.41
Nat Dep Education	0.78	1.42	0.64	1.28
Nat Dep Soc Serv	0.62	1.43	0.58	1.33
Local Communities	0.87	1.33	0.78	1.31
Traditional Leaders	0.95	1.45	0.85	1.46
U.S. NPS	0.51	1.52	0.46	1.36

The low levels of agreement expressed for non-tangible heritage show that respondents do not consider any of these organisations or groups are preserving the culturally important elements of non-tangible heritage effectively.

Both sets of respondents (adults and students) gave muted agreement to the proposition that all of these entities are today preserving culture to an extent. However, as the greatest possible level of agreement with a proposition would achieve a mean of three the level of agreement expressed in regards to several critical groups or organisations is surprisingly low. The results for both adults and high school students may be compared in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Both groups have expressed only slight agreement with the proposition that the NPS has been effective in its efforts to protect local heritage. This result may disappoint some but it should not be thought surprising. As there is little or no physical NPS presence within the region it is very possible that respondents are simply not familiar with the work done by the NPS. It has consistently kept a very low profile, preferring to promote the involvement of local groups and/or organisations rather than itself.

The real surprise in the data lies elsewhere. Adults have expressed unexpectedly low levels of agreement with the propositions that local communities and traditional leaders are effective in preserving traditional culture. Historically, one of the primary functions of traditional leaders and elders has been to promote and safeguard traditional ways of life (Finsker 1997). From their responses to this group of propositions, it is clear that adult respondents do not believe that local communities or traditional leaders are very effectively fulfilling their traditional and shared responsibilities to preserve Micronesian heritage. High school students, on the other hand, have expressed somewhat stronger agreement in regards to these two groups, but when those responses are compared to other responses given by this same group, they also show surprisingly restrained agreement. The data do not explain why respondents express such low levels of agreement with the proposition.

It is interesting that despite generally showing low levels of agreement to the proposition that these eight organisations or groups were effectively preserving heritage, respondents also express an even more muted agreement

that these entities are more effective than they used to be (Table 2). Adults ($IA = 1.25$, $\sigma = 1.21$) show a much greater appreciation of the effectiveness of the HPO in preserving heritage than students ($IA = 0.65$, $\sigma = 1.33$) do.

Responses by adults to this group of performance-based questions are displayed graphically in Figure 1 and those for high school students are shown in Figure 2, both of which show some very consistent patterns. Of the eight organisations or entities included, the data show that museums are regarded as the most successful in their efforts to preserve culture both in terms of what they do today and how that compares with their levels of success in the past. At the other end of the scale, Government departments are regarded as the least successful,
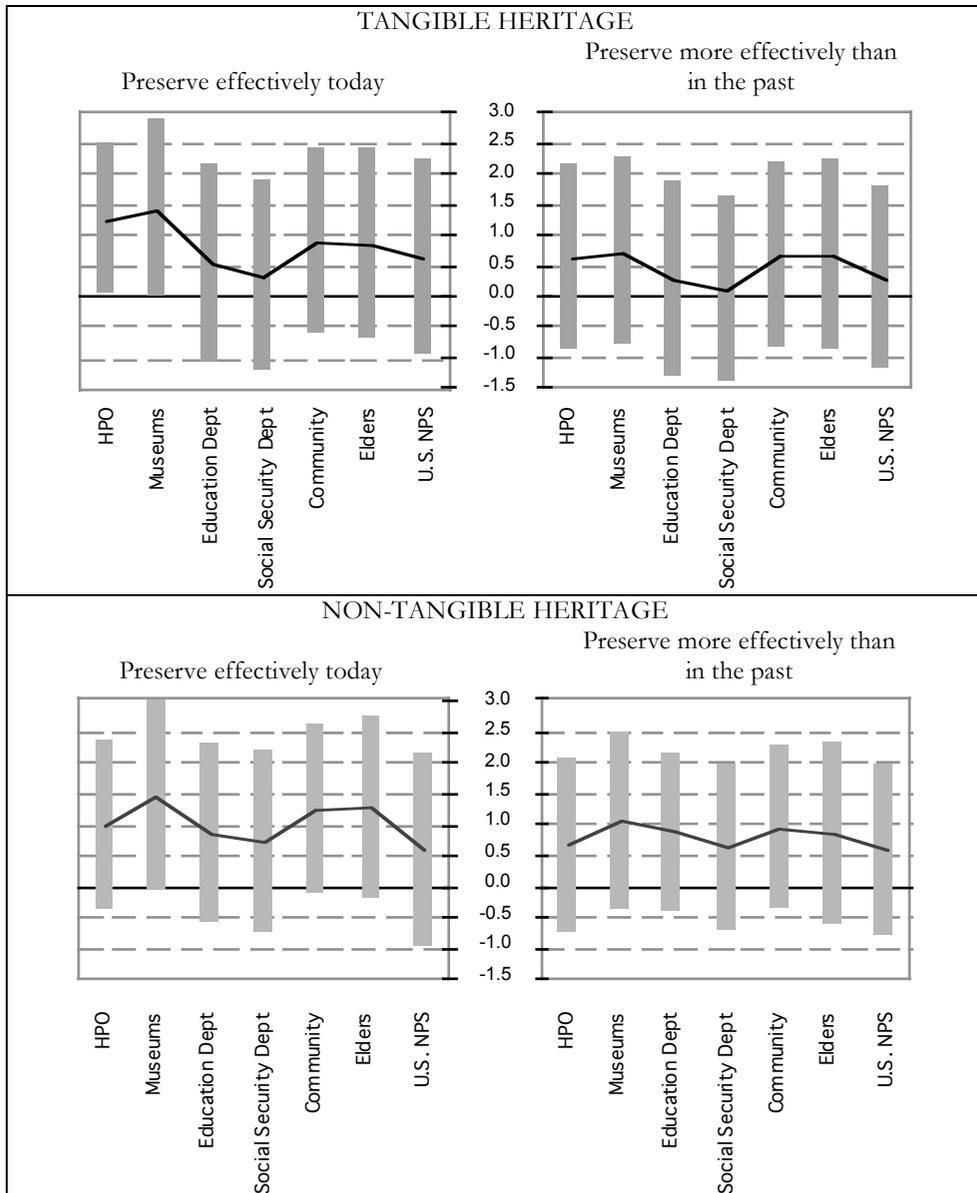

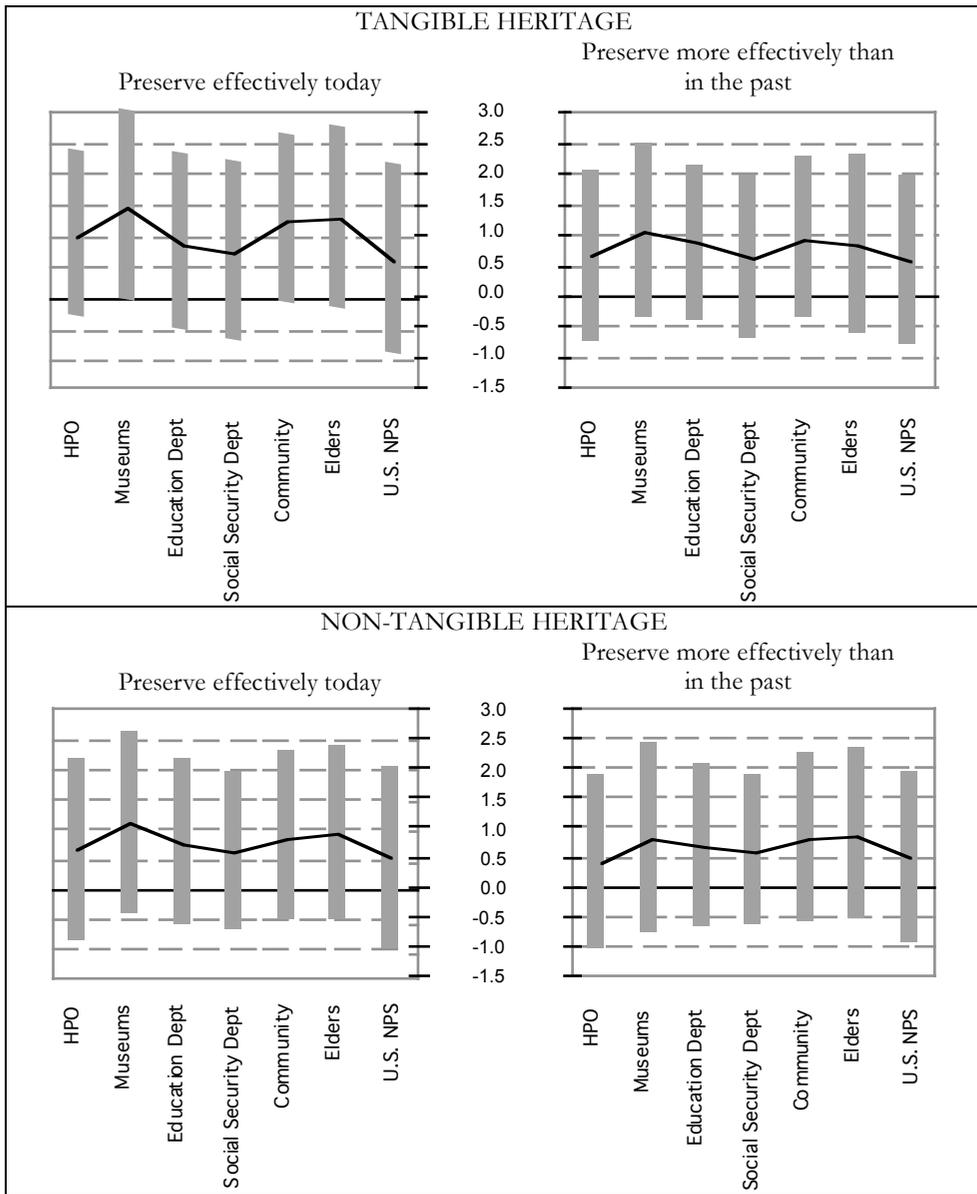
Figure 1 Preserving Cultural Resources (Adults)

Figure 2 Preserving Cultural Resources (HS Students)

Responses to these questions show a strong level of consistency exists throughout the questionnaire regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, and origin. They suggest that Micronesian communities share a strong sense of dissatisfaction with current historic preservation practices. When combined with other data discussed elsewhere (O'Neill & Spennemann 2004, 2006a; 2007a–b), it is clear that respond-

ents believe that several key players in heritage protection are not as effective as they would like them to be. As a result of this perceived lack of effectiveness, several heritage elements considered to be important and which respondents value greatly are losing relevance in societies that are being reconstructed in an environment strongly influenced by external cul-

tures over which they have little control. For example:

1. Neither HPOs nor the U.S. NPS are seen to be effective in fulfilling their core responsibility of historic preservation. The data do not clearly show why this is believed to be the case. Perhaps public communication of the various important and successful preservation activities these organisations have undertaken is not as effective as it could be. It may be that insufficient direct involvement of the public in these activities has occurred. Whichever the case, Micronesians clearly feel a strong sense of ownership of their cultures and heritage. They also feel that their cultures are undergoing changes in ways and areas that do not please them but which appear to be beyond their power to control.

2. Apparent in the data is a level of dissatisfaction with the performance of these organisations/entities that is particularly strong in regards to non-tangible heritage, which respondents clearly feel is not being appropriately protected, preserved, or promoted.

3. The level of dissatisfaction with the performance of governments and their departments appears to be particularly strong. The data indicates respondents consider them to be failing in their support of local traditional cultures.

4. Neither local communities nor traditional leaders are generally regarded as being successful in this area either, in spite of their traditional responsibilities to actively teach, preserve and promote traditional culture.

OUTLOOK

Where then does historic preservation go in this new era? That Micronesians are becoming more vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction with some current practices and their perceived failure to protect those elements of their cultures they most value is clear. That they are beginning to seek greater power to decide what aspects of their heritages are to be preserved and how available funds are to be used is also clear. What at this stage is not clear is how donor organisations (principally the U.S. government) are going to respond to these emerging desires.

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