

Article

# Assessing the Social Values of Built Heritage: Participatory Methods as Ways of Knowing

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the role participatory methods play in understanding the social values of built heritage, including people's sense of identity, belonging, and place. It is based on research in Scotland where, as in many other countries, there is an increasing emphasis on contemporary significance and public participation within domestic heritage management frameworks. The paper draws on the experiences and findings of a social values assessment for Cables Wynd House, a Brutalist block of flats in Edinburgh that was listed in 2017. Through the case study assessment, conducted over six months in 2019, Cables Wynd House is manifested as a multiplicity of connected realities, diverse experiences, and micro-locations. The participatory methods reveal interactions and tensions between the architectural design and aesthetics of the building and participants' lived experiences and connections. The article argues that the mix of participatory methods provide different opportunities and ways of knowing, surfacing diversity, dissonance, and complexity. It highlights that participatory research is a collaborative process, requiring a flexible and responsive approach to methods. The paper concludes that participatory methods and collaborative approaches can provide nuanced and contextualised understandings of the social value of built heritage, which can complement but also diverge significantly from professional assessments of value. Wider adoption of these methods and the resulting understandings into the management and conservation of built heritage would support more people-centred, inclusive, and socially relevant forms of practice.

**Keywords:** social value; built heritage; participatory methods; listed buildings; social housing; heritage management; Scotland



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## 1. Introduction

Value is a central concept in discussions of heritage and conservation practice. From international conventions to local conservation policies, complex, contextual and, at times, contested values are at play. The values being privileged may be explicit or they may be hidden within 'objective' or professional evaluations of significance. The importance of social values, "the significance of the historic environment to contemporary communities, including people's sense of identity, belonging, and place" [1] (p. 21) is increasingly recognised. However, there are tensions between conserving and preserving while changing as little as possible, the principles that have traditionally guided heritage and conservation practice [2] (p. 1), and maintaining a place's significance to communities in the present. These challenges have meant that "*in practice* historic and aesthetic values tend to override others, such as social value, in heritage significance assessment" [3] (p. 6, italics original).

A focus on significance assessment as the first step in heritage management has become accepted practice in national and international conventions [4] (p. 9). The Burra Charter [5], issued by ICOMOS Australia in 1979, has been widely credited as a key development in shaping these practices [6]. The initial Charter attempted to bridge the divide between tangible and intangible heritage with a range of (theoretically equal) types of value considered as part of establishing significance [1] (p. 23). It states, "Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations" [5] (Article 1). As Lesh explains [7], the inclusion of social value in this definition owes a lot to

the specific history of conservation in Australia and what is meant by the term has varied in practice over time. Subsequent revisions of the Charter have given greater prominence to the social values of contemporary communities as an important part of cultural heritage [8,9], seeking to clarify what has been an evolving concept and reflecting the influential people-centred processes adopted by Australian heritage practitioners since the 1990s [7] (pp. 55–56). Although initially emerging in a national heritage context, these ideas have been developed through international heritage instruments such as the 2005 Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society [10] and have been widely adopted in other national contexts. For example, the influence of the Burra Charter can be seen in English Heritage's Conservation Principles [11] and it is expressly cited in the definition of cultural significance given in Historic Environment Scotland's national policy [12]. This growing emphasis on social values has raised the prospect, at least in theory, of broader and more inclusive conservation frameworks and practices.

Discourses on the value of heritage have ancient roots and, in a Western European philosophical tradition, are often based on well-established ideological positions that characterise the purpose and power of the arts more broadly as: innately beneficial; making a positive contribution; or having a negative impact [13]. The perceived dichotomy between the intrinsic and instrumental effects of heritage (mirroring the first and second of these positions) arguably obscures a more nuanced discussion on the complex interplay between co-existing values. The nature and role of values in heritage policy and practice have been interrogated by a growing body of critical heritage scholarship. Emerging alongside the international and national developments in heritage policy described above, critical heritage studies have foregrounded the contextual, relational nature of heritage [14,15], questioning how heritage is identified, legitimised, and mobilised [16–18]. The idea that values are inherent in the fabric of a building or other material, a principle that characterises many conservation instruments (including the Burra Charter), has been critiqued by critical heritage studies scholars, who highlight that heritage is embedded in, and a product of, social and political processes [19–21]. These debates have led to a more nuanced response to the 'things' of heritage that integrates different aspects of significance [15,22,23]. Scholars of critical heritage studies have also explored how meaning and values are formed and expressed, emphasising that values are fluid and dynamic expressions of continuous processes of valuing [14] (pp. 45–46), [18] (p. 167), not definitive or singular but plural and liable to change or evolve in response to the wider context and the practical "performances" [19] (p. 3) associated with their (re)generation. Heritage professionals and conservation practices are identified as active participants within these on-going processes of negotiation and interaction [1,18,24]. These new perspectives on value and the processes of valuing have been raised alongside more practical questions, such as what a "values-based approach to culture resource management" might look like [25] (p. 89) and what "the validation of multiple conceptions of value" might mean for conservation practices that are rooted in "processes which involve the fixing of meaning and value" [26] (p. 1).

Values not only determine what is prioritised or conserved as heritage and how, but also who gets to participate in those processes. In common with many other countries, community participation and social values are increasingly prominent in the heritage policies of the UK nations (the built environment being a devolved area of public policy), but the implications have been slower to filter through into day-to-day practice. Despite some progress in recent years, heritage is principally "a field in which specialist practitioners and decision-makers consult with local people and (sometimes) facilitate their involvement" [27] (p. 3), [4,6,28]. There are exceptions but, in many situations, communities are talked to, rather than listened to, about the significance of places that they are familiar with and value [29] (p. 141). Scholarship from critical heritage studies has highlighted the contradiction between policies of increased community participation and the established reliance in practice on expert judgements and professional authority [3] (p. 67), [30] (p. 51), [19,31,32], critiquing heritage and conservation practice as reproducing dominant power and knowledge hierarchies, what Smith terms the "authorised heritage dis-

course" [19]. However, there has also been recognition that responding to value as multiple, dynamic, and contextual presents practical and theoretical challenges for practitioners working within institutions and systems that are based on established principles for conservation practice [1,26]. A key problem that has been identified within both critical heritage studies and international heritage management debates is the absence of appropriate methods for the assessment of social value in 'real world' contexts [3] (p. 67), [4] (p. 28), [14], [24] (p. 69), [33], [34] (pp. 145–146, Points 1, 2 and 4).

Without appropriate means for practitioners to understand and evidence the social values of the historic environment they remain invisible in official assessments of significance. Avrami et al. note that, "[i]n order for conservation planning processes to center on, and take into deeper consideration, the multitude of social values, we need to develop better tools and methods for the assessment of cultural significance" [24] (p. 69). With the notable exceptions of the edited volumes from Sørensen and Carman [35] and, more recently, Madgin and Lesh [36], methods have received relatively little attention to date from within critical heritage studies. Nonetheless, alternative, qualitative methods have gradually emerged, especially from countries with significant indigenous populations, such as Australia [1] (p. 28), [3] (p. 5), [33,37], [38] (p. 571). Academics have successfully applied collaborative approaches that centre community knowledge in a variety of heritage studies contexts [39–43]. These studies have established the strengths of using participatory methods in research with contemporary communities and have identified them as "fruitful avenues" for exploring social values [4] (p. 34), but they have not explored how these different methods enact and (re)produce different knowledges.

This paper addresses the current gap in the academic literature on the 'work' that methods do in values assessments and how they operate in context. In keeping with critical heritage studies scholarship, in this study values are understood as dynamic and plural, contextualised expressions of on-going social processes of valuing. The study draws on the experiences and findings of a social values assessment for Cables Wynd House, a 1960s Brutalist block of flats in Edinburgh, Scotland, which is still occupied and in use according to its original design. Cables Wynd House was selected as a case study within my doctoral research [44] because the assessment was expected to provide critical insights on the implementation of rapid, participatory methods in complex social and environmental contexts. In addition, Cables Wynd House was listed as a nationally significant building in 2017. In Scotland, buildings are listed based on an assessment of their "special architectural or historic interest" [45], a continuation of earlier policies that reflect the parameters of the relevant legislation [46]. Having been through a formal listing process relatively recently, the case study offered the scope to explore whether that process, or the building's listed status, has contributed to the social values and the extent to which the conservation priorities identified in the listing are congruent with the values expressed by residents and other communities.

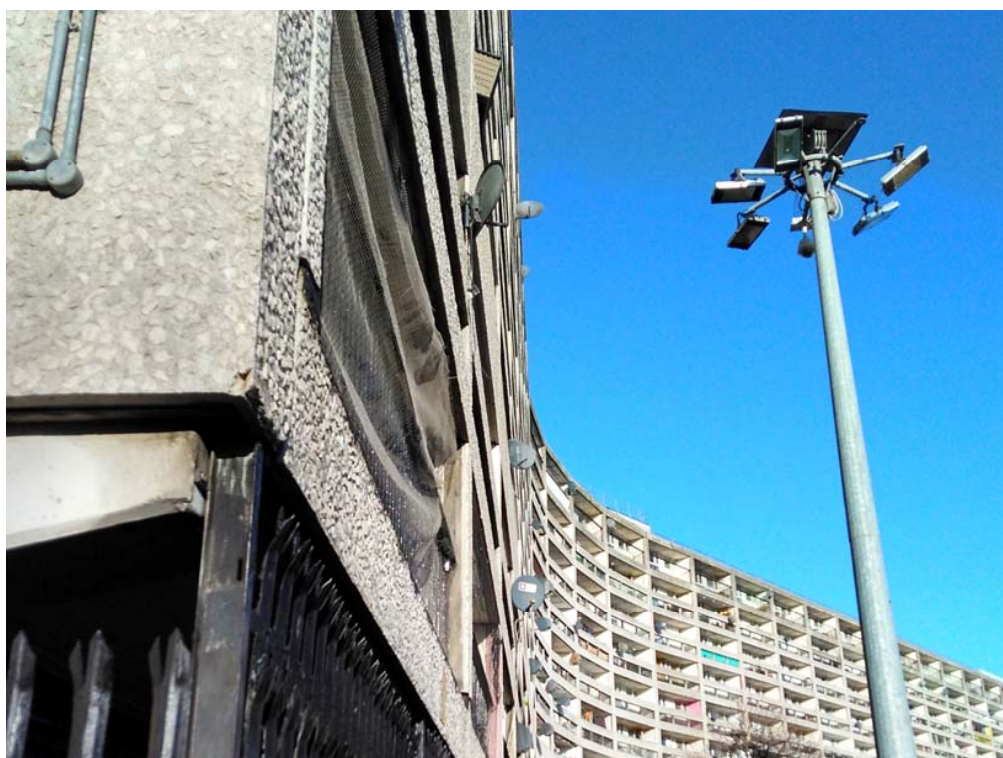
Through the Cables Wynd House material, I explore how a range of rapid, participatory methods provide different opportunities and ways of knowing. Looking at the assessment findings, I show that participatory methods and collaborative approaches can provide nuanced and contextualised understandings of the social value of built heritage, surfacing diversity, dissonance, and complexity. The variety of communities and values identified and the ways in which people experience Cables Wynd House, as a place and as a focus for heritage conservation, also highlight how social values can diverge significantly from professional assessments of value. By looking at the methods comparatively, and how they operate in combination, I demonstrate that method choices are not merely neutral, technical decisions; they (re)produce different types of knowledge and actively shape the resulting understandings of value. This is an important insight, of significance for academic research on heritage values and for conservation and heritage practice.

In the following sections, I first introduce the Cables Wynd House case study and the methods that were adopted in the social value assessment. This is followed by a description of the results of the assessment. I then comparatively discuss the understandings achieved

through the different methods applied in the study and how the assessment approach was adapted to the specific context, demonstrating the flexible and responsive approach to methods that this type of research requires. The paper concludes with some reflections on the practicalities of applying multi-method participatory approaches to understand the complex and dynamic social values of built heritage, arguing that wider adoption of these approaches, and incorporation of the resulting knowledge within conservation and heritage management, has the potential to generate more inclusive and socially relevant forms of practice.

## 2. Case Study Site and Methods

Cables Wynd House, also known as the Banana Flats on account of its distinctive bend (Figure 1), is located in the Kirkgate area of Leith, Edinburgh. It is embedded in a complex and dynamic urban context, both socially and environmentally. Leith is a part of Edinburgh that has been shaped historically by the presence of the docks, port, and industrial manufacturing. Today Leith is a culturally diverse area of housing and light industry, with good transport links to the centre of Edinburgh. According to the 2011 census, significant percentages of the population were born outside the UK (19.6%) and self-identify with ethnicities other than the majority White Scottish or British, including Polish (11.4%) and Asian, Asian Scottish, or Asian British (5.3%) [47] (Output Area S00107051). Leith also encompasses some of Scotland's most deprived areas when it comes to indicators for income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime, and housing. The Scottish Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation indicates that the data zone including Cables Wynd House is within the 5% most deprived data zones in Scotland [48] (Data Zone S01008788).



**Figure 1.** Exterior of Cables Wynd House—East-facing/private balcony side (photo by the author).

The Kirkgate development that includes Cables Wynd House was one of several large public housing developments that were constructed in Leith between 1963 and 1965 [49] (p. 367) following slum clearance programmes. The House contains 212 flats, laid out over ten stories, accessed via communal landings and with private balconies to the rear.



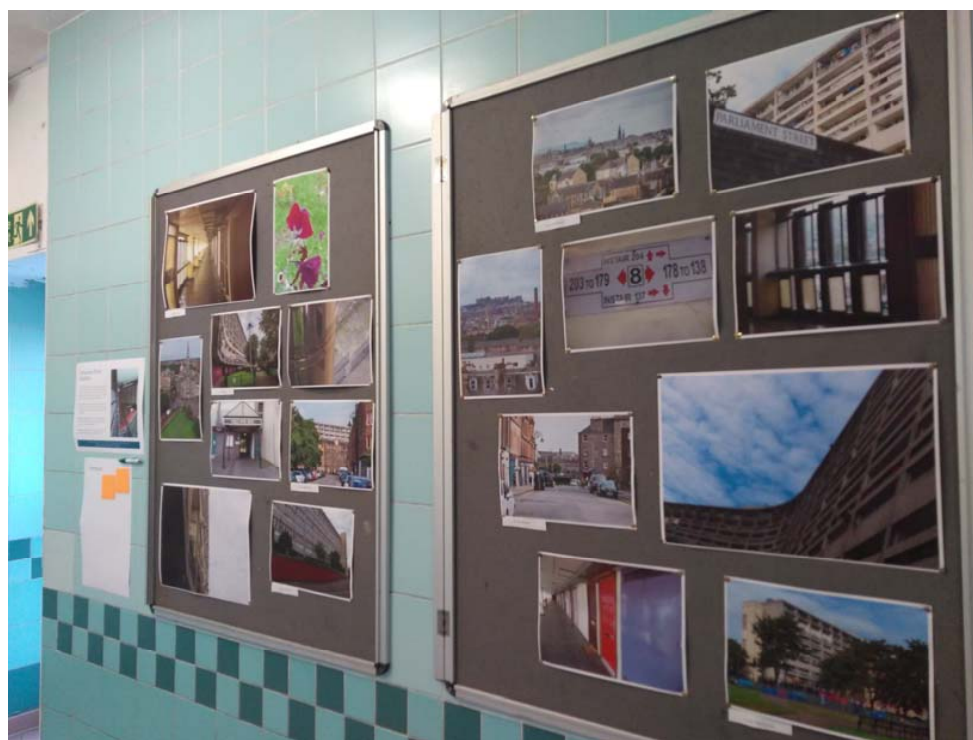
It is owned and managed by Edinburgh City Council, the residents being mainly Council tenants with a small number of owner-occupied flats. In January 2017, following a period of public consultation, Cables Wynd House was added to the national list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest at category A: outstanding [50]. The Statement of Special Interest cited reasons related to the design, which is in the New Brutalism style and reflects the then “emerging theoretical interest in community planning, using external access decks as a way of recreating the civic spirit of traditional tenement streets” [50] (p. 9). As well as its architectural interest, the Statement of Special Interest notes that the building and its location have frequently been used as subjects for photography and filming, and feature in Irvine Welsh’s novel, *Trainspotting* [50] (p. 8).

The social values assessment for Cables Wynd House discussed in this paper was conducted principally over a period of six months (March–September 2019) and adopted a rapid, participatory approach, applying a mixture of qualitative methods that are principally drawn from ethnographic practice. The study began with observational techniques, including behaviour mapping, drawing a rough plan of the location, and recording what was observed, the behaviours that were displayed at different places, and how people moved around the site [37] (p. 90). Observation was also conducted during subsequent on-site activities, which were carried out during repeated daily visits (13 in total). Many ethnographers emphasise the importance of shared practice in producing understanding [51], but Davies argues that the “nature, circumstances and quality of the observation” is also key [52] (p. 83). Such attentive observation not only sensitises the researcher to the social and environmental context, but can also help in identifying areas for further enquiry through other methods and suggest future research directions [53] (p. 47). In this case, the in-person and on-site activities were supported by online observation of public participatory media (Instagram and Facebook) posts related to Cables Wynd House and a review of the documentation and publicity surrounding the listing process in January 2017.

The study applied a combination of participatory and co-creative research activities. The approach taken was to engage with local authorities and community groups as an initial point of contact and to reach out to local residents and tenants through them. Semi-structured interviews (seven in total) were conducted early in the research period with heritage practitioners, Council officials, and representatives of local organisations (four respondents) and then later in the research period with tenants (three respondents). All semi-structured interviews were conducted one-to-one and in-person, and one incorporated a walk through the area surrounding the House. The semi-structured format was chosen to allow for a relatively free-flowing discussion and mutually engaged exchange from which a depth of understanding can be achieved [52] (pp. 113–115). Given the large number of people living at Cables Wynd House, a structured interview technique was also proposed. Following the approach described by Taplin et al. [37] (pp. 87–88), a short, six question interview format was developed, to be conducted quickly, either face-to-face or by self-completion. The emphasis was on open-ended questions, to provide scope for qualitative responses. A folded A4 leaflet containing basic project information and the six questions was distributed to all the flats in the House (two responses received). The same questions were used subsequently for face-to-face interviews with people passing through the public areas of the House and gardens and on the street to the front of the building (eight respondents). Participants in face-to-face interviews were a mixture of tenants, local residents, and visitors.

As well as the individual participatory interview methods, group activities were proposed to explore how the interactions and negotiations between individuals shaped the values being expressed. Although there has been an active residents’ association for Cables Wynd House in the recent past, there was not one in place at the time of this study. However, there are several organisations in the immediate area providing community spaces and services, which offered alternative opportunities to connect with existing activities and social groups. Following enquiries at a local community centre, it was possible to trial a photo-elicitation activity [54] (p. 452), working with a group of older people living in the

area. This activity took place over three consecutive weeks, each of the sessions lasting one to two hours. The first week was a group meeting at the community centre to introduce the research and agree together how we would arrange the activity. All group members were invited to participate, and five self-selecting volunteers (four female, one male) were willing and able to do so. Some of the participants were more familiar with Cables Wynd House than others, but none were present or former tenants. The following week, the participants met to take photographs (using their own cameras) and I accompanied them. Participants were asked to focus on things that they felt were significant about the building or the wider area. We visited the communal areas of Cables Wynd House as a group and then split up to explore the surrounding area individually or in pairs before reconvening. The third week, the group met at the community centre to share and discuss the images the participants had taken. Each participant selected around 10 of their photographs to share and speak about. Afterwards, with the agreement of the group members, a number of the photos were selected and printed as A3 or A4 colour images and displayed on two of the wall mounted noticeboards in the main entrance vestibule of Cables Wynd House (Figure 2). The photo exhibit was left up for five days with a comments sheet (unfortunately, this was removed during the week) and I spent a couple of hours on site on the first and last day to take comments in-person (20 responses, 18 from tenants and 2 from visitors).



**Figure 2.** Photo exhibit in the vestibule of Cables Wynd House (photo by the author).

### **3. Different Communities and Multiple Values**

Cables Wynd House (hereafter ‘the House’) is a place of residence, employment, and (through being home to so many people) a social hub. Council staff advised that the flats are normally almost all occupied, although there has been an increased frequency in turnover (potentially related to changes in policy for managing housing stock). The research identified a number of communities of interest, identity, and location, for whom the House is of significance. These included: current and past tenants; their friends and relations; people “born and bred” in Leith and/or identifying as “Leithers”; and younger people, including those making use of the park and basketball court situated to the rear of the building. There are some communities for whom the House is principally of significance for reasons closely aligned to the listing criteria (i.e., those with a professional or personal

interest in architecture and design or the literary/film connections). This was reflected in comments from some respondents and images and comments posted online. Design and aesthetic factors were also mentioned by some participants as supporting other social values, as is reflected in the discussion below.

First and foremost, the House is experienced as a home and, for the most part, a place of safety and belonging. Since it was constructed in the 1960s, it has been a place of residence for many hundreds of people. Some tenants move into the House after being in temporary accommodation or homeless. One man who responded to the questionnaire indicated that his strongest memories were of his first night staying in the House: "Having been homeless for some time it was a great relief despite having no furniture at all" (Respondent 3.22). Although there may be a tendency to think of a 20th-century concrete building as modern and relatively recent, there has been more than enough time for three generations to have grown up living in or around the House. During the study, various multi-generational or family connections were mentioned. For long term residents, there were memories of their own childhoods and bringing up their children in the House. There were inter-generational connections involving non-residents, as in the case of one young woman, who said, "My aunt's lived here over 20 years, [I've] visited regularly all my life" (Respondent 3.28). There were also instances of multiple generations living separately in the House; for example, one resident of 20 years indicated that, "My daughter stays here too" (Respondent 3.30). One resident viewing the photo exhibit said, "Nan grew up here, me, my mother-in-law, a lot of history" (Respondent 3.49). In other contexts, three generations of association might be expected to lead to memories, attachment, and value, but this multi-generational connection seems to have passed largely unremarked upon in the social housing literature, perhaps because of the individual nature of tenancies. However, in this case, family history was important in how the House was viewed and valued.

In addition to the building operating in its primary function as housing, it is also a hub for, and generative of, numerous social networks, relationships, and interactions between tenants, local residents, staff, and visitors. These relationships and the sense of community are central to how the House is valued and, for those with an active social network, support feelings of safety and belonging. However, as participants reflected, these values and experiences varied between people and over time. One interviewee indicated that "everyone knows everyone", but reflected later that, "people in here find it quite lonely" (Respondent 3.7). Others felt the "community spirit" had declined since their early years in the House, as their children grew up and tenants changed, with a sense that today people are "not encouraged to try and meet and talk" (Respondent 3.5). This suggests that being connected to "everyone" is limited to within particular social groupings or contexts. It was also apparent that the physical space itself shapes these social interactions. Participants spoke about talking to people on or from balconies, but also mentioned the absence of social opportunities or physical spaces for interaction. Visitors also commented on the fact they did not see many people in the communal areas when they were in the House: "Actually, when we were in [the flats], was sort of like a ghost town" (Respondent 3.10).

As the above suggests, the feelings expressed towards the House were complex and mixed, at times strongly expressed and at other times more equivocal. The day-to-day experiences of living in the House prompted nostalgic memories of time spent with family members alongside frustration, anger, or resignation over the management of the property and realities of living in close proximity to other people. Participants mentioned disruptive works in the kitchens, mice getting into the flats, broken heating, and noise from neighbours or the basketball court. A few people had experienced violence or disturbances that had left them feeling unsafe in the House. As in any (particularly high density) residential area, it is the behaviours of their immediate neighbours that impact most directly on residents. Tenants tended to characterise the House according to their landing; for example, "never had it [drug dealing] on my section of the landing—quietest bit" (Respondent 3.5). Such comments demonstrate a hyper-local understanding of the House and how people

identified with places through individual relationships and shared behaviours. Similar spatial differentiation within what might otherwise be seen as a unitary area of housing is described by Pendlebury et al. in their study of the Byker housing development in Newcastle [55] (p. 188).

This hyper-local reading of the House itself sits alongside attachments and identities expressed in terms of the wider area. The communal landings in the House provide a wide view of the local surroundings and almost all of the photo-group images prompted discussions on points of reference within the wider landscape and how it had changed, such as: “there used to be the big store there and there was shops and then the wee [small] park” (Respondent 3.10). Participants were often explicit about being from or wanting to live in Leith, with comments such as: “Lived in New Town [another area of Edinburgh] ten years and here five years. Wish I had spent that time in Leith” (Respondent 3.6); “Born and bred in Leith. . . wouldn’t want to be anywhere else” (Respondent 3.27). These expressions of identity, belonging, and attachment contrast with feelings of aversion and examples of participants distancing themselves from the area or the House due to what one participant referred to as “the Trainspotting stereotype” (Respondent 3.29), a reference to the drug addiction and economic depression described in Irvine Welsh’s book and the film of the same name. Sometimes these contrasting feelings were expressed by the same respondents at different times, depending on the specific experiences, places, or identities being foregrounded in the discussion. For example: “I was here a lot while young [. . .] hasn’t changed a lot, still a nice place to be”; and then later, “People [are] stuck here forever, never going to get out. People came here with young children, want to get out and have a garden. Kids can’t get out and play, disabled kids, can’t keep an eye on them when up high. [I] have a young baby now and eventually will get out” (Respondent 3.7).

The degree to which the House is perceived to be receiving care, whether from the Council or the tenants, affects how it is valued. While comments were principally concerned with the physical appearance of the House, they reveal feelings that go beyond the present physicality to reflect lived experiences and social relations, past and present. For example, the issue of cleanliness was referred to when discussing the decline in “community spirit”: “Tenants used to clean the building, wash the landing every day for a week and then passed on to the fifth flat and on like that, and clean the stairs between the landings once a month” (Respondent 3.5). Although experienced in the context of a specific building or neighbourhood, studies have shown that changes in social cohesion and neighbourly reciprocity of the sort described are society-wide issues [56,57]. The links being made between cleanliness and behaviour suggest that “clean” and “cared for” are experienced and understood not only as material matters but as “analogies for expressing a general view of the social order” [58] (p. 4). Perceptions of the building are therefore influenced in part by how respondents are positioned with regard to the social structures and behaviours that they associate with the House.

There was a high level of awareness among people contacted as part of the study that the House had been listed (90% of structured interview participants indicated they were aware of the process), with responses ranging from interest to incredulity. While most indicated that the formal status had not changed their feelings towards the site, building on the point above, some people expressed a disconnect between the interest taken in the building and the attention paid to residents’ interests and priorities: “The Queen has a listed building, but does she have problems with heating like us?” (Respondent 3.7). Some respondents also associated the listing with a perceived lack of maintenance: “Since the new status it has gone downhill drastically. Council are hanging back [on repairs]” (Respondent 3.5). However, for some tenants, the design features supported their attachment to the House: “From the outside the first impression is not so good but when [you] go inside and see the design of the flats, if into design, then you change your mind” (Respondent 3.6). This same respondent referred to the building as “iconic” and said, “[I] feel privileged, fortunate to be in it”, while several people responding to the photo exhibit described the House as “unique”. Against the backdrop of a proposed listing, Pendlebury



et al. [55] explore how the neighbourhood of Byker in Newcastle is valued by residents and professionals (what makes it “unique and special”) and the potential impact of the listing. They conclude, as seen here, that the listing itself was not an especially important issue, barring concerns about future improvements to the building or marginal benefits (p. 197).

Communities are collective and therefore relational. While a simplified community identity may be presented externally, membership is more accurately a complex and evolving negotiation [59] (p. 21–22), [60] (p. 132). The contextualised nature of community membership and identity was apparent in this case, with the residents of Cables Wynd House manifesting as a heterogeneous group and the House as multiple micro-locations. Experiences were highly differentiated between groups and individuals, impacting on how people valued the House and felt connected to specific places. The lack of a functioning residents’ association is also suggestive of a degree of fragmentation within the wider tenant community. Participant responses indicated an awareness of this diversity and dissonance, but the degree to which they aligned themselves with groups, values, and behaviours depended on contextualised identities and experiences. As an attribute, “community spirit” depended largely on personal experiences and networks of active relationships. Some people felt there was a greater sense of community in the past, for others it was a positive aspect of their current experience or thought to be improving; yet it was evident from other comments that in practice some people and groups may be isolated or excluded. This isolation could be physical or embedded within concepts of community and place. For example, values of community belonging that emphasise being “born and bred” locally could operate to exclude other communities and experiences in an area known to have experienced significant in-migration.

Exploring the range of experiences and views of the physical, social, and emotional environment of Cables Wynd House, including seemingly incompatible or opposing values and practices, was important in revealing how values and understandings of place were operating within the particular context. Although the House has a much smaller body of residents than the Byker housing development, the observations of differentiated, complex, and contradictory values in this case mirror the findings of Pendlebury et al. in their study [55]. Also taking Byker as one of his cases, Malpass [61] expands on some of the challenges inherent in taking occupied “council housing” and valuing it according to formal listing criteria. One of the critiques he identifies is that, “listing tends to place heavy emphasis on the building itself, as an object of importance in itself, abstracted from the context in which it was created and separated from the people who use and interact with it” (p. 205). As was found in this case, improvements to the physical environment (whether for conservation purposes or to upgrade living conditions) may not be experienced as care and attention if lived experiences more broadly are of social disruption and disregard. It follows that preserving the social values of home and belonging (and the “civic spirit”, identified in the listing document for Cables Wynd House as one of the design ambitions of the building) depends on more than maintaining the structure. It requires an understanding of and support to the social processes associated with the building and the communities that call it home [61].

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. *Methods as Ways of Knowing*

The various methods used in the Cables Wynd House assessment engaged different groups and enacted different sorts of knowledge, resulting in multiple and diverse understandings of the House. Observation (on site) and behaviour mapping helped to build an understanding of the spatial context. The mapping was not limited to the public areas of the House but extended to include the surrounding area, the locations of local services, where people gather, and the routes taken between areas. This revealed how people actively engage with and construct the landscape through practices that do not necessarily follow planned uses of the space [62]. Not all practices or interactions can be readily observed, either because of what they are (such as unsanctioned practices) or when and how they

take place (for example, gatherings in people's homes). As one woman's response to the photo exhibit indicated, time of day and weather can also impact on behaviours: "[The photo exhibit has] not captured the true meaning of the flats. I've been here two years, Friday or Saturday night or a sunny day and that park will be full of people drinking, I can hear and see them from my balcony" (Respondent 3.44). Differences between observation and the understandings gained by other methods can also suggest areas for further investigation [53] (p. 47). For example, during visits to the House, I regularly observed people working on the volunteer gardening project and cleaning or maintaining communal areas, but interview responses reflected a perceived lack of care and attention to the House, an area of dissonance that was brought into particular focus through the responses to the photo exhibit. Similarly, in-person observations can evidence activities or communities that may be absent from the discussions or choose not to engage in the research activities.

Structured and semi-structured interview methods were critical to making sense of the House and exploring or understanding observed activities. After securing permission to access the communal areas of the House, discussions with City Council and Historic Environment Scotland staff familiar with the management arrangements and listing process provided useful contextual background for the study. The subsequent interviews with tenants and local residents highlighted the detailed and distinct knowledge held within communities. Although interviews were based around prepared questions, during the discussion respondents frequently developed new ideas or suggested new avenues for enquiry. On occasion, respondents shared experiences and memories that related to past or concurrent identities at different times in the interview. This resulted in seemingly contradictory statements, which were not resolved or clarified relative to one another (each being consistent with that part of their story), but which emphasised the dynamic multiplicity of values associated with the House. By drawing on the material from multiple interviews, it was possible to gain an understanding of the range of experiences encompassed within or across communities.

The self-completion rates for the questionnaire posted to the flats were very low, with less than 1% of leaflets returned. However, the two responses received each reflected very different experiences of residency; one highlighting feelings of safety after being homeless for some time, the other recalling disturbances and "being woken at 4am by a junkie looking for a fix" (Respondent 3.21). Edinburgh City Council's current strategy is to prioritise homeless tenants for housing in Cables Wynd House, but the questionnaire response was the only time that someone self-identified as formerly homeless or specifically mentioned that past experience. This suggests that the opportunity to respond anonymously provided a safe space to share this memory. As was anticipated, the in-person approaches for structured interviews had a much higher response rate [63]. The experience of being on site and speaking to people directly also contributed to my understanding of who was present, how they were using the space, and why. Negative responses to in-person requests for participation were themselves revealing, identifying absences and potential challenges to engaging people in other research activities. Information from semi-structured interviews with staff from the City Council suggested a relatively small number of tenants were non-English speaking. However, my inability to engage with non-English speakers was a limiting factor in over 10% of the structured interview requests made in-person. This resulted in some recognised gaps in participation, which were highlighted in the assessment report. Acknowledging the inevitably partial nature of the assessment findings was important, as focusing only on what is known risks reinforcing existing gaps and silences. Identifying at least some of the realities that are excluded also underlines the open-ended and contingent nature of values assessment, an appreciation for which could be critical when considering the findings as part of future management actions.

The photo-elicitation activity engaged participants with the multi-sensorial aspects of being in place and moving through the area [64] as they captured images that conveyed aspects of the House or surrounding area that were of significance to them. The group members' engagement resulted in a selection of 54 images that were then reviewed together.

The existing familiarity between group members and our shared experiences of visiting the House resulted in a free-flowing discussion, during which people made observations about the location, how places had changed, and personal or family connections to the area. Participants who had initially indicated that they had only passing familiarity with the House shared detailed knowledge of the area and, in some cases, of the House as well. Respondents not only spoke about what was in the pictures, but also things that were not visible, past experiences, and absences. The exchanges between group members demonstrated how interaction and negotiation between individuals shapes the values being expressed and were also revealing of different values or associations. Two similar images of a communal corridor were described as showing variously:

- “the pride they [the tenants] took in their area, bright coloured doors, no rubbish to go out” (Respondent 3.11).
- “the sameness and the similarity [of matching doors down the corridor]” (Respondent 3.9).

Viewing one another’s photos began to “break the frame” [65] (pp. 20–21) of taken for granted views, opening up more reflective discussion. For example, this exchange in response to a photo of the communal balcony with the sunlight coming in through the windows onto a shiny floor (Figure 3):



**Figure 3.** Cables Wynd House communal landing (photo by Respondent 3.8, reproduced with permission).

Respondent 3.9: Huh, that makes it look. . . quite attractive.

Respondent 3.10: It does!

[laughter]

Respondent 3.8: You can see how clean it is.

Respondent 3.12: Mmhmm.

Respondent 3.10: As I say, it's a few years since I was there, but then it was all graffiti and horrible.

Respondent 3.12: That's remarkable actually, the whole building, there was not one bit of graffiti that I could see, in the whole building.

The subsequent photo exhibit in the communal vestibule of the House further enhanced the depth and range of engagement, revealing important areas of dissonance. As in discussions with the group members, people were observed identifying places they knew and there was some evidence of people having physically touched or drawn on the images (though this did not happen while I was present), illustrating how a physical artifact or image can be used to prompt interaction and reflection. During the group discussion, the photographer was able to explain the intention behind their image and the experience connected to it, constructing a narrative beyond what the picture showed [66]. When the images were displayed in the photo exhibit, they were left completely open to interpretation and were used by respondents to "produce and represent their knowledge, self-identities, experiences and emotions" [67] (p. 82). Responses to how the building was shown in the images, and perhaps also the range of pictures taken and selected for the exhibit (by non-tenants), identified a disconnect between how the House looked compared to how it was experienced. For example, several people responded with comments such as: "[It] looks a lot different to how it looks when you're in it [...] looks very clean" (Respondent 3.43). These comments resonated with interview responses, in which people had focused on cleanliness not only as a physical or practical concern but as an expression of "community spirit" in the House.

Combining multiple methods not only supports a greater depth of understanding but can also inform the emergent research process. The combination of structured and semi-structured interviews served to identify common touchpoints and supported the interpretation of observations or other activities. The understandings and knowledges each provided usefully complemented one another; the structured interviews suggested potential areas for discussion in the more detailed and in-depth semi-structured interviews, as well as an indication of how widespread the specific experiences and associations mentioned by the semi-structured interview respondents were. Although the response rate to the self-completion questionnaire was low, a couple of people did bring the leaflets to the semi-structured interviews, showing that they had helped raise awareness among residents that the research was taking place. The impact of sequentially implementing methods is also seen more directly in the outputs of the photo-elicitation being taken forward into the photo exhibit. While the sequencing was partly practical, as it took time to identify people willing to participate in activities, starting with more general exposure was helpful in building up familiarity with the site, key individuals, and the wider context, which proved to be important when it came to implementing more engaged methods and interpreting the resulting materials. Towards the end of the assessment process, the draft findings were shared with participants and professionals responsible for the conservation and management of the House. A poster summarising the key findings was also developed, to provide feedback to tenants and visitors who may have observed or participated in the research but not provided contact details. These activities were part of my accountability to the original knowledge holders, but also intended to increase awareness of the diversity of values associated with the House and the different ways in which it is experienced as a place, beyond its observable functions and physical form, providing important social context for any future conservation actions.

#### *4.2. Methods in Context*

Working with multiple methods and combining different types of method generated a plurality, or a breadth as well as a depth, of understanding. While at times the participant engagement led to seemingly contradictory or opposing statements, the aim was to "obtain a variety of interpretations rather than seek consistencies" [52] (p. 109). As a result, the assessment built up a complex understanding of the diversity of social values for the range



of communities with interests in Cables Wynd House. The “methods assemblage” [68] used in the assessment was able to reveal and accommodate this complexity. More than a cluster of methods, this approach looks beyond methods as techniques to also consider how they are embedded in dominant epistemologies and hierarchies of knowledge, systems for reporting and recording, and complex material, individual, and organisational/community relations [68] (p. 160). These are all factors that affect how methods work in different contexts and when implemented by practitioners with different profiles. In this case, the fact I was working alone on the assessment meant personal attributes, such as gender and language, impacted on engagement. While I was careful to consider my positionality, it was often in the processes of reflection and interpretation that unconscious biases or gaps became apparent. For example, the choice of terminology was flagged in my draft report, where there might be implicit negative connotations in referring to Cables Wynd House as an estate, as opposed to the more neutral development or building. Such reflections served as reminders that, although the report was based on participatory methods and included community voices, the process of analysis, interpretation, and writing inevitably privileges and is shaped by a researcher’s “theoretical and epistemological commitments” [69] (p. 12). Working with others (in this case my supervisory team) who have complementary but diverse specialisms can assist in identifying and compensating for unconscious bias, as well as supporting a multi-methods approach [70] (p. 42), [37] (p. 81), [71] (p 352).

Drawing on a range of methods means that the research process can be responsive to dynamic contexts and developing understandings. In anticipation of the complexity of an inner-city context with relatively high levels of diversity and transience, the proposed approach for the Cables Wynd House assessment was to deploy rapid, participatory methods over an extended period. In practice, both the overall amount of time and duration of the study had to be increased to obtain sufficient material for the assessment. This was principally due to challenges in identifying community structures and engaging participants in the methods. Given the social context and the lack of a residents’ association for the House, it was expected to be challenging to engage participants, particularly in more collaborative activities or those requiring repeat engagements. Following the low response rates to self-completion questionnaires, plans were adapted and in-person structured interviews were scaled-up. Referrals by formal gatekeepers made it possible to conduct semi-structured interviews with a small number of tenants. As a site embedded in day-to-day life, it was planned to work with residents to develop photo or written diaries of their daily engagements with place. Through notices posted in the communal areas of the House and observation in the wider area, I identified several community organisations holding events for local residents, either at the site or in the immediate vicinity. It was possible to attend some of these community gatherings and they provided opportunities for engagement. However, it remained difficult to identify and engage the informal, personal networks that were described by interview respondents as contributing to their sense of community.

Online observation and mapping the local area gave me an understanding of some of the local amenities. Enquiries about possible collaboration initially received positive responses from two community support organisations in the area, one working with young people and the other with women. Unfortunately, practical constraints, competing priorities, and limited resources meant that the planned research activities could not be arranged with those groups. While visiting a local community hall, I saw an activity advertised for older residents interested in photography. Unlike the other organisations that I had approached, I was able to engage directly with group members and the collaboration did not require support from the co-ordinating organisation or divert scarce resources and time from other priority projects. The proposed activity aligned well with the group’s existing activities and the members agreed to focus on Cables Wynd House, resulting in a productive series of exchanges that also generated the material used in the photo exhibit at the House.

Although there were some initial assumptions, based on existing documents, about potential communities and the types of values and practices associated with the House that

might be significant, the outcomes of the social values assessment were not predetermined. The assessment was a process of exploration, undertaken together with the participants. Like all socially-engaged research, it required a flexible, responsive, and reflexive mode of practice, working with emergent understandings and evolving contexts. Whether a planned method could be implemented depended on a combination of factors, not least the willingness and availability of potential participants, networks of relationships, and the wider context. As with all participatory research, I had a responsibility to ensure the process was conducted ethically and to take cognisance of the potential impacts that the activities or findings may have on the individuals and communities involved. When assessing social values, there is always the potential for activities to surface potentially distressing or emotional issues, tensions, or conflicts for participants. The memories associated with historic places are not necessarily the “nostalgia of good times past” [72] (p. 58). This understanding, combined with the emergent nature of the research process, meant that the social values assessment demanded an “everyday ethics” [73] (p. 127), a continuous process of self-reflection and dialogue with participants, in which consent is renegotiated and reconfirmed throughout the process and in response to the specific context.

As this study shows, working with methods in context is not a purely technical matter. It implies new ways of thinking about knowledge production and of working with the individuals and communities who are expert in their own relationships to place. The history of current conservation practice has been dominated by Western European thinking and positivist traditions that emphasise scientific processes, with professional judgements presented as objective and constant. Adopting more participatory, responsive, and reflexive methods unsettles this established reliance on professional judgements and changes the role of the practitioner from being the only (or in some cases even the primary) expert and custodian of built heritage. While this shift in power and authority brings challenges, such approaches can result in new, shared understandings of the range of values associated with built heritage, ultimately supporting its future conservation.

## 5. Conclusions

The Cables Wynd House study is one example of how a multi-methods participatory approach can be applied to explore the variety of communities and range of social values associated with built heritage. There were unexpected challenges and adjustments required throughout the process but, through working flexibly, it was possible to implement a range of participatory methods. The understandings that resulted from the assessment depended on the combination of methods and an iterative, close examination of the resulting material [69]. This depth of knowledge could not have been achieved through non-participatory, desk-based research alone, and differs significantly from professional assessments of value, as detailed in the listing documents. It was apparent that people were aware of the building’s status as nationally significant, but the values that they associated with the House were rooted in their day-to-day experiences, relationships, and intimate knowledge of the place over time. That said, there is a relationship between the formal heritage processes and the social values identified. The architectural features that principally underpin the listing do impact on how the House is valued; just as the experiences of the House as a place of home, community, and connection, which are central to how people value the building, are also reflected in the original design intention. The case study also shows how conservation and management actions focused on the physical fabric have the potential to strengthen or undermine these social values, depending on how they resonate with people’s other understandings and experiences of place (see also [74]).

Each method provided insights and generated material that, taken together, informed the overall understanding of the social values associated with the House. However, the methods were not simply alternative means of achieving the same understanding, as was apparent, for example, in the differences between the knowledge shared during an individual semi-structured interview when compared to the negotiated understandings and different views that emerged from the photo group discussion. The different methods pro-

vided different ways of knowing, with different knowledges negotiated and (re)produced through the process. The multi-methods approach was therefore critical in surfacing and understanding the complexity and range of values associated with the House. Furthermore, the knowledge generated through the different methods did not straightforwardly make up different parts of a coherent whole. Rather the diverse lived experiences of the building and the varied temporal, spatial, and social connections that were enacted through the different methods revealed a diverse and potentially contradictory multiplicity of realities [75]. Working with a combination of qualitative methods in a “methods assemblage” [68] allowed for this multiplicity, nuance, complexity, and dissonance to surface within the assessment process, and held those tensions without falling into incoherence or requiring their resolution through an artificial consensus. As Mol and Law observe, this messy complexity is often elided within official reports, with the objective tone that typifies much academic and professional writing, authoritatively establishing what is known, leaving limited space to reflect on the more unexpected and uncertain aspects of our knowledge [76] (p. 3).

Another advantage of adopting a mixture of qualitative methods is that they provide multiple avenues for participation. Differences in engagement across the methods proposed or adopted in this study highlights that methods are not equally accessible or appealing to participants. Such differences also emphasise the need for critical reflection on what individual methods might not reveal, or who might be unintentionally excluded from the process, as well as flagging practical considerations regarding where, when, and how people are willing and able to participate. As critics have argued, participatory processes do not inevitably result in greater inclusivity, empowerment, and sustainability; they can be co-opted or coercive, reinforcing existing practices and values rather than recognising the issues, knowledge, and spaces claimed by communities themselves [77,78]. Participatory processes designed to engage more marginalised groups are also open to ‘capture’ by the more advantaged and empowered middle class, who are familiar with the processes and terminology used in policy consultation [79]. Recognition of, and specific efforts to overcome, power differentials and existing inequalities, including critical self-reflection on personal positionality, values, and biases, are therefore essential to these processes.

“All action in the field of conservation is affected by an appraisal of value” [2] (p. 6). Perceptions of value determine what is done and how, as well as who decides and based on which forms of knowledge. In a Scottish context, the values that can be considered as part of a listing process are limited to assessments of architectural or historic interest, as determined by the underlying legislation. Nonetheless, public participation is an increasingly important part of heritage conservation, as professionals seek to balance the physical preservation of historic fabric with contemporary uses and values. In this context, the qualitative, participatory methods applied in assessing social values, and the nuanced understandings of the relationships between people and place that result, are arguably extremely useful and likely to become ever more relevant in the conservation and management of built heritage. However, bringing the knowledge resulting from a social values assessment into conservation practice is not without its challenges. Determining how pluralistic understandings of value can be incorporated into practical heritage management and conservation contexts remains “probably the most significant issue facing contemporary heritage management and policy” [26] (p. 1). As Macdonald observes, professionals are “only beginning to grapple with the implications for conservation in terms of which values take priority and how they are conserved” [80] (p. 7).

This case study has demonstrated that a mix of rapid, qualitative, participatory methods, deployed in a flexible, responsive, reflexive, and ethical manner, is practical within ‘real world’ conservation and heritage management contexts. However, to be most effective, participatory methods need to be embedded in genuinely people-centred heritage management and conservation processes. This means going beyond consultative approaches and engaging people in “invited spaces” [81] (p. 230) to recognise other forms of knowledge and expertise regarding what makes built heritage valuable. Jones and Yarrow [82,83] have described the collaborative processes and negotiations that take place between con-

servation practitioners, but community expertise and social values are rarely included in these processes. Working with participatory methods and engaging in truly participatory processes is an important step in opening up heritage and conservation decision-making, making otherwise hidden professional judgements and values more visible. Doing so also offers the potential for more inclusive and socially relevant forms of practice to emerge. The result is a more complex, but also a far richer, understanding of our historic environment and the contribution built heritage makes to people's lives.

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