

Capacity Building using social networking sites

Stevens Titiml

Abstract

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is a country characterized as having the most dispersed set of islands in the Pacific Region. The RMI Historic Preservation Office (HPO) is responsible for preserving and managing the underwater cultural heritage (UCH) which spans nearly two million square kilometers (km²) of ocean. While the task is daunting, we realize that other Pacific Island nations face similar challenges. At this time, the RMI-HPO office is fully staffed with an Anthropologist and Archaeologist, while some of our affiliated offices in the Micronesian region do not staff one or the other and in some cases do not have either. With our offices spread out across the Pacific Region, and preservation programs characterized by limited funding, short staffing, and reliance on contracted professionals, collaboration on preservation work can be instrumental in protection of the UCH.

We are small island offices with limited resources, but a larger community of countries whose interconnectedness can be traced to prehistory. With our invaluable UCH to care for, we propose the utilization of popular social networking tools to build capacity. Building a communication site online where we share resources, information and project ideas would be a first step in tackling some of the issues that compound our work. This paper explores several avenues of technology to build capacity, and is the first step towards the creation of a collaborative network.

Introduction

The Republic of the Marshall Islands Historic Preservation Office (RMI-HPO) is responsible for all preservation related work in the Republic. The RMI HPO office is responsible for all preservation work in the Marshalls which consist of 29 low coral atolls and five small coral islands spread over nearly 2 million km² of ocean, the Marshall Islands are the most dispersed set of islands in the Pacific Region. The RMI-HPO office is fully staffed with an Anthropologist and Archaeologist; however some of our affiliated offices in the Micronesian region do not staff one or the other and in some cases do not have either. With our offices spread out across the Pacific: communication and collaboration on preservation work are nonexistent with limited funding and high transportation cost.

The Micronesian Endowment for Historic Preservation (MEHP) meets annually to report back to National Parks Service (NPS) what each individual office has accomplished the previous year. It is a prime time for showcasing each office's achievements and projects that proved to be difficult in both time and resource for numerous reasons and of course the most universal issue that we all have in common is the lack of funding available for all offices. We can all agree that we can all use a little, if not a lot, more funding from NPS or outside grants to be able to contribute quality work on sites that are so far spread and hardly accessed by both our staff and tourist alike.

Our affiliated offices throughout Micronesia are wholly funded by the NPS under the Compact of Free Association (COFA). With the limited amount of funding we receive from NPS through The Department of Interior, it continually proves to be the most problematic issue for The Marshall Islands HPO, as stated

earlier, due to the relative size and make-up of the atolls and the funding amount we receive.

Generally we are required by law under the **Use of Cultural and Historical Properties**: to preserve all sites which include both terrestrial and underwater sites in all of the Marshall Islands atolls (RMI 1992.).

With so many sites and a limited number of resources, we are spread thin and even more so with little funding set aside for outer island travel to be able to conduct any survey. This is equally more compounded by the fact that inter island travel is reduced to slow moving charters which can drain our offices resources quickly and the unreliable domestic air service.

Building a communication site online where we can have a dedicated site to share information and project ideas would be a first step in tackling some of the issues that compound our work. I think basic information sharing on what each office is doing will greatly increase our capacity to help each other, especially in situations where one office has dealt with an issue successfully and can provide guidance to another office undergoing the same issue. Sharing ideas on projects that parallel our work, offering advice, problem solving issues on administrative, field work, and how we involve public participation of local residents and traditional leaders would greatly enhance our ability as an individual office and for our responsibility to the entire Pacific Region.

The first question of course is the word capacity building. What is capacity building?

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has defined "capacity" as, "the ability of individuals, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner". The terms "capacity building" or "capacity development" describe the task of establishing human and institutional capacity.

Capacity building is a very broad term and has many uses. In this term of course, it is used to refer to building the capacity of those many individual HPO's that compromise the Freely Associated States (FAS) in their efforts of preserving their history and culture.

I am a strong believer that social learning and empowerment of learned information from professionals and peers in your field of work rely on each other to fully be successful in any particular field of work. It is especially important when the information used in the process of enhancing capacity of individuals in the historic preservation field, who are on the ground making efforts to improve on the preservation of underwater sites and/or department heads, that they have the tools to make choices regarding site administration and planning, with the ability to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. In an area such as Micronesia with its diverse underwater sites and very unique aqua culture, we are able utilize the knowledge of traditional experts of navigation as it is passed on from one generation to the next. Comparing the Marshall Islanders navigation tools and knowledge the sea in accordance with sea and weather

patterns, we can look at both similarities and differences in their approach. All this can be done using a social network site for research purposes.

People responsible for activities under historic preservation and planning attended training and workshops but neglected to impose or implement the knowledge learned. This loss led to the misunderstanding that a capacity-building training or workshop does not go beyond the conventional perception of training .

The main concerns of this paper are to address the social aspects and impacts of many social-networking tools available online. These are that are essentially easy to set up through the internet for collaboration and information sharing. This could be done on one of the many popular social networking sites that are available to use at a minimal cost to our office, and easily accessed by our affiliated offices throughout Micronesia. It would help to keep our offices connected on a more social basis. Rather than the traditional email exchange, this can be difficult to relay. Through this interaction we may create possible ideas or avenues of exploration and share over a broader network.

Social networking sites such as: Facebook, Google Friends, Myspace, Bebo are some of many such sites that have become a popular and easier means of communication with friends, family, or colleagues. It is a tool of which the function of it is based on an internet connection. This only requires the payment of basic high-speed broadband bills but not the oscillating prices of long-distance phone calls. Virtual communities are essentially formed with a click of a button and people are invited to join in a social networking environment that encompass discussion of common issues and interests. These communities are composed of people connected together by work, office, purpose, goal, and overall desire to improve on the overall issues of a region. Our main interest is, of course, focused on the underwater sites that blanket the Pacific area comprised of the FAS, namely Palau, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and American Samoa.

The Marshall Islands alone has a plethora of underwater sites that are well beyond the developed capitol atoll of Majuro. Needless to say, we need help in developing a system that inputs our data , we need to clarify how to share that information, and how to gain access to the ideas of others so we deepen collaboration between offices and improve on site planning and restoration projects.

In my opinion we have not equally addressed our maritime culture as we have with the terrestrial preservation of historical sites or traditional bwebwenato sites (traditional stories). It is of course not because of lack of interest, one can only assume in my short time I have been here, that such an oversight has to do more with the fact that there is relatively no money available for underwater sites. The realities are the time it takes to travel, train staff properly, acquire and maintain gear, and hire a qualified underwater archeologist, especially considering the amount of area that needs to be covered.

There are numerous underwater sites that are already renowned as underwater marvels that were created as a result of World War Two (WWII) (see in this volume works by Ishimura; McKinnon; Arnold) and many more naturally

made eco-systems that are also in need of preservation. One such marvel that man created is Bikini Atoll, of which the popular search engine Wikipedia defines it as :

Prior to the explosion of the first atomic bomb on the island, the lagoon at Bikini was designated as a ship graveyard after World War II by the United States Navy. Today the Bikini Lagoon is still home to a large number of vessels from the United States and other countries. The dangers of the radioactivity and limited services in the area led to divers staying away from one of the most remarkable potential scuba diving sites in the Pacific for many years. The dive spot has become popular among divers since 1996. However, oil prices have severely curtailed diving operations to the point of being suspended since August 2008 and through 2009, restricted to fully self-contained vessels by prior arrangement. The lagoon contains a larger amount of sea life than usual due to the lack of fishing, including sharks, increasing the fascination with the spot as a diver's adventure spot. Food including fish is contaminated so tour boats must bring all their own supplies. (Wikipedia 2011)

Recently Bikini Atoll was inscribed into United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural, Organization (UNESCO) list of World Heritage Sites (UNESCO 2010) under these two criterions:

Criterion (iv): Bikini Atoll is an outstanding example of a nuclear test site. It has many military remains and characteristic terrestrial and underwater landscape elements. It is tangible testimony of the birth of the Cold War and it bears testimony to the race to develop increasingly powerful nuclear weapons. In the wake of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, the Bikini Atoll site confirmed that mankind was entering a nuclear era. It also bears witness to the terms of population displacement and public-health issues.

Criterion (vi): The ideas and beliefs associated with the Bikini nuclear test site, and more generally with the escalation of military power which characterized the Cold War, are of international significance. These events gave rise to a large number of international movements advocating nuclear disarmament; they gave rise to powerful symbols and to many images associated with the "nuclear era", which characterized the second part of the 20th century.

Namdrik Atoll (Figure 1) is another atoll that has a unique aquaculture. It is located approximately 145 kilometres (90 miles) west-southwest of Jaluit, and 117 kilometres (73 miles) northwest of Ebon Atoll. The atoll consists of two large wooded islets. The larger (also called Namorik) wraps around the central lagoon from the southwest to the northeast, while the smaller island closes off the northwest corner of the lagoon. A coral islet stands between them on the reef, with numerous black boulders. The very shallow lagoon is cut off from the sea by the drying coral reef. Boats can cross the reef with difficulty, at high water on the west side of the atoll.

Landing near the west side of Namorik Islet can be affected to about 90 meters south of it. There is no shelter during northeast winds, and it is dangerous with strong southwest winds when there is a heavy sea. There is a fringing reef which extends about 135 meters in the vicinity of the landing place. There is

depth of about 1.2 meters and there are rocks in places. Two stranded wrecks lie about 90 meters off the south shore along the reef line.



Figure 1. Namdrik lagoon, Republic of the Marshall Islands
(Picture taken by Stevens R. Titiml)

Conclusion

These two types of underwater cultural heritage sites are one example of how we can tackle the collaborative work being done. We have a varied landscape which ranges from flat atolls to mountainous peaks. Of course this would mean that all of the FAS-HPO's working environments are not quite the same, but we share the similarities of small islands scattered in the Pacific Region and the ability to progress with our work initiative using up-to-date technology. We share the same goals for our islands and we hope that our work will provide future areas of further intellectual stimulation and general enjoyment of available resources.

The general colloquial saying goes, "our Ocean is our oyster". It is often said and it rings so true when talking about our underwater sites. We encompass a big part of history. The seabed of our islands are riddled with material culture of man's stories and exceptions of natures' majesty. The HPO attempts to reveal

what it can of those stories and implement/monitor preservation of the sites so that stories are told and sites visited many times over.

It is projected that an online social network website would reach beyond our office and out to communities. It is important that we play a role in fostering the social networks and information exchange needed to educate, not only our affiliates, but also serve as an outreach for our office to empower and educate the public on community building. This would move us forward in our mandate to manage change, to resolve conflict, to manage institutional pluralism, to enhance coordination, to foster communication, and to ensure that data and information are shared (the HPO mandate). All of these action points require a broad and realistic view of capacity development. This definition covers both institutional and community-based capacity-building of what our office needs and the impact of the message we can send to the public.

Information sharing is needed from colleagues but also from our peers and the general public. It is not true that our office is only here for preserving WWII and historical sites.

Producing a social networking website is going to probably be the speediest and most efficient step towards our goals. The issue that we will have to tackle is the site administration itself and the amount of content that we want, or are willing, to put up for the purpose of sharing and gaining comments.

We hope that this site can bring mutual understanding and a concise effort to collaborate on undertakings, in not just the Marshall Islands, but also in other regions in the FAS. To use each office as a resource to make not just one island, but a whole region, in equal standing with underwater archeology as in the rest of the world.

Informative public awareness is a something that will expose our online material so that the public and professional institutions are aware that we are not just about land modification permits and preserving historical sites but a whole lot more concerned with preserving the national treasures that lay just below our waters.

We should not let the downsides of social networking hinder us from being able to compile a site that is truly ours to view, share, and collaborate on projects. While social networking sites have become places for establishing connections and meeting friends, they have also become likely places for identity theft and fraud. As you have to provide certain information such as your e-mail address, name, and location. Criminal's steal identification information and pretend to be you, especially when they are into illegal activities. The worries are if someone is pretending to be somebody else that they can make you believe that he or she is up to some business offer (project funding, capacity funding) and ask to meet up with you, at which point they may take your money. It has also become easier for someone to stalk you and harass you online.

Like in any social situation people must learn to conduct themselves safely and productively. One should consider the pros and cons of social networking sites and take precautions in the kind of people to trust and share information with. The debate whether you should or should not be part of the social

networking community is never ending. And, at the end of the day, the best weapon that you have is sound judgment.

Not only do we need to share information with colleagues, but the fact is the RMI are all privately owned lands leased and subleased, to a great extent, to public and national offices to use. The development aspect of using private property for development purposes whether residential or for commercial use in any area within the capitol of Majuro or outer islands comes under the aegis of the land owners and what they want and need. This is a very sensitive issue because land ownership is considered a highly regarded right in traditional Marshallese Custom; so understanding anthropological studies and their soil impacts on the local to wider communities would open further discussions on how to handle certain issues.

We are small island offices with limited resources, I have suggested we have a social networking website in order to exchange information and keep everybody updated and informed. With which we would have a tool to build on our current information and work together on projects so as to build on our capacity as a whole.

Abbreviations

RMI Republic of Marshall Islands

Bibliography

RMI 992	<i>Historic Preservation Legislation</i>
UNESCO 2010	<i>Bikini Atoll Test Site</i> - website- Accessed July 31 2010, http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339
Wikipedia 2010	<i>Namdrik Atoll</i> - website- Accessed July 2010, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Namdrik_Atoll
Wikipedia 2011	<i>CapacityBuilding</i> -website-Accessed October 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capacity_building