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# Sense of place at a British coastal resort: Exploring 'seasideness' in Morecambe

## Abstract

*This paper considers the tourist's sense of place as experienced at Morecambe, Lancashire; it is concerned with emotional connections and reactions to place. This struggling traditional British seaside resort has seen the ebb and flow of visitors over the years and more recently regeneration. The qualitative research that underpins this paper consisted interviews with 55-74 year old repeat visitors from the North of England, reflecting the resort's visitor demographics. This paper therefore reflects a perspective rather than the views of a wider population. The interviews reveal the important role of the sea and seascape to these visitors, this coastal environment lies at the heart of their sense of place. It facilitated a distinctive experience which centred around the inter-related themes of nostalgia, wellness and spirituality. Exposure to the open space of the seafront allowed a connection to something more substantial and enduring than themselves; this was considered thought provoking, uplifting and even spiritual. The respondents valued their seaside visits and perceived them as enjoyable, beneficial and a part of their identity. The tradition of seaside visits was part of their childhood, family narrative and something to be shared with children and grandchildren now and into the future. Their attachment to Morecambe fed into a positive sense of place, referred to here as seasideness, which relied on the distinctive socio-cultural and physical elements of the resort.*

**Key words:** *tourism; seaside; seasideness; sense of place, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA); Morecambe; UK.*

## Introduction

There is now a variety of research into the British seaside resort, involving histories (Walton, 2000), environment (Hassan, 2003) and economy (Beatty & Fothergill, 2003) however, an understanding of the modern day seaside visitor's sense of place remains relatively unexplored. Indeed Tunstall and Penning-Rowsell (1998, p.331) suggested that future, "Qualitative research with in-depth interviews or discussion groups would deepen our understanding of individuals' lifelong experiences of coasts, and the meanings they attach to them". This research attempts to address this in relation to Morecambe, a traditional and medium sized resort which has faced many challenges in recent times and which is introduced in more depth at a later point in this paper. In the late twentieth century the British seaside was often associated with decline as many of its resorts lost visitors to other attractions and destinations in an increasingly competitive, diverse, expanding and international tourism industry; the resorts were increasingly considered less extraordinary and slid down the leisure spaces hierarchy (Urry, 1997). Nevertheless these resorts have also proven to be resilient social constructions that continue to draw

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domestic visitors (Lancaster City Council, 2011; Walton, 2000). Over the last fifteen years Morecambe has benefitted from a new promenade adorned with statues and a restored Modernist hotel; it has staged a modest recovery from the lows of the late-twentieth century. Nevertheless Morecambe's future as a destination remains in the balance and it is therefore important to consider the visitor experience.

This research investigates the experiences of 55 to 74 year old repeat visitors from the North of England, the very demographic that has stayed loyal to the resort over recent decades and still visit the resort in significant numbers (Gibson, Crawford & Geddes, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with visitors who matched this profile, so this paper explores their perspective rather than represent a wider population of domestic visitors. Morecambe, like most other traditional British resorts, never attracted significant numbers of international tourists (which may well reflect the international availability of beach holidays) and so this research considers domestic visitors. In purposively considering a narrow and well defined group of visitors, this research aligns with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an approach to qualitative enquiry that is employed in the analysis of this research. This paper provides an overview of the main themes to emerge from this process and explores the relationships between them; in doing so it offers an insight into the nature of seasideness (sense of place at the seaside) based on this work in Morecambe. Before these themes and their significance can be explored further, it is necessary to consider issues surrounding sense of place.

## Sense of place at the seaside

The Existential and Phenomenological Humanistic Geography of the 1970s and 1980s played a vital role in the discussion of place and sense of place, it put "human consciousness, feeling, thoughts and emotions at the center of geographical thinking" (Cresswell, 2013, p. 109). Notably, Tuan's work considers the interplay between space, place and time. He focused upon experience which is a "cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality" (Tuan, 1977, p. 8) and individuals experience Topophilia through a strong affinity to place (Tuan, 1974). Despite advances in Human Geography, the Humanistic approach still offers a valuable understanding of events and experiences considered meaningful to humans; it can reveal the texture of place (Adams, Hoelscher & Till, 2001). In the 1990s Massey saw the Humanistic view of place as reactionary because it was bounded and associated with singular identities; instead she suggested that places are relational (Massey, 1997). Humanistic Geography came to be seen as insufficiently ideographic and the debate surrounding the contested terms of place and space moved on; a variety of different approaches developed such as Radical Cultural, Feminist, Poststructuralist as well as Relational Geographies. In recent years much critical debate of place has centred on the writings of Ingold, Casey and Deleuze in particular (Cresswell, 2013). In basic terms contemporary Human Geography considers place(s) to be diverse, conflicted and above all constructed; this is acknowledged by this study which focuses on sense of place.

The Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) website offers a useful non-academic definition of sense of place:

*The term "Sense of Place" is often used to describe your feelings for a place, and the elements that make that place special to you – it may be memories of past visits, views, sounds, people, tastes, even the smell of the place! (Forest of Bowland AONB, n/d).*

The focus in this quote is on experience and the individual's reaction to the physical environment, which is a component of many academic definitions of sense of place and are broadly in line with the focus of Environmental Psychology (Steele, 1981; Gifford, 2013). In general Geographers consider sense of place to be the subjective and emotional relationship between people and place (Agnew, 1987; Cresswell, 2015). However this is usually in terms of both the individual and wider society/culture, it "is more than an emotional and cognitive experience, and includes cultural beliefs and practices that link people to place" (Low, 1992, p. 165). So senses of places are "products of the creative imagination of the individual and society" (Ashworth & Graham, 2005, p. 4). The study of place is multi-disciplinary and can be approached in a number of different ways but these definitions suffice for purposes of this paper, which focuses on an overarching sense of place as experienced by visitors and accepts that both personal experience and cultural factors be influences. This paper deliberately avoids breaking sense of place down into to the inter-related concepts of place-identity, place-attachment or place-dependence (for more on these see Ashworth, Graham & Tunbridge, 2007; Cresswell, 2015; Low & Altman, 1992). For these concepts, whilst distinguishable from each other, are fluid dimensions of a more general sense of place (Jorgenson & Stedman, 2001). Instead this paper dedicates itself to identifying the range of specific themes which form sense of place, based on interviews with visitors. Previous studies have considered sense of place at tourism places (Stedman, Beckley, Wallace & Ambard, 2004) and some of these have concerned themselves with the visitor's sense of place (Kianicka, Buchecker, Hunziker & Müller-Böker, 2006; Smaldone, 2006). Nevertheless sense of place amongst modern day visitors to traditional British seaside resorts is little studied.

A number of academics have part explained the British seaside's sense of place through liminality or the carnivalesque (Chapman & Light, 2014; Gilchrist, Carter & Burdsey, 2014; Shields, 1991; Webb, 2005). This is just one reading of the seaside; since industrialisation this place has hosted the healthy seaside and other versions of the seaside in which social-actors play their part (Baerenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen & Urry, 2004; Shields, 1991). Walton (2000) points out the contemporary tendency for seaside nostalgia against a simplistic and media-fuelled background narrative of widespread decline amongst British seaside resorts. One can of course contrast all these interpretations to pre-renaissance views of the shoreline – it was often considered a disgusting boundary and best avoided (Corbin, 1995). The evolution of the modern seaside from this medieval view involves advent of natural theology, romantic poets and industrialisation / urbanisation. Modern urban man now seeks to re-connect to an idealised version of the coast, from which he has become increasingly isolated over the last two hundred years or so (Corbin, 1995; Gillis, 2012). All of these observations point towards the seaside as a place which has hosted, and indeed still hosts, a wide variety of meanings. However the focus of this research is not a historic review of seaside cultures or a comparison between resorts, rather it is a contemporary place based case-study with a focus on a particular market. Therefore any further discussion of relevant literature will be in relation to the specific themes identified by this research in the *discussion of results* section. Before this, the research methods and Morecambe itself are introduced.

## Research method

The overall aim of this research is to consider the aforementioned inter-connected meanings that make up seasideness, as experienced by the modern day visitor to Morecambe. This paper centers on research

completed in 2013. Semi-structured visitor interviews, utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (or IPA), were conducted. In Geographic circles phenomenology was once associated with Humanistic Geographers but it is now employed by other Geographers, for example those concerned with non-representational theory (Cresswell, 2013).

IPA is primarily an “approach to qualitative inquiry” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 1); it was established within the discipline of psychology and remains under-utilized within the qualitative domain of tourism studies. It is a systematic form of data analysis that lends itself to particular forms of data collection and approaches to sampling, notably in-depth semi-structured interviews (Howitt, 2010; Howitt & Cramer, 2011; Shaw, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2009; Smith & Osbourn, 2008). IPA allows the texture of individual experience to be revealed; it is a two stage process combining empathic and questioning hermeneutics (Smith & Osborn, 2008). It aims to *get inside the respondent’s head* and gain the insider’s perspective as much as possible (it is phenomenological), whilst accepting that this is never fully achievable as it relies on the researcher (it is interpretative). The sample of ten was chosen to reflect Smith *et al.*’s (2009) observation that the ideal IPA sample is small, homogeneous and will find the research question meaningful. Indeed, within IPA purposive homogeneous sampling is vital, if one is to probe with sufficient depth to represent a specific perspective or type of experience, as opposed to a population.

In this study the sample of ten participants were identified through information from an earlier pilot study. Namely a self-completed questionnaire, distributed to cafes, hotels and a gift shop in Morecambe, which was completed by 201 visitors but otherwise does not contribute to this paper. Clear criteria are needed to enable purposive screening and the selection of appropriate cases (Gratton & Jones, 2004). The sample was decided through the following three screens: aged 55 to 74 years, resided in the North of England and were repeat visitors to Morecambe. These screens were informed by the *average* visitor in terms of demographics and visiting habits, according to the aforementioned pilot study and Morecambe based visitor research carried out for the public sector (Gibson *et al.*, 2008).

The interviewees were asked about their experiences and motivations as visitors to Morecambe. Interviewees were put at ease to build their confidence before conducting the interview; for instance location was decided by the interviewee, often at their home but sometimes in a seemingly neutral setting such as a café. The interviews tended to last over an hour and were all recorded and fully transcribed verbatim. This paper constitutes a discussion of the main themes that emerged from these interviews. The conclusion of this paper includes a diagram that attempts to summarise and clarify the themes (see Figure 1), whereas the discussion of findings section includes a selection of quotes from the interviewees that illustrate these themes. These quotes are in italics in order to avoid confusion with any other quotations.

## Morecambe

The focus of this research is Morecambe, a traditional seaside resort in Lancashire, North West England, with a population of 39,000. It developed as a resort in the nineteenth century and expanded rapidly in the early twentieth century. The second half of century was quite another story; in the decades following a post-war boom decline started to set in. The once popular resort went on to experience a

dramatic fall in numbers and a sustained loss of attractions, touristic infrastructure and reputation. By the early 1980s it was very clear that the resort's tourism economy had been transformed, "Morecambe suffered a calamitous fall in visitor spending from £46.6 million in 1973 to £6.5 million in 1990, expressed in constant values. Few resorts have suffered such a collapse" (Hassan, 2003, p. 254). For some years now a number of British seaside towns, especially traditionally working-class ones such as Morecambe, "are no longer fashionable, they do not signify good taste" (Urry, 1997, p. 103). Morecambe was known as the "Costa Geriatrica" due to the high average age of its visitors and suffered a serious image problem (Bingham, 1990, p. 273). Furthermore Morecambe came to be associated with range of social-economic problems with deprivation at their core (Bingham, 1990). All too often British seaside resorts today suffer deprivation relative to other towns (Centre for Social Justice, 2013; Office for National Statistics, 2013). Nevertheless the late 1990s saw a partial recovery in terms of tourism from the lows of the 1980s, as parts of the resort and especially the promenade saw regeneration.

British seaside resorts are a resilient social construction and have a long tradition of re-invention (Walton, 2000; Ward & Hardy, 1986). For approximately twenty years visitor numbers have modestly and steadily increased (Lancaster City Council, 2011; Trotman, 2007) and the destination Midland hotel was reopened by Urban Splash in 2008, to become a beacon of hope for the resort. Even the author of the Morecambe inspired *Crap Towns* book of 2003 concedes that the resort has much improved in recent years (Jordison, 2012). Yet some have pointed out that recovery in Morecambe has lost any momentum in the aftermath of the economic crisis and it is in a state of limbo (Harris & Domokos, 2011). The resort makes an interesting case study because it appears on the cusp of a stalled potential reinvention, its future seems uncertain. The underlying appeal of the seaside at Morecambe, touristic sense of place and associated meanings are far from clear. The choice of case study can be justified simply because, from the perspective of modern day tourism, this case has yet to be studied in any detail (Yin, 2014).

## Discussion of findings

Seasideness primarily comprises of three themes, which emerged from this Morecambe based research. This section explores each theme in turn, before considering their inter-relationships in the conclusion. The themes are:

- The role of the sea: the perceived characteristics of the sea and coast which underpin the appeal of this place.
- Wellness which includes the spiritual draw of the coast as well as belief that a visit to the seaside is good for you.
- Nostalgia which in this case particularly focusses on childhood.

### The role of the sea: A place to experience space and expanded thought

The sea dominates the seaside experience of these visitors to an extent where it dominates sense of place. The environment on the coastal strip at Morecambe with its open vistas was considered natural and associated with spaciousness. The specific characteristics of the sea identified by interviewees were

those of scale or vastness, power, timelessness and an aesthetic appreciation as demonstrated in these quotes from different interviews:

*You're just like a tiny little speck and a wave and all these huge rollers coming in and different tides and, you know, it does make you feel, you know creation, well to me I just feel it's very peaceful and, you know, sort of quite awesome really.*

*...And to be able to look at something that is unchanging, and for all intents and purposes will always be like that, maybe it's a little bit... has a calming effect, you know, to see that something won't change. Mankind's changing so much.*

*But I think it's also the fact that you look across that bay, particularly on a summer's evening when the sun's going down, and, and it's over the bay and there's such beautiful sunsets and beautiful views that you can't help but, but be, be attracted to it and can't help but be affected by it.*

The reactions to the perceived characteristics of the seaside environment were multifaceted, interconnected and centre primarily on nostalgia and wellness in their widest sense. The interviewees also had what can be generally considered to be a romantic view of this environment; they consistently brought up and discussed the sublime and timelessness. Indeed perceived timelessness, as experienced at the seaside, can be considered as a part of the truly sublime (Schopenhauer, 2010). Some of the interviewees specifically used the term sublime and all of them connected the sea views with some hidden meaning or power that might be external or internal.

The interviewees suggested that there is something deep within us that is sparked by the unchanging view. The timeless sea was considered reassuring or comforting and contrasted with pressures and challenges they faced in life. This holds clear parallels to the concept of nostalgia, which is a bitter-sweet emotion characterised by a yearning for another time (Boym, 2001). Although there was often no specific past in mind but instead a vague notion of an unending timeline stretching out like the seaside horizon. The beach and seaviews allowed the interviewees to feel that they could escape from the modern day to a place that operates on a different notion of time. Tuan (1977) writes that landscapes and seascapes appear permanent in contrast to our lifespans. Consider the words of one interviewee: *"...when we're not here they'll still be... the tide will ebb and it'll flow"*. To feel that you are outside time is attractive as it offers a sense of freedom, "open space itself is an image of hopeful time" (Tuan, 1977, p. 120). More recently Carter (2014, p. 34) points out that for many the coast is, "a place outside the space-time of late capitalism, a place to unwind, to recharge so that one is reenergized sufficiently to be able to move at the requisite pace when one returns to the realities of late capitalist modernity". Carter also reminds us that these meanings, which allow the coast to sit apart from the everyday and modernity, are a hegemonic construction. This view of the sea is notable because it underpins the other significant seaside associations and connections to arise from this research – not least spirituality.

## Spirituality and wellness: Making a connection

Spirituality varies in its nature and intensity and can even be thought of in terms of a sliding scale (Hay & Nye, 1996). In this paper the term is used in its widest secular sense as a reflection upon the self and a simultaneous holistic heightened awareness of that which is not the self - often something greater than the self. It refers to the connectedness through experiences, in this case the seaside experience.

Bachelards observed a connection between the limitlessness of the sea and the depth of “inner space within us all” (Bachelard, 1994, p. 206). Research by Dawney (2014) suggests that coastal path walkers in Dorset, England, experience a connection with nature. The walkers even felt that they were a part of nature through their visits. Such feelings of connection can take different forms. In the case of this research visitors to Morecambe felt a connection to nature or creation and linked this to feelings of well-being and spirituality in a way that Bachelard would recognise.

Morecambe is a struggling resort facing various socio-economic challenges and so the link to spiritual experience may not be immediately apparent. Yet one must remember that the main activity of these respondents, as confirmed in the interviews, was walking down the promenade and looking out to sea. A Modernist Hotel, a non-operational theatre which primarily acts as a heritage site and public parks remain as attractions but the swimming pools, summer gardens, piers, a theme park and various other attractions have disappeared during the preceding decades (Bingham, 1990; End of the ride, 2007). The mass tourism infrastructure that might be associated with fun and the Carnavalesque has faded and the renovated promenade, beach and seascape appear to be the main attractions.

The visitors all claimed that a visit to this coastal environment was restorative, it “*seems to blow the cobwebs away*” and makes them feel “*ten years younger*”. Fresh air was consistently referred to in the context of wellness as were the wide open spaces of the seaside. The holistic concept of wellness primarily refers to an overall feeling of well-being and good health; it can refer to mind, body and spirit. Yet in most cases, interviewees also experienced something beyond fresh air and felt a connection with something natural, vast and eternal which can be considered as spiritual to some extent. These experiences have been reported before in studies more concerned with wilderness experiences (Hinds, 2011). The perceived characteristics of the shoreline offered by visits to Morecambe allow an interaction into nothingness, without any impingement from the contemporary man-made world or having to make continuous, conscious decisions. Rumsey (2010, p. 13) observes that visiting the seaside brings relief because “The Sea marks the terminus of our control”. The environment allowed a certain clarity and depth of thought or encouraged a meditative state; interviewees made a connection between the sea and their consciousness. One interviewee observed:

*...I think you breathe it all in and I think just getting away into sort of nothingness is very spiritual and it does help me an awful lot, you know just to sit quietly and almost meditate where you block everything out of your mind.*

Environmental Psychologists might refer to these experiences in terms of optimum somatic arousal; apparently natural environments, such as the foreshore, offer just the right level of sensual stimulation to enable us to feel restored and experience a mindfulness which can include a feeling of connection (Kaplan, 1995; Nichols, 2014). In summary, the seaside afforded the interviewees the opportunity to change the way they felt and to alter their state of mind; to experience expanded thought. This open space offered escape, meditation and a chance to be themselves by the seaside.

## Nostalgia for childhood in a timeless environment

The perception of a timeless space at the seaside very much feed into themes of childhood and the loss of childhood, which dominated the interviews. This bitter-sweet yearning for the past is the hallmarks

of nostalgia (Boym, 2001). According to the respondents, the seaside provides an unchanging backdrop against which childhood memories were formed and repeatedly revisited in adulthood. This revisitation can take an unselfconscious form of reverie, most likely experienced through adults playing with children and thereby reconnecting with themselves.

In many cases, the sense of loss experienced through remembering seaside holidays was strongly felt and that loss was often that of a loved one, most often late parents, *"I think it does take me back to, you know, to years gone by when I used to go for a walk along the prom with, with Mum and Dad..."*. Interviewees became emotional when recounting memories of family holidays, time together as a family, that clearly mean a great deal to them now. This was reflected very clearly in the interviews where within moments of recounting seaside visits (late) family members featured in the narrative. Walks on the promenade or playing on the beach with family members were often fondly recalled. However, this loss was tempered by a feeling of continuity; interviewees took comfort in the fact that they now played the role of parent or grandparent in seaside trips. Nostalgia complemented a linear view of their past but it also informed the present. The family narrative was circular, as traditions were passed down the generations; one day the interviewees' offspring might remember seaside days with them, in the same way that they remembered their parents and grandparents. This traditional seaside resort proved to be a key sites of their childhood memories. This coastal strip was the foremost landscape associated with childhood holidays for the interviewees; it forms a primal landscape - it is the landscape of childhood play that therefore carries a resonance in adulthood (Measham, 2006). Ryan (2010) observes that beaches are one of the few places where adults can have childlike fun as opposed to leisure. Through playing freely alongside the unselfconscious children in this landscape and through vicarious observation, the adults connect to their family narrative and partially revisit their past. One interviewee, an older father, commented:

*Them [his children] enjoying what you've enjoyed, and you can see them enjoying that and it takes you back to the feelings you had. Maybe buried in your subconscious, but you know, to see them enjoying it, and just having an ice cream in the sunshine and looking out and seeing the view, etcetera, you know?*

The senses inform the tourist experience (Dann & Jacobsen, 2003; Obrador-Pons, 2007/2009; Urry & Larsen, 2012). The significance of the seascape and the senses, is essential to understanding the link between the seaside environment and nostalgia. The seaside experience itself – the open view across the bay, the smell of the sea, the fresh air, the wind, the taste of the ice-cream, the noise of waves crashing or even a win on the penny arcade (all of which were highlighted in the interviews) are considered unchanging sensations. For example on interviewee recalled her first visit to Morecambe as a small girl with her father and remembered the very strong winds on that day, now whenever she visits the coast on a windy day she remembers that day of her childhood. Furthermore the natural environment is apparently unchanging and even the built environment closely mirrors that of decades ago. Sensory seaside experiences in adulthood remind visitors of the primary memory of childhood; the senses appear to act as mnemonic triggers for a Proustian remembrance of things past. The seaside experience may well result in a form of reverie when one re-lives childhood directly, when the inner child is allowed to play and have fun (Bachelard, 1971). However the interviewees more often refer to a more self-conscious and less direct connection to childhood through the bitter-sweet emotion of nostalgia.



Seaside nostalgia has a distinctly negative side. This study reveals that visitors consider that childhood itself had changed; this was consistently demonstrated through reference to childhood play on the beach. Either the beach play was seen as unchanging but other aspects of childhood had changed around it, or beach play had changed thereby indicating wider socio-cultural changes. In either case, modern childhood was seen as different from theirs; which was more adventurous, free, safe, modest and simpler. They were typically poor but happy and “*made do*” in their childhood. In contrast, modern children were often portrayed as having higher expectations, more likely to be playing indoors on computers and having less independence due to parental fears. The loss felt here is for their own childhood and changes to childhood. One interviewee remembers:

*Because we, we were brought up like ... we use to have to get some pieces of stick and then cut a bat out of a piece of wood and play a game of cricket. They don't have that ability these days, the children, do they? They've got to ... so you've got to put something for them to do.*

Even those who saw problems with modern day childhood still tended to view the beach in positive terms and as a relatively free place. Some saw children playing on a beach as timeless and unchanging in itself. The fact that the beach was the perfect environment for free play underpinned virtually all recollections and views on it. The visitors pointed towards the abundance of water and sand to form the perfect setting for play, for both adults and children alike. Others referred to the feeling of openness and space, with no corners to hide behind. The beach was seen as a relatively unrestrained natural playground; this place of leisure and spaciousness was associated with a feeling of freedom.

In summary, childhood memories were triggered when respondents re-visited this distinct and enduring primal landscape. Seaside nostalgia was a comforting emotional reaction to the seaside, it supported identities and was highlighted as an important element of the visitor experience.

## Conclusion

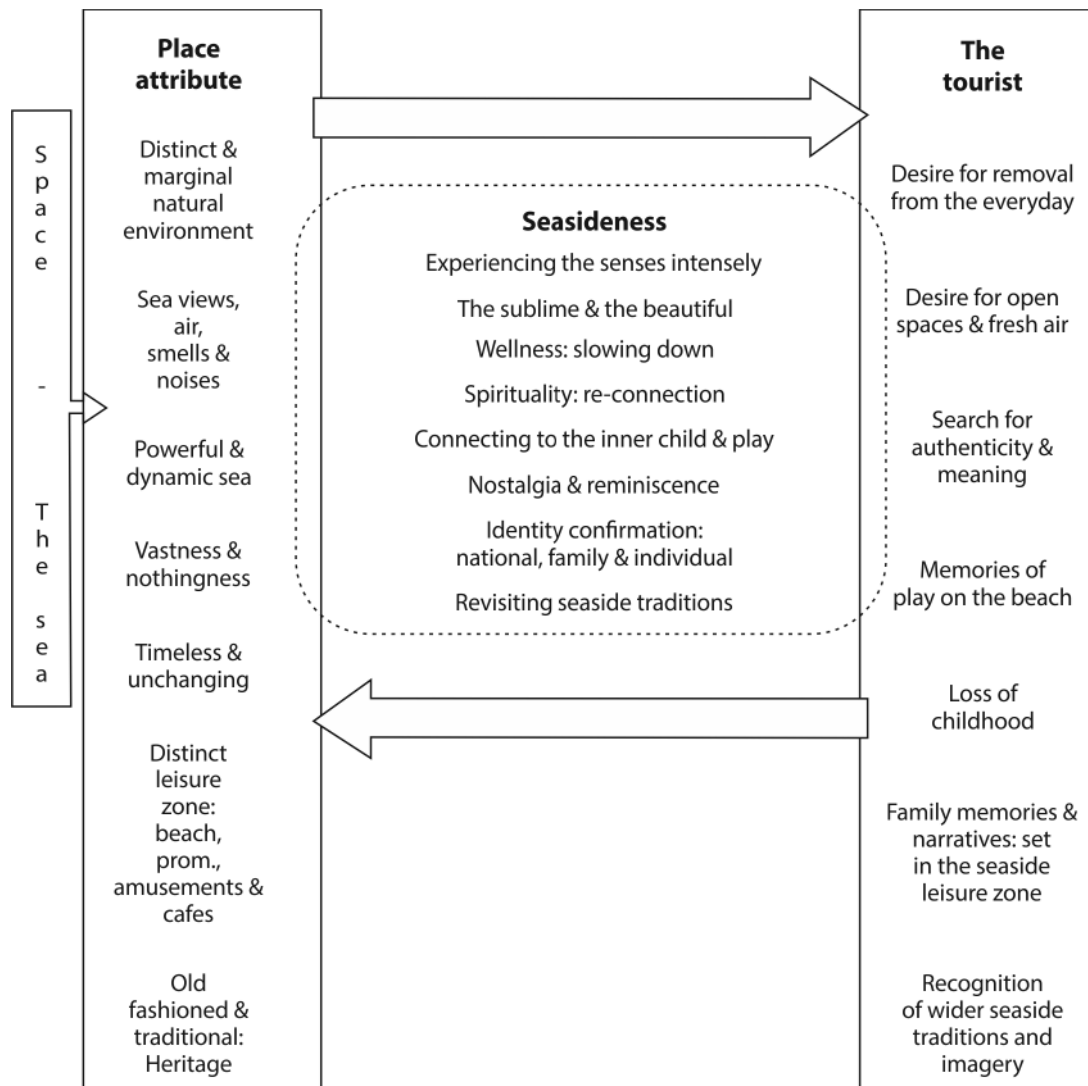
For these interviewees' experiences of space or spaciousness, associated with the sea views and perceived openness, informed sense of place. The Carnavalesque did not emerge as a theme from these interviews as one might expect, perhaps reflecting the resorts current visitor demographic and lack of tourism infrastructure. One might speculate that the sense of place in nearby Blackpool with its rides, entertainment and night life might be very different to Morecambe's. The coast, as experienced in Morecambe by these visitors, was instead predominantly a place of a wide ranging spirituality and nostalgia; furthermore these need not be considered entirely separately. Boym (2001, p. 8) sees a connection between the secular search for spirituality and nostalgia; she describes nostalgia as, “a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual”. Nostalgia may, arguably, sit close to the less considered end of a spiritual scale and be seen in similar terms to secular spirituality. For both are the results of introspection, reflection and an attempt to find ones place or meaning in the world - to momentarily connect with something that is normally out of reach.

A desire to re-connect emerges throughout this research, alongside and part of the themes of nostalgia, wellness, spirituality and issues of identity. The object of this re-connection varied and included God, nature, shared heritage, loved ones but most often childhood. It was often to something greater than ourselves or beyond us and in most cases the object in question is represented by, or associated with,

the seashore. This vast and apparently timeless space allows visitors to take what they need from it. The seaside is indeed a blank canvass and offers the feeling of spaciousness that they desire, even if this desire is not in itself timeless as the coast held very different meanings in the pre-industrial past.

The inter-related themes that arose from the interviews are summarised and clarified in the diagram (see Figure 1). It attempts to show that the visitor's experience of place is a reflection of their identity and wider socio-cultural forces on one hand and place attributes, influenced by the seaside environment amongst other things, on the other. Therefore it reflects the interaction between the place and the tourist; seashore sits at its centre. The sensual coastal environment encourages potentially powerful experiences, which in turn are linked with an aesthetic appreciation ranging between the beautiful and the sublime (Schopenhauer, 2010).

Figure 1  
A sense of place at Morecambe



A sublime or liminoid experience has clear spiritual connotations, indeed the interviewees linked the apparently awesome seacape to spirituality and restorativeness. There is a connection between the nothingness of open space and the internal space within man; one reading of this internal space is the inner child (Bachelard, 1971/1994). This is seen most clearly on the beach. Interviewees partially return to their childhood through re-visiting and sometimes playing in this primal landscape and undertaking traditional activities, often with children or grandchildren, thereby completing a circle. Nostalgia powers family narratives, confirms individual identity and unites those with a common identity. Seaside space allows or encourages expanded thought and a re-connection to something within themselves. Of all the themes to emerge from this research, it is this connection between seaside space and thoughtful introspection that has been the most consistently and powerfully expressed. As Bachelard (1994) suggests, the void fills a void. Seaside is characterised by a sense of space and a deep attachment to place. This coastal resort still holds a deep seated attraction for these interviewees; seaside has a powerful draw that motivates these visitors and needs to be explored more widely in the future.

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Submitted: 26/03/2015

Accepted: 09/08/2015