

HOW DO ICONIC HERITAGE TOURIST ATTRACTIONS REMAIN RELEVANT TO THEIR AUDIENCE?

COMO É QUE AS ATRACÇÕES TURÍSTICAS HISTÓRICAS E SIMBÓLICAS SE MANTÊM RELEVANTES PARA AS SUAS AUDIÊNCIAS?

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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that iconic status heritage tourist attractions innovate using the inherent characteristics which are the core of their competitive advantage. This results in a pattern of innovation waves shaped by changes in social attitude, the distance of time and current trends. The main driver of innovation at heritage attractions is the necessity of remaining relevant to a constantly evolving audience. The determinants of innovation include the story of place and value placed on its intrinsic assets. A chronological case study at Port Arthur in Tasmania, Australia was conducted in order to identify the nature of each innovation wave and its triggers. The paper concludes that at heritage attractions the source of innovation lies in the internal values of place which in turn are the aspects of the story which are memorable, meaningful and personal to the visitor.

RESUMO

Esta dissertação sugere que as atracções turísticas históricas e simbólicas renovam seu prestígio utilizando as características inerentes que são o âmage da sua vantagem competitiva. Isto resulta num padrão de ondas inovadoras moldadas pelas mudanças na atitude social, o decorrer do tempo e as tendências actuais. O principal impulsionador de inovação das atracções históricas é a necessidade de se manterem relevantes perante a audiência em evolução constante. Os determinantes da inovação incluem a história do local e do valor dado às suas vantagens intrínsecas. Foi realizado um estudo de caso cronológico em Port Arthur na Tasmânia, Austrália, a fim de identificar a natureza de cada onda de inovação e as suas causas.. A dissertação conclui que a fonte de inovação das atracções históricas está nos valores internos do local que, por sua vez, são os aspectos da história que são memoráveis, significativos e pessoais para o visitante.

Keywords:

Heritage, Innovation wave, Relevance,

Palavras chave:

Histórico, onda de inovação, relevância

This paper proposes that if heritage tourist attractions are to be sustainable, they must be innovative in order to keep pace with evolution and generational shifts in social attitudes and perspective. First this paper will consider which aspects of heritage tourist attractions have the capacity for renewal or transformation and are therefore resources for innovation. Second the paper will consider the types and patterns of innovation which take place at heritage tourist attractions and their drivers and determinants. Third, a chronological study is used to illustrate innovative activity over a prolonged period at an iconic Australian heritage attraction. To date most of the research which has linked tourism and innovation has concentrated on the adoption or adaption of technological advances for use within the tourism sector (Hjalager, 2001). This research proposes that there are opportunities for innovation based on the inherent resources at the heritage core of the attraction (Poria et al., 2003)

The interpretive experience is a fundamental competitive advantage for a heritage site, providing unique insights and meaning to the visitor. Opportunities for innovation lie in the nuances inherent in the story and how it is interpreted, presented and delivered to the public (Peters and Weiermair, 2000). The story constantly evolves with new chapters being added as time passes and new events take place (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1995). Change also occurs due to research and development which results in new discoveries about the past (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998a). A story can be expressed in multiple ways, through a range of media to different audiences, providing an opportunity for innovative activity. The interpretation is the trigger for meaning with which visitors connect when they spend time at a heritage site (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998a, Tilden, 1957).

The aims of innovating through interpretation are to create value and to maintain the relevance of the place for the current audiences; to caretake the values which are associated with the place by a wide range of stakeholders; and to constantly update and expand the knowledge pool which feeds into the story of place enabling a range of understandings and providing a

story which is multi-layered offering contact points to a diverse mix of visitor types. The interpreted experience includes the embodiment of the visitor in the heritage place (Edensor, 2001, Gold and Gold, 2007, Leiper, 2004a), within the physical confines of the story and surrounded by the tangible evidence of what has taken place in the past. Innovation occurs when interpretation is the interface between the historic event of the past and the heritage production of the present, resulting in constant reinvention and new products (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1995). Emphasis placed on specific periods, events or viewpoints alters perspective and meaning (Chronis, 2005, McIntosh, 1999, Voase, 2002), purposely changing the fundamental beliefs held about heritage places.

Both the historic and market environments in which heritage attractions exist are in a constant state of disequilibrium, continuously evolving and exposed to internal and external influences which may be intended or unintended (Barras, 1986, Schumpeter, 1939). Disequilibrium results in fluctuations between periods of activity which lead to changes in meaning and periods of apathy when meanings can become out-dated and less relevant (Hjalager 2001). Over a period of time it is possible to discern how social activity and changes in community perception are reflected in the interpretation and consequent meanings reflected in heritage places. In manufacturing and technology the pattern of innovation has been described as occurring in waves relating to economic activity over time (Schumpeter, 1939), this research posits that a pattern of waves can also be detected at heritage attractions based on shifts in perception and meaning, over time.

Sustainable attractions are those which are able to innovate repeatedly over long periods to maintain their relevance for audiences once old ideas become outdated (Hjalager, 1997). Audiences are a product of their generation as their social perspective is formed by the society in which they live (Chronis, 2005, Giaccardi and Palen, 2008, Urry, 1990, Halbwachs, 1992). Values are socially constructed and shift with each generation, accordingly the values applied to

heritage places also change, based on what the heritage represents to a contemporary audience (Giaccardi and Palen, 2008, Richards and Wilson, 2006, Urry, 1990). Interpretation which connects with the audience elicits an emotional response (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998a) which is stimulated through a choice of meaningful triggers designed by the operator and selected by the visitor (McIntosh, 1999, Poria et al., 2003, Voase, 2002), resulting in an experience which is tailored by each visitor to suit their own needs (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). It is in the design of the meaningful triggers that operators of heritage sites have an opportunity to innovate, either due to demand when visitor perceptions change, or through supply based on research and development.

Meaningful attractions have iconic status which is inherent in attractions which are representative of identity on national, regional or local level (Gonzalez, 2007, Hollinshead, 2007, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, Palmer, 1998). The visitor cohort at iconic heritage tourist attractions includes heritage tourists and those interested in associations with identity and the broader story (Poria et al., 2003) which extends the audience for whom the story needs to be interpreted. Operators of heritage attractions understand visitor motivations and recognize the full interpretative potential of all of their core assets if they are to provide the breadth of connections which a diverse range of visitors seek (Poria et al., 2003). In recent years heritage sites, like museums, have had to market themselves more extensively than their immediate niche market if they are to attract enough visitors to be economically sustainable (Dewhurst and Dewhurst, 2006).

An iconic heritage attraction is a combination of tangible and intangible assets, which together represent at least one historic moment or era which has meaning for the present generation (Leask et al., 2002, Richards and Wilson, 2006, Wanhill, 2003). The nature of iconic attractions means that there are some limitations to innovative activity caused by conflicts in values and priorities. The operators of heritage tourist attractions have to maintain their relevance within the boundaries presented by multiple

stakeholder opinion and sensitivities, including (amongst others) visitors, potential visitors, future generations and those who have no intention of visiting but who consider the heritage story to be personally significant (Gold and Gold, 2007, Leask et al., 2002, Maddern, 2005). Other limitations can include the built heritage infrastructure when it is largely unalterable due to its authenticity value, consequently making the physical aspects of a resource predominantly non-renewable (AlSayyad, 2001, Pocock, 2006).

A tourist experience is a co-production between the visitor as consumer and the operator as producer, similar to the definition of a service experience (Kotler, Bowen et al. 2006). Similarities include intangibility when memories and recollections as well as emotional connections such as nostalgia are the outcomes (Kotler, Bowen et al. 2006). Dissimilarities include the tangible embodiment of visitor in place and the physical reality of souvenirs and photographs. The interrelationship between the visitor and operator is a form of open innovation where the consumer acts as an external partner, contributing their own prior knowledge and values to the creation process (Austin and Devin, 2003, Bessant and Davies, 2007, Bughin et al., 2008). Other similarities between the service and heritage experience include; variability, because the experience differs on each visit based on variables such as mood, weather, company and the visitor's prior experience; perishability because each visit is in the moment and cannot be repeated at another point of time; and heterogeneity as each visitor is a partner in co-producing their own unique experience (Kotler et al., 2006).

According to Pine and Gilmore, the four experience components which need to be provided if audiences are to be engaged include entertainment, education, aesthetics and escapist opportunities (Pine and Gilmore, 1999b). Entertainment is associated with the emotional responses which people have to the interpretation designed and delivered by heritage operators to elicit a response which may include laughter, horror, nostalgia or surprise (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, Moscardo, 1999, Pine and Gilmore, 1999b).

Education includes an engagement with the mind through increased knowledge, which is fundamental to creating a meaningful connection with the visitor (Moscardo, 1999). Knowledge can be either tacit or explicit (Nonaka et al., 2000) and is delivered using a range of participatory or observational media, designed to shift the perception of place in the minds of visitors (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998a, Voase, 2002). Designed experiences include those which emphasise a particular aspect of the story in a carefully chosen location to elicit a specific emotional response (Crouch and Desforges, 2003, Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, Richards and Wilson, 2006, Ryan, 2002, Utterback, Vedin et al. 2006).

The aesthetic realm involves passive participation by the visitor in the experience which can be provided by being in a heritage place (Crouch and Desforges, 2003). The heritage surroundings become a catalyst for visitor imagination (Crouch and Desforges, 2003) and a sensory experience of place if affectively interpreted (Crouch and Desforges, 2003, Edensor, 2001, Uzzell and Ballantyne 1998). The aesthetic realm is manifest through atmosphere and ambience (Bonn et al., 2007, Dann and Jacobsen, 2003, Edensor, 2001, Kotler, 1973, Richards and Wilson, 2006).

The escapist realm involves the active engagement between visitor and site, when the visitor is converted into a participant through an interpretative experience (Tilden, 1957, Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998a) using staged activities and the built infrastructure at the site (Edensor, 2001). As a participatory experience it immerses the visitor, influencing their perspective through physical as well as mental sensory triggers (Pine and Gilmore, 1999b).

The renewable resources of heritage tourist attractions are the core attributes inherent in the place and its story. The flexibility to deliver an interpretation to a range of visitor types, resulting in a variety of experiences allows several types of innovation to occur. The Innovation Space model sets out a theory of innovation in services (Bessant and Davies, 2007). This model has been adapted to identify innovations at iconic heritage tourist

attractions, as follows: product innovation includes a change in the method of interpretation or in the content of interpretation at a heritage site; process innovation includes changes in the delivery of interpretation or how new elements are incorporated into the main story; position innovation includes changes in market, if products have been designed specifically to attract a niche segment by altering the context in which the story is told; and paradigm innovation includes the change in mindset of visitors when their expectations shift or following a visit when their perceptions of place are altered, consequently changing the meaning of place and its associated values. Although heritage is present centred and represents the values of a contemporary audience (Ashworth and Graham 2005), the aspects of the story which become symbolic of the past need time to pass into history before they can be converted into heritage (Lowenthal 1985, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1995). The distance of time offers the benefit of hindsight (Halbwachs 1992) when identifying how meaningful triggers can be designed to show how events fit into a 'bigger picture'. Management strategy includes updating interpretation, based on events or occurrences which can, after a period of time, be accepted as part of the heritage story.

A chronological case study at an iconic heritage tourist attraction was conducted to identify the types of innovation which occurred at different times during the evolution of the attraction. A wave type pattern at 40 - 50 year intervals was identified, displaying similarities to the long waves occurring in a Kondratiev cycle, but based on social change rather than economic change (Marchetti 1981). The waves are influenced by entrepreneurial or management activity occurring either as a reaction to, or to create, changes in social perspective associated with the story. Major global events, such as war are catalysts for social change, reflected by the inclusion of characteristics which symbolise national identity (Hollinshead, 2007, Lowenthal, 1985, Tranter and Donoghue, 2007, Whelan, 2005). The iconic status of the attraction and its relationship to national identity preclude stagnation and decline as the site increasingly reflects values and meanings primarily

associated with identity rather than tourism. The wave pattern occurs in fluctuations between periods of activity and periods of apathy when the story is at risk of becoming outdated and irrelevant. Active periods result in updated interpretation constructed from new knowledge and understanding. The outcome of which are small incremental innovations in product, process, position and paradigm (Bessant and Davies 2007) which over a long period may be recognised as radical innovations.

The case study was conducted at Port Arthur in Tasmania, Australia. In brief, Port Arthur was a British colonial penal settlement active between 1830 and 1877 (Walch 1871). From 1877 until the present day it has been available for tourism, initially free of charge, but now a pay to enter attraction (PAHSMA 2008). Port Arthur, is iconic, having strong ties to the identity of the State (Richards and Wilson, 2006) as well as to the wider colonial history of Australia (Tranter and Donoghue 2007) .

In 1846 Port Arthur reached its zenith with 1200 convicts being held, but in 1853 transportation to Van Diemens Land (the previous name for Tasmania) ceased, and the number of convicts declined, dropping to 500 increasingly frail and aged convicts in 1870 (Alexander, 2005) . In 1854 Van Dieman's Land acquired the rudiments of self rule from Britain and two houses of Parliament were established (Young, 1996). Two years later, in 1856 the name of the State was changed to Tasmania (Alexander, 2005). Abandonment of Port Arthur as a penal settlement had been advocated since 1860, it finally closed in September 1877 (Alexander, 2005).

Port Arthur is situated on a peninsula, approximately 100 kilometres, by land, from Hobart, the State capital. Sea provided the only access, and the remote location plus the wilderness nature of the surrounding land meant that the penal settlement was not surrounded by walls, nature acted as the gaoler (Young, 1996). The settlement had a village atmosphere with residential cottages, pretty gardens and a Church, as well as the prison buildings, including the Penitentiary, Model

Prison, Hospital and Barracks (Young, 1996). The settlement was in a large, safe harbour, accessed from the Southern Ocean and surrounded by forested mountains (Young, 1996).

Wave One lasted from approximately 1877 until 1835. Significant events which had a bearing on national identity during this period included Federation in 1901, culminating in independence for Australia (Alexander, 2005). During the First World War, Australian soldiers fought under their own flag for the first time, most markedly during the battle of Gallipoli in 1915 (Tranter & Donoghue, 2007). Australians began to forge a distinct national identity which included the larrikin, a maverick or antihero who rebelled against rules and who became a popular stereotype for an Australian (Tranter & Donoghue, 2007).

During this period Port Arthur developed into a tourist destination called Carnarvon (Young, 1996). Demand created opportunities for entrepreneurs to provide accommodation, access, guiding and amenities (Young, 1996). In the 1880's and 1890's three severe bushfires swept through Port Arthur. The first destroyed the Church the others destroyed the Penitentiary, Hospital and Model Prison (Weidenhofer, 1990). There was very little management of the ruins until 1916, when they came under the auspices of the Scenery Preservation Board, whose role was to create reserves in places of natural or historic interest (Alexander, 2005). By the 1920's deterioration had become a safety and access concern as very little money had been spent on maintaining what was left of the buildings (Weidenhofer, 1990). Some were in private hands and not open for tourism, others had remained in Government ownership (Weidenhofer, 1990). No income was generated to spend on conservation or preservation and the Government was reluctant to promote or protect the remains of the penal settlement which symbolised a perceptibly shameful period of history. The 1920's mark the bottom of the first wave, and new levels of interest were not shown until around 1927 when the name of the settlement reverted to Port Arthur and the second innovation wave began.

As soon as access was available in 1877, visitors motivated by curiosity flocked to Port Arthur which had been the focus of speculation for decades exaggerated by lack of access (The Mercury Newspaper, 27 December 1877), the result was mass tourism (Khaslavsky and Shedroff, 1999, Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2002) and all opportunities to visit were substantially over-subscribed (The Mercury Newspaper, 28 December 1877). These were contemporary visitors, cognisant of the convict era and familiar with the social mores of their time which precluded those with convict antecedents from being accepted in society (Young 1996).

Interpretive sources consisted of contemporary newspaper reports, fiction, and a combination of fact, myth and rumour as well as word of mouth (The Mercury 27 December 1877). The availability of first hand accounts, particularly by ex-convict guides, created an illusion of authenticity (Waite, 2000, Weidenhofer, 1990). Resulting in a visitor experience which incorporated excitement, sensationalism, adventure, titillation and enjoyment, plus fantasy (Richards and Wilson, 2006, Dann), epitomised by 'Being There', (Tilden 1957). The experience provoked an emotional response (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) being entertaining, sensory and escapist manifest in thrills, horror and surprise starting with the boat trip from Hobart and including (for many), being locked into a punishment cell in total darkness and silence (The Mercury Newspaper, 27 December 1884). The official story focused on the Commandants who were presented as heroes or villains, but convicts whose crimes were especially heinous were included, as were those who had fallen foul of the law for non criminal offenses such as their political beliefs (Beattie, 1913). Guidebooks and guides added to the story with horrific descriptions of punishments (Beattie, 1913). Visits were also made to the burial ground on Dead Island, the name of which has changed since, reflecting the sentiment attached to the place and those buried there (Beattie, 1913).

Perceptions changed following the bushfires in the late nineteenth century, as the ruins mellowed into the landscape, the aesthetic experience shifted from one of harsh reality to a romantic imagery. A romantic-gothic interpretation of the penal era was also current in the tragic tale of Rufus Dawes, epitomised in the novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874). The story which included horror and violence as well as a love story was narrated through different types of media including a stage play (1886) and a film (1908), extending interest to a wider public and symbolising the struggle of the human spirit against the direst conditions which epitomises a national Australian identity (Tranter and Donoghoe, 2007).

By the early twentieth century Port Arthur was established as a tourist destination, offering scheduled transport and several hotels for visitors (Young, 1996). Innovations which took place included the development of a tourist product through network of private entrepreneurs who provided the necessary services. There was also a shift in paradigm during this wave as the visitor experience evolved from contemporary horror and sensationalism into romanticism and an imagined heritage tinged with pity for the mass of convicts who had been incarcerated (Beattie, 1913). Changes in position and process were evident as the market expanded beyond an intrastate to an interstate visitor cohort, based on better access and easily accessible information in the form of official guidebooks. The use of stage and film media to tell the story reached a wider audience and shifted the delivery modes for knowledge about the story of the site.

Wave two began in approximately 1935 and ran until 1976. By 1935 The majority of the population had either been born after, or they were immigrants who had arrived after, the convict era had ended, there were very few people remaining who had first hand knowledge of convicts.

Port Arthur had a recognised role in national identity, but needed interpretation to explain its relevance in the broader national story (Maddern, 2005, Richards and Wilson, 2006, Tranter and Donoghue, 2007, Strange,

2000). Heroes were early settlers, seen as pioneers forging a new nation, similar to those in America (Tranter and Donoghue, 2007). The defining principle of Australian heroism was 'mateship', reflected in the early settlers and later in the Australian soldier (Smith, 1955).

A new version of the movie *For the Term of His Natural Life*, filmed on location in Port Arthur in 1927, and the first on-site museum of convict curios plus the Port Arthur room at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart (The Mercury Newspaper, May 1935) encouraged a renewed interest in convict history. Common-use objects (Wouters, 2009) which were no longer recognised as being everyday (Gunn, 1997) were included in the collections.

In 1935 the Church at Port Arthur celebrated its Centenary, promoted as Australia's only bona fide ruin, idealised as a picturesque folly set within the natural scenery. Guidebooks described Port Arthur as 'the ancient penal establishment' (Tasmania for the Tourist, 1930). In the 1930's and 1940's some Port Arthur buildings were purchased for preservation, due to their historic associations and corresponding value for tourism. The 1950's and 1960's were a period during which little changed at Port Arthur. It became a popular destination for coach tours and campers who not only visited the ruins, but used the site for other recreational pastimes. In 1972 the National Parks and Wildlife Service took over the Management of Port Arthur commissioning a Management Plan which included a section about Interpretation. The aim was to raise funds for conservation and preservation based on the importance Port Arthur held for national identity and the history of Australia.

The third wave started in 1976 and is continuing through the present day. Between 1979 and 1986 the Port Arthur Conservation Project was initiated, this involved a team of specialists including historians, archaeologists, conservation specialists, with task of conserving and preserving the buildings and grounds of Port Arthur, creating a heritage product and positioning it into a niche market segment. In 1980 an

alternative draft management plan was commissioned, causing consternation by placing conservation needs in precedence over tourism interests, the main outcome was that in 1986, in order to charge an entry fee, the site became enclosed, and the people who had lived and worked in Port Arthur were moved out. Port Arthur became a 'sacred place' based on its historic importance and value for national identity (Tranter and Donoghue, 2007). When Port Arthur was a prison there were no walls, today the heritage site is bounded by a fence. In 1987, the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority was appointed to take charge.

On 28 April 1996 a new episode was written into the history of Port Arthur when it became the site of the world's worst peace time massacre. Thirty-five people were murdered either at Port Arthur or in the nearby area. There is very little interpretation of the event, a note in the brochure asks people not to question staff about the massacre. This unexpected event acted as a catalyst for innovation with the building of a new visitor centre and a new interpretation which attempted to put the stories of individual convicts into a contemporary frame. Commandants and their role are mentioned only briefly. In 2009 the Model Prison was reinterpreted using the atmosphere and ambience of the place, to provide a sensory experience for visitors where only whispered sounds can be heard from the closed cells. The designed experience today is an attempt to construct an image of the past showing the positive outcomes of the penal system and how convicts lived a better life following their reformation.

The innovations introduced during the third wave have been radical. The story of Port Arthur has been changed from one of horror to one of reform shifting the basic paradigm. The interpretation is participatory and sensory sparking the imaginations of visitors while creating personal connections between the place and the individual. The interpretation is not prescriptive but multi-layered, enabling individuals to follow their own interests at the site, making the experience personal and unique.

In conclusion, innovation occurs at heritage tourist attractions through the constant reinterpretation of the core story if the place is to remain relevant to a continually evolving audience. Social perceptions change over time, based on external influences. Consequently, the meanings and values symbolised by heritage places also change, driving further reinterpretation and innovation. The outcome of interpretation is the visitor experience which is unique and personal based on the co-production between visitor and operator. Research and development are valuable sources of new knowledge which expand the core assets and which can provide the impetus for innovation.

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