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Historic buildings and the creation of experiencescapes: looking to the past for future success

Richard Tresidder and Emmie Louise Deakin

Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to identify the role that the creative re-use of historic buildings can play in the future development of the experiences economy. The aesthetic attributes and the imbued historic connotation associated with the building help create unique and extraordinary “experiencescapes” within the contemporary tourism and hospitality industries.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This paper provides a conceptual insight into the creative re-use of historic buildings in the tourism and hospitality sectors, the work draws on two examples of re-use in the UK.*

Findings – *This work demonstrates how the creative re-use of historic buildings can help create experiences that are differentiated from the mainstream hospitality experiences. It also identifies that it adds an additional unquantifiable element that enables the shift to take place from servicescape to experiencescape.*

Originality/value – *There has been an ongoing debate as to the significance of heritage in hospitality and tourism. However, this paper provides an insight into how the practical re-use of buildings can help companies both benefit from and contribute to the experiences economy.*

Keywords *Experiencescapes, Tourism, Hospitality, Historic buildings, Experiences economy, Architecture*

Paper type *Viewpoint*

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Introduction

The future of experiential travel relies on the continuous creation of innovative and unique experiences for tourists. When participating in the meaning-making process, people are still drawn to the heritage of destinations and this contributes to their understanding of both the present and future. The contribution of history and heritage to the future development of tourism has been well developed in this journal and was the focus of several authors in two Special Editions in 2017 “The future of city tourism” (Postma *et al.*, 2017; Postma and Schmuecker, 2017) and, in 2018 “History of tourism” (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2018; Richard, 2018). When looking forward in the tourism industry we also often must look backwards, as the past contains a rich vein of resources upon which contemporary and future experiences can be based. The stock of disused or redundant historic buildings around the world provides an opportunity to create spaces that can offer unique and differentiated tourism and hospitality experiences for the experiential traveller. As such, historic buildings remain a valuable resource in the experience economy by enabling tourism and hospitality organisations to create distinctive “experiencescapes” that enhance the experiential aspect of tourism and hospitality products (Fuste-Forne, 2017; Matson-Barkat and Robert-Demontrond, 2018).

The development of successful “experiencescapes” requires more than just developing an effective and efficient servicescape. It can be argued that experiencescapes are in fact “servicescapes+”, this paper explores what constitutes this “+” and how the re-use of historic buildings for contemporary tourism and hospitality usage can be used to create contemporary experiencescapes and the opportunity for future tourism developments and sustainability of

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buildings (Postma *et al.*, 2017; Postma and Schmuecker, 2017). Creative re-use is demonstrated in this paper by drawing on two unique and successful hospitality spaces; the Pitcher & Piano in Nottingham, UK (www.pitcherandpiano.com/where-are-we/nottingham) and the Malmaison Hotel in Oxford, UK (www.malmaison.com/locations/oxford/). The Malmaison was completed in 2006, has 86 bedrooms and is located in the former Oxford Jail which closed in 1987; it has won a number of prestigious architectural awards for its innovative design and use of space (ADP-Architecture, 2019). The castle was originally built by Robert D'Oilly, friend to William the Conqueror and has been home to kings, sheriffs and, latterly, convicts. The castle was subject to a £45m regeneration project in 2000 and is now the home to a Heritage and Education Centre, Various Commercial Premises, Apartments and various public spaces as well as the Malmaison Hotel (Oxford Preservation Trust, 2019). The Pitcher & Piano in the Lace Market area of Nottingham is in the deconsecrated Old High Pavement Unitarian Church, the church was built in 1876 in the Neo-Gothic style. However, by the Millennium it had fallen into disrepair, it was first converted to a Pitcher & Piano in 2006 before being refurbished in 2014 (National Design Academy, 2014).

Both buildings offer spaces that are differentiated from the mainstream hospitality product by virtue of their former uses, and unique architectural characteristics. Before being converted into hospitality spaces both buildings were disused, were falling into disrepair and were on the Historic England at risk register. What these two buildings demonstrate is how the creative re-use of historic buildings can contribute to the experience economy by offering distinctive spaces in which the contemporary tourism and hospitality industries can flourish while also allowing for a sustainable approach to portfolio development.

From servicescapes to experiencescapes

The idea of a servicescape has been well developed within tourism and hospitality studies (Otto and Ritchie, 1996; Turley and Fugate, 1992). However, over the past decade, there has been a shift in the language utilised which reflects a move in tourism and hospitality studies to discuss the concept of experiencescapes. O'Dell (2005) defines experiencescape as a place where human interactions, pleasure, entertainment and enjoyment can occur to create an experience. On the other hand, authors such as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003) and Binkhorst and Dekker (2009) have identified that the experiencescape is co-created and is a result of visitor interactions. These definitions do not acknowledge the significance that the buildings play in elevating servicescapes to a higher or extraordinary level. Although Willson and McIntosh (2007) go some of the way to identifying the role historic buildings can play in forming what may be termed experiencescapes, their work does not explore how buildings can create future experiences for the experiential traveller. Yet, despite the ongoing debate in hospitality and tourism studies the phrases servicescapes and experiencescapes appear to be interchangeable and often used without a clear understanding of the difference between the two concepts.

The two examples utilised in this paper demonstrate how the development of imaginative hospitality experiences can take place in historic buildings, they draw on something that is intangible, but is linked somehow to an aesthetic that creates a unique experience that cannot be duplicated. The Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison can be thought of as offering a "servicescape+" that transforms tourism and hospitality spaces into extraordinary experiencescapes. For the purpose of this paper, servicescapes are the material representations of the tourism or hospitality product, that is, the design of the hotel, restaurant or tourist attraction (Matson-Barkat and Robert-Demontrond, 2018; Blumenthal and Jensen, 2019), its décor, music, art, the clothing of staff (Jernsand *et al.*, 2015), their behaviour, the level of formality of service and the link to particular cultures, times or societies (Tresidder, 2015).

In terms of understanding how these unique spaces have been created, it is important to blend two seminal pieces of work that have informed the way in which we use and understand spaces within the tourism and hospitality sectors in conjunction with the "+" factor. Kotler (1973) explored the intentional control and structuring of environmental cues and how these impacted upon customer's perception of the space and their subsequent behaviour (Turley and Milliman, 2000; Turley and Chebat, 2002). Kotler (1973) explored these atmospheric cues in terms of the senses (i.e. visuals, smells and touch), these cues are of importance for the tourism and hospitality

industries in their search to create unique experiences. From Bitner's (1992) seminal work on the environmental dimensions of retail atmospherics, it is possible to draw three elements that form important parts of any experiencescape. These are:

1. ambient conditions (lighting, temperature, etc.);
2. space (layout, design, flow, etc.); and
3. the signs, symbols and artefacts that are used to provide context and meaning to the experience.

What Kotler (1973) and Bitner (1992) both contribute to this debate is they recognise the significance of the multidimensional attributes a space must possess to have meaning within a specific consumption context. This view was quickly adopted by tourism and hospitality academics (Getz *et al.*, 1994; Otto and Ritchie, 1996) as a means to understand how the performance aspect of the host/guest interaction was developed. Within both tourism and hospitality, the servicescape must transport the guest to another time and space that is different to their everyday lived experiences. As can be seen from Plates 1 and 2, both sites adopt an aesthetic that helps to create

Plate 1 The Pitcher & Piano, Nottingham, UK

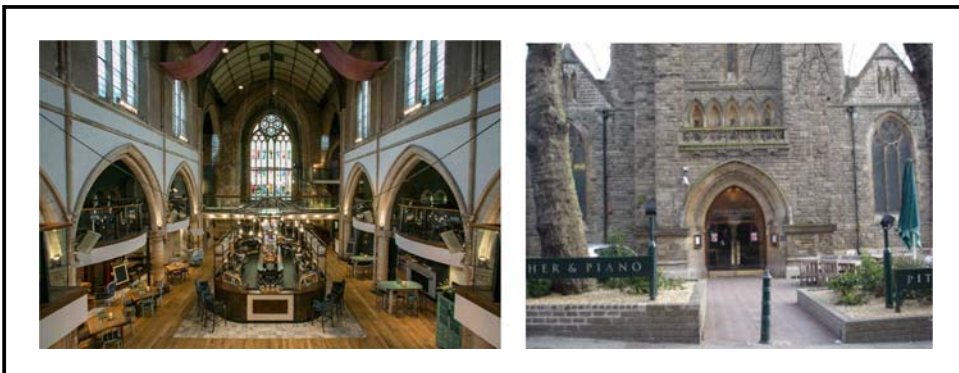
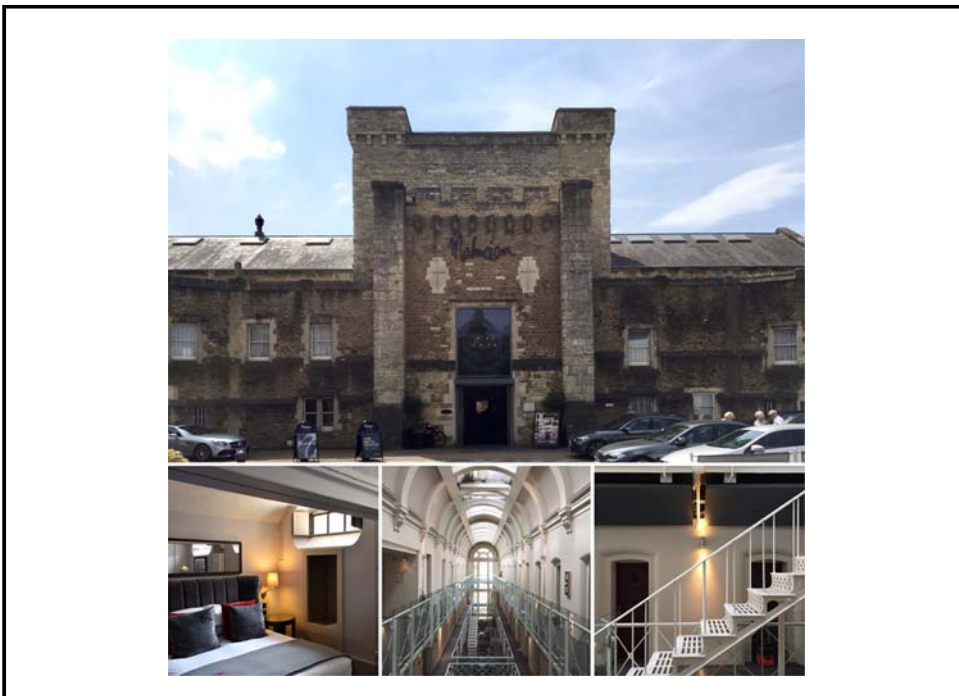


Plate 2 Malmaison, Oxford, UK



a hospitality orientated space. The mixture of light, original form, function and design which affords the space informs how guests negotiate the experience. In short, the building influences the way in which the guest's approach engages with and interprets the proffered experience. At a simplistic level, both the Malmaison and the Pitcher & Piano are buildings that have been converted from one use to another, and utilise a servicescape that allows them to function as a hotel or bar, yet it can be argued that the feelings, ambience and intangible characteristic create a "+" factor, that both heightens and creates unique and extraordinary experiences. If the design and use of space was transplanted into a modern building, the significance would be lost. It is the combination of atmospheric cues (Ballantine *et al.*, 2010); environmental dimensions and the aesthetics of the historic building that help create unique contemporary experiencescapes.

The role of experiencescapes

In accepting that an experiencescape is a "servicescape+", it is important to understand the role they play in communicating and creating the tourism or hospitality product. Building on the work of Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Hemmington (2007) identifies how companies that can capture an essence of theatre, performance and generosity within their product gain a competitive advantage by providing their guests with experiences that are personal, memorable and add value to their lives (Kozinets *et al.*, 2004). The impact of creating effective experiencescapes can also be contextualised within Licciardi and Amirtahmasebi's (2012) identification of how developments such as the Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison can both contribute to, and benefit from, engaging with "the economics of uniqueness". Within the portfolio of hospitality businesses owned by Marston's, they have developed a distinctive sub-brand that they identify as Destination and Premium Premises. These hotel, bars and restaurants are located within distinctive buildings and locations. In a challenging financial climate, Marston (2018) has increased the number of these Destination and Premium Premises in the UK, of which the Pitcher & Piano forms part, with underlying revenue increasing from £202.6m in 2017 to £210.7m in 2018. Likewise, in a crowded market place, the Malmaison in Oxford has an occupancy rate of approximately 90 per cent in 2017 (Oxford City Council 2018).

The concept of the experiencescape is more than an academic construct; it is an important aspect in creating successful and differentiated tourism and hospitality experiences. It is possible to think of experiencescapes as "commercially staged experiences" (Chronis *et al.*, 2012) that supplements to the experience or consumption of the tourism or hospitality product. For example in the case of Malmaison, at the basic level it provides a place to sleep, eat and drink, it fulfils the same function as any other hotel; however, its conversion from prison to hotel was undertaken in a sympathetic manner so that the building provides comfort while keeping its uniqueness. From interviews by the authors of this paper with the developers, they were keen not to raise, for example, the height of doorways as requested by some potential hotel companies as they felt such structural changes would negatively impact upon the aesthetic of the building and the experience being generated. Consequently, their search for a tenant focused on companies such as Malmaison rather than other large chains who would have required that the buildings met their company standardisation of design, room dimensions and facilities. It was felt by the developers that Malmaison's brand image and previous investment in unusual or historic buildings within the boutique hotel sector made them the perfect partners.

Both the Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison utilise buildings that may have negative, experiential, ethical or even theological connotations for some customers and as such may not appeal to all consumers. Yet for many, they offer creative liminal spaces in which people can find meaning "in the world" (McCracken, 1989) through engaging with differentiated experiences. Although experiencescapes are created by developers, designers, architects and tourism or hospitality companies (Jernsand *et al.*, 2015), the success of these rely upon how individual customers negotiate or mediate (Aurier *et al.*, 2005) them. As such, experiencescapes through their usage and host/guest interactions become a site of joint cultural production (see Peñaloza, 2000; Kozinets *et al.*, 2004), or in other words, are co-created. However, the experience will differ according to each consumer according to their available resources (Tresidder, 2011). For example, the consumption, negotiation and interpretation of Malmaison by customers can be influenced by many factors including their relationship to Oxford, previous experience with the penal system or, through various television programmes for which it has been used as a filming location, for example

the British crime drama *Lewis*. The historic nature of a building and its design aesthetics generate various market place meanings (Thompson and Hayto, 1997; Arnould and Thompson, 2005) that are negotiated by consumers, thus experiencescapes will not have the same meaning for every consumer, and can be seen as offering, “[...] polysemic symbolic resources that allow for significant variation in consumer interpretation and use [...]” (Holt, 1998, p. 334).

It is possible to think of the design of experiencescapes as an example of communicative staging; this idea has been developed by Arnould *et al.* (1998), who identify it as an important part of the marketing offer. Simultaneously, communicative staging can also be seen as an important part and example of Hemmington’s (2007) idea of performance. Historic buildings often provide spaces that can be re-used in creative ways and the architectural characteristics of the building such as high stained glass windows as in the case of the Pitcher & Piano, or, the regular rhythm of windows at Malmaison, which all contribute to a distinctive aesthetic. Subsequently, architectural and aesthetic features offer creative stages in which exceptional tourism and hospitality experiences can be developed. As can be seen from Plate 1, the Piano and Pitcher has managed to keep all the original ecclesiastical architectural characteristics of the building. They have preserved the essence of the church by incorporating some innovative building processes, for example introducing a frame that sits within the church but does not touch the walls or interfere with the windows and the light that emanates from them. This fits in with the conservation principle of minimum intervention where the minimum of historic fabric is removed from the historic building as is possible, and also provides a unique use of space that in turn generates an extraordinary experiencescape. However, we must not forget that communicative staging includes all communicative items that help constitute a servicescape and includes examples such as menu boards, interpretation boards, images (Matson-Barkat and Robert-Demontrond, 2018) and staff or employees (Bitner, 1992). In terms of personal interactions between the host and the guest, communicative staging can range from a highly scripted and commercial performance, to a more flexible and authentic dialogue. Not only do service delivery personnel bring the experience and the environment to life for participants through narrative framing and storytelling, but they also act to make it safe and magical (Arnould and Price, 1993). The staff in organisations help guide the customers in terms of co-creating experiences.

Although these aspects go some of the way to understanding experiencescapes, it is important to think how the “+” element is added to servicescapes. As can be seen from the two examples presented within this paper, the creative re-use of historic buildings adds an additional factor that can only be generated by the feelings the buildings generate. Building on the work of Kotler (1973) and Kim and Moon (2009) in identifying the significance of the senses in the retail environment, it is possible to argue that the tourism and hospitality industry has created a multi-sensual language of experience (formed from design cues and embedded hegemonic ideas of what constitutes successful tourism and hospitality experiences). These design cues are utilised in the marketing and development of hospitality and tourism experiences that is understood by consumers (Tresidder, 2011; Tresidder, 2015), and that this language directly underpins the construction of experiencescapes. Both the Piano and Pitcher and Malmaison utilise this language of hospitality; however, its negotiation and interpretation are contextualised by the buildings themselves. Subsequently, it is conceivable not just to think about how experiencescapes are defined by their décor, design or theme, but also how they impact upon the consumer’s senses and how meaning is constructed for them and communicated to them.

The experiencescape as a sensual construct

As identified above, experiencescapes provide a multi-sensual experience, whereby the consumer becomes immersed in a set of formulated experiences that reinforce the positive impact of the tourism/hospitality experience (Blumenthal and Jensen, 2019). It is possible to identify two different approaches to the utilisation of sensual incorporation in the sector; the first can be defined as “explicit incorporation” where the extraordinariness of the experience is based around sensual strategies. Examples of this include tourist attractions such as the Jorvik Viking Centre in the UK (<http://jorvik-viking-centre.co.uk>) where the smells and noises of Viking York are pumped into the attraction, thus creating a multi-sensual tourist experience. The Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison both offer examples of “implicit incorporation”, although still creating an intriguing

and extraordinary experiencescape it involves a more subtle strategy, where the feeling, ambiance or aesthetic of the building informs the experience. This is created by both the servicescape and the way in which light, space and the heritage collectively influence the nature of the hospitality performance and the way guests interpret it. Both the implicit and explicit incorporation of sensual strategies contribute to the transactional experiences of consumers (Trauer and Ryan, 2005). As Chronis *et al.* (2012, p. 263) comment:

[...] human perception privileges sensations felt through the body, they conceive imagination too as steeped in embodied perception. For them, perception is a synthetic experience. Consumers grasp the world directly through their multiple senses and by imaginary modes of embodiment.

The significance of senses in contributing to tourism and hospitality experiences is well charted (Pan and Ryan, 2009; Low, 2005; Law, 2001); however, little research has been undertaken in understanding the nature of the building and servicescapes in driving consumers interaction with sites. Nevertheless, Dann and Jacobsen (2003, p. 19) made a positive step forward by challenging the primacy gaze orientated research within the tourism field by offering an insight into the importance of multi-sensual strategies. As they state:

[...] the successful tourist destination, which otherwise could be regarded as something of a hybrid and living anachronism, blending ancient with post-modern, now can be the winning formula, precisely because it does not rely on sight alone.

Tourism and hospitality servicescapes offer a certain form of experience; however, it can be argued that the “+” element is the key to continuously engage the experienced traveller, this requires an understanding of how guests use their senses to negotiate tourism and hospitality experiences. In exploring the complexity of the relationship between senses and servicescapes and linking the consumer’s experiences to touch, smell, feel, etc., experiencescapes are largely multi-sensual, in trying to understand the significance of this, it is worth considering Sutton’s (2010, p. 217) concept of “synesthesia”. Synesthesia encompasses the notion that senses do not operate in isolation, but rather that they operate in relation with all the other senses. The significance of this is important when attempting to define and comprehend the multi-sensual experience offered in the experiencescapes of tourism and hospitality. For instance, Pan and Ryan (2009) identify the multisensory nature of tourism and its significance to the contemporary tourist. Senses have always been an important part of tourism, we can chart this back to Baudelaire’s (1863/1964) notion of the “flâneur” and the idea of exploring the city through a heightened sensual awareness of the environment. According to Biehl-Missal (2013), we need to consider the impact senses have on our understanding of the world and how it influences our behaviour. She states that we gather “[...] aesthetic experiences through our five senses create an embodied, tacit knowing that [...] can influence behavior” (2013, p. 5). The heightened experiences that are generated by historic buildings such as Malmaison and the Pitcher & Piano contribute to why people choose to visit these two sites over others. They offer a hospitality product (food, drink or accommodation) that does not differ from their competitors; however, the building differentiates the experience and elevates it to the extraordinary.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, when looking forward it is important not to forget the past. Every country has a stock of disused historic buildings, whether they be castles, prisons, churches, factories or warehouses; all of these provide the opportunity for companies to create unique and extraordinary experiencescapes that can draw from and contribute to “the economics of uniqueness”. The relationship between the experiencescapes of tourism and hospitality upon the behaviour and perception of the experience by guests cannot be underestimated. It is possible to think of the servicescape+ not only as a design exercise, but also as a psychological one that stimulates and engages consumers’ senses. Both the Pitcher & Piano and Malmaison offer a stage that elevates the hospitality experience to a higher level; this is achieved not through the menu or levels of service, but the context in which their product is delivered. It is difficult to really identify what historic buildings contribute and it is even more difficult to quantify it; however, the only thing that we are certain of is that they add something intangible to the tourism and hospitality experiences that elevate them to the level of the extraordinary. What these historically important sites achieve is to

create settings in which the experiential tourists can find something different from the mainstream; the consumption of these experiences attracts elevated levels of cultural capital that is traded with friends, family or peers. The ability to continually create unique experiences is not only important for the experiential tourist but also to continually generate new experiences for tourists.

The uniqueness of historical buildings and their role in forming extraordinary experiencescapes provides a supply of destinations or touristic resources for the experiential traveller, they reflect regional or geographic differentiation, and offer an aesthetic experience that cannot be replicated by a newly built attraction or hotel. Consequently, what we can be certain of is that the use of the resources from our past provides opportunities to create experiences that transcend time and secure the future not only for the buildings but also for tourism and hospitality companies, cities and other destinations. The creative re-use of historic building offers companies the ability to differentiate themselves in a crowded market place, to gain a competitive advantage, to contribute to the protection and conservation of national heritage and most importantly to create unique experiencescapes. Sometimes the future relies on the past! As Bob Marley and Ford (1974) once said:

In this bright future you can't forget your past.

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