



**Erica C. Avrami, ed.** *Preservation and the New Data Landscape*. New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City. Columbia University Press, 2019. 220 pp. \$28.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-941332-48-1.

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In this first volume of Columbia University Press's Issues in Preservation Policy series, editor Erica Avrami, along with the diverse cast of authors assembled in this edited collection, makes a convincing case for the positive contribution that thoughtful data collection, collaboration, and analysis can make to the work of historic preservation. While data collection in the form of list-making and qualitative reporting has been a central function of institutional historic preservation in the United States since its inception, Avrami argues in the volume's opening essay that new forms of data collection and analysis, when deployed thoughtfully, have contributed to a "new era of transparency" (p. 11) in which preservationists can better engage citizens and counteract institutional biases. To reach this goal, Avrami argues, heritage organizations must institutionalize inclusive and transparent data collection and management, paying close attention to bias and the complex relationship between expert and public ways of knowing and remembering. Though it may be difficult, negotiating this process of data collaboration and operationalization can result in telling stories that better serve the needs of the communities heritage organizations serve.

*Preservation and the New Data Landscape* is organized into four thematic sections: institutionalizing data, co-producing knowledge, building evidence-based narratives, and informing policy agendas. Los Angeles-based preservationists Janet Hansen and Sara Delgadillo Cruz lead off the first section with their essay, "Big City, Big Data: Los Angeles's Historic Resources." Hansen and Cruz document the creation of the nation's largest publicly accessible heritage database through the operation of two convergent public projects: SurveyLA, a historic resources survey, and HistoricPlacesLA, the city's online inventory and management system. Florida preservationists should find the discussion of the city's use of Arches, an open-source data management tool, particularly helpful as they work to integrate and share information across the state's loosely interconnected network of public and private cultural resource organizations. Avrami's interview with World Monuments Fund CEO Lisa Ackerman sheds light on how academic data in museums and other repositories may also be incorporated into an accessible, public-facing data portal. Software architect Matthew Hampel offers more technical perspective on data collaboration in his essay, "Managing Historical Complexity: Practical Lessons from Tech-Forward Historic Resource Surveys," demonstrating how a crowd-

sourced survey effort using a mobile app gathered a large volume of data in a short time. The immediacy of this data collection method drove greater public participation, Hampel argues, while a carefully crafted set of questions and tools made it easier to train volunteers and collect quality data. Florida preservationists may find a similar approach useful if they choose to mobilize the state's large and diverse community of citizen-volunteers in their work.

Developing knowledge in partnership with citizens and the public and private sectors is the central theme of the book's next section. An interview with technology professional Alicia Rouault opens the section with some useful perspectives on the role of technology in developing preservation partnerships. Far from a "magic elixir," Rouault argues, technology is instead a tool that is best used alongside other processes as part of a partnership among diverse stakeholders. Rouault's detailed overview of how tech-centric partnerships can achieve successful outcomes may be particularly useful for Florida preservationists working to take their first steps in this direction. Vicki Weiner provides an example of such an outcome in "Democratizing Data: Pratt Center's Neighborhood Data Portal," arguing that the New York City-based Pratt Center's open data tool addresses a critical imbalance between the producers and consumers of heritage data. The Neighborhood Data Portal, a free online application, allows nonspecialists to analyze and prepare visual presentations of key demographic and social data. Importantly, the team at the Pratt Center is working on ways to incorporate "community assets," such as nonprofit cultural centers, ethnic grocers, places of worship, nonprofit workforce centers, and other assets governments typically fail to include in resource surveys in the portal through on-site surveys.

Developing these powerful tools is not without significant challenges, however. City planner Jennifer Most argues in "The Case for Data Analytics in Preservation Education and Practice" that

preservation planners and policymakers need additional, formal training in data analytics to take a meaningful part in the new data environment and assume a proactive, rather than reactive, stance to data-driven preservation efforts. In addition to training, preservationists must develop strategies to incorporate the wealth of information they already possess into new, community-driven solutions. In "The Challenges of Legacy Data in Preserving the Historic Built Environment," professor Andrew Dolkart outlines issues with incorrect data lacking human context in existing "big data" projects to argue that projects should insist upon data that is highly accurate and deeply contextualized by the human history it seeks to describe. Artist Marco Castro Cosio describes how the art museums where he has worked provide some of this crucial human context. Because cultural institutions are important partners in historic preservation throughout Florida, Castro Cosio's insights may be of particular interest to a Florida audience.

Stephanie Ryberg-Webster and Kelly L. Kinahan begin the book's third section, on evidence-based narratives, with "The Possibilities and Perils of Data-Driven Preservation Research: Lessons from a Multiyear Study of Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits." Using a limited set of federal tax incentive data to study patterns of public investment, Ryberg-Webster and Kinahan found significant utility in such public datasets. They offer useful advice on how to improve on weak or limited data to tell evidence-based stories, but caution against an overly quantitative approach. Amanda Webb takes a close look at another quantitative dataset, energy efficiency, in "Historic Preservation in a New Era of Building Energy Data." Even though preservationists have long deployed energy data to understand historic buildings and advance a narrative extolling the positive relationship between preservation and energy efficiency, Webb argues that their perspective on the issue has been limited by problems with how this data is framed and analyzed. Preservationists should become

more active stakeholders in the collection, analysis, and presentation of this data, Webb argues, to meet the challenges of energy efficiency posed by new construction. In “Using New Data to Demonstrate Why Old Buildings Matter,” Michael Powe makes a similar case for the careful deployment of other data indicating the “performance” of historic structures, including their contributions to community walkability, economic vitality, density, and cultural activity. Emily Talen builds upon this theme in her study, “Historic Buildings, Chain Stores, and Mom-and-Pop Retail,” showing how data can be used to demonstrate the value of older buildings in maintaining walkable main streets populated by local retailers. Jeremy C. Wells, Vanilson Burégio, and Rinaldo Lima pull together these discussions of discrete datasets, finally, in “Big and Deep Heritage Data: The Social Heritage Machine (SHEM)” by proposing a theoretical web-based application, SHEM, that will use a combination of social media tools, websites, and documents, connected with data tools such as ArcGIS and SPSS, to gather user data to help researchers better understand how laypeople relate to the built environment.

Authors in the book’s final section explore the role that data can play in informing preservation policy agendas. Douglas Noon and Tetsuharu Oba argue in “Perspectives on Data in Urban Historic Preservation Policy” that more data in itself is not an effective tool to tilt policy toward preservation, but that more data providing a wealth of perspectives can aid preservationists as they attempt to shape public policy. Eduardo Rojas stresses the importance of gaining additional perspective in his contribution, “Social Actors in Urban Heritage Conservation: Do We Know Enough?” Rojas argues that defining social actors as mere “stakeholders” does not account for the cultural diversity of the various needs and perspectives that community members bring to the table, and that preservationists or the researchers they rely upon to help tell their stories should develop better methodologies to work with and understand the communities

they serve. Rounding out the essays in the volume, Randall Mason argues in “Connecting Preservation to Urban Policy in a Data-Rich Future” that preservationists must be vigilant in selecting quality data from the wealth of humanities, social science, and geospatial information available even as the quantity of these datasets rapidly expands. To aid in selecting quality data that meets its needs, Mason implores preservationists to understand the “cultures of policy” that shape governance in their communities, to align this with a deeper understanding of the history of preservation itself, and to continuously work to overcome the imbalances of power that shape both the collection and use of data.

Avrami includes appendices containing calls to action, policy priorities, and an annotated bibliography that preservationists and policymakers will find helpful as they strive to incorporate data into their practices. Readers interested in a detailed discussion of data methodologies, specific practices and frameworks, or practical advice about how to integrate technologies like ArcGIS/QGIS, SPSS, or other data analysis software into their work will need to look elsewhere, but Avrami’s edited collection will help them understand where and why to begin. Preservation students and practitioners alike who are interested in why and how they should integrate data and build technical partnerships into their work will find this book immensely useful.

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