

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Photos of the Past

Dr Emma Waterton of the Institute for Culture and Society is examining the way visitors construct and express their sense of national identity at a range of tourism sites in Australia. This project is funded by the Australian Research Council through its Discovery Early Career Researchers Award scheme.

'The definition of what it means to be Australian is a contentious one,' says Dr Waterton. 'And when Australians visit tourist heritage sites in their own country, is it obvious what they make of them. There are many questions we can explore: How do such sites affect a sense of identity and shape conduct towards others? What message do visitors take with them? Do these sites provide opportunities for non-Indigenous understanding of Indigenous history – or do they tend to provide packaged and disempowered images of Aboriginality and culture? Scholarly literature on heritage tourism tends to focus on "attractions" and "tourists" without making significant attempts to gain a deeper understanding of what happens during tourist encounters with these sites. Argue that a sense of belonging is *felt* or experienced as a response to atmosphere, mood and message and it is not just about taking photos as a memory documentation exercise. Tourist experiences are *constructed*, not just photographically remembered, and are imbued with meaning. In this project I will examine these questions and experiences in detail.'

Six national tourist sites that allow for reflection on cultural and political meaning and identity will be included in the study. They will have settler/historic or Aboriginal histories, or a mix of both (such as Uluru and Port Arthur). An examination of how "belonging" is felt or experienced will be achieved, in part, by the researcher accompanying tourists at these sites.



Through follow-up interviews, tourists will be asked to re-examine their experiences and the meaning of their engagement with the heritage sites and how it informs their identity as Australians. A project-related website will be developed where participants in the study can upload their photos and comment on their experiences.

In order to contribute to international debates about social cohesion, national identity and belonging, we need a better understanding of how Australians interpret and use their own heritage to understand "Australianness". By examining the experiences of Australians at popular national heritage sites, this project will provide new information about Australian identity and how it is constructed in the 21st century.

Project Title: Photos of the past: the negotiation of identity and belonging at Australian tourism sites.

Funding has been set at: \$375,000

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