

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF HERITAGE BUILDINGS.

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Traditionally within the developed western world, decisions concerning the preservation of heritage buildings and sites have been primarily based upon economic measurement and criteria. It is recognised that heritage assets offer many experiential qualities and hold importance to the wider lives of individuals; specifically, tourists and host communities imbue the sites with their own personal values and subjective significance. They seek personal meaning and connection through their experiences with heritage. In this way, the accountability of heritage building preservation can be viewed in greater terms than solely their economic value. Despite this recognition, there remains a lack of attention in previous heritage tourism studies towards exploring the personal meaning and experiential qualities of heritage buildings, with the exception of the literature focusing on buildings of religious significance. Further, the spiritual value of heritage has been explored largely within the context of sites of religious significance; spirituality though is a broader, more encompassing concept than religion. This paper explores the spiritual value ascribed by international tourists to heritage buildings within a particular region of New Zealand: Hawke's Bay. Sixty-six photograph-supported interviews conducted with international tourists found that heritage buildings can hold deep 'spiritual' meaning to individuals. Rather than any religious significance, findings showed that heritage buildings render the townscape an experiential 'spiritual' space filled with emotion, mindfulness, engagement and personal meaning. The paper concludes that this finding has important implications for the way in which heritage buildings are promoted, developed and preserved within a destination townscape.

Heritage, Buildings, Spirituality, Preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Decisions concerning heritage preservation have traditionally been based wholly or primarily upon economic measurement and criteria (Dutta, Banerjee & Hussain, 2007; Navrud & Ready, 2002; Salazar & Marquez, 2005). In consequence, many decision-makers have viewed empirical economic data as being the primary or sole way of valuing heritage buildings; thus, key heritage preservation decisions are often made without taking into account the personal, emotional, intangible, subjective, and perhaps spiritual value of heritage to individuals. As a result, economic measurements such as contingent valuation have formed the methodological bases of much previous research exploring the value of heritage (Noonan, 2003). This is despite calls from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to recognise the human value of heritage. UNESCO (2009) advocates, "Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration". Many scholars also acknowledge the human value of heritage (e.g. Goodall, 1993; Hall & McArthur, 1998; Poria, Butler & Airey, 2001). Most of this scholarly effort focuses on the community value of heritage

preservation (Allison et al., 1996; du Cros et al., 2005; Fyall & Garrod, 1998) as a sense of community pride and social identity. Thus, studies of oral histories and biographies have given authenticity to the local community's relationship with its heritage (for example, Mataga, 2008; Ramshaw & Gammon, 2005; Riley & Harvey, 2005).

Acknowledging the human dimensions and value of heritage, increased attention has been given in the tourism literature to tourists' experiences of heritage tourism. Specifically, it has been found that tourists visiting heritage sites elucidate a number of personally meaningful experiences (for example, Beeho & Prentice, 1997; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; Willson, 2008; Willson & McIntosh, 2007). Experience can be defined as 'the subjective mental state felt by participants during a service encounter' (Otto & Ritchie, 1996: 166) or 'events that engage individuals in a personal way' (Bigne & Andreu, 2004: 692). Thus, 'experience' can be viewed as the subjective mental state felt by individuals (Beeho & Prentice, 1997; Palmer, 2004). Within a heritage tourism context, previous experiential research has measured the key dimensions of tourists' experiences in natural (Chettri et al., 2004; Schanzel & McIntosh, 2000) and constructed heritage environments (Beeho & Prentice, 1997; Masberg & Silverman, 1996; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; Moscardo, 1996). Outwith the experiential studies of different heritage settings, there have also been studies examining the relationship visitors have with a wide range of heritage buildings, including those of religious (Munsters, 1996; Rinschede, 1992), historical (Beeho & Prentice, 1997; Griffiths, 2000), stately (McDonald, 2000) and commercial (McIntosh & Siggs, 2005) value. It can be deduced from these studies that tourists gain distinct experiences by interacting with differing types of heritage buildings, as they do in other heritage interpretation settings (Moscardo, 1996). As an example, Beeho & Prentice (1997) found that New Lanark World Heritage Village provided visitors the chance to 'live, experience and imagine' the living and working conditions of their ancestors. Despite this, there remains a gap exploring the personal meaning of heritage buildings within a wider townscape (rather than the significance of particular heritage buildings, e.g. those of religious significance, as mentioned above). There also remains a pertinent gap in the literature of a wider examination of the personal meanings that tourists place on heritage more generally – such as that described by Timothy, (1997) who purports that many people hold individual attachment to heritage sites; and it is this personal meaning that has received a dearth of scholarly attention.

With the exception of the examination of the religious and cultural significance of heritage buildings, there remains little understanding of how, for example, heritage buildings assist an individual in finding meaning in life. Previous literature, such as that conducted by Uriely, Israeli & Reichel (2002) and others gives further evidence of the different ways in which heritage sites can be experienced by its visitors, depending on their own cultural backgrounds, personal agendas and own life histories. For example, Uriely, Israeli and Reichel (2002) found that in the heritage area of Nazareth, those of a Muslim faith were less likely than Christians to value the economic impact of tourism, and did not wish for further development because they felt their 'personal' heritage was not being represented.

There remains a paucity of research exploring the spiritual qualities of heritage, notwithstanding studies that have explored the religious qualities of heritage. Traditionally, the concept of spirituality has been overlooked within heritage research because, for much of the last two hundred years, most scholarly inquiry has been approached from a scientific, positivistic perspective. During this period, scholars have conducted positivistic studies that strive empirically and logically to prove hypotheses

and concepts, and thus, ultimately they have sought to provide definitive answers to certain issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 1980). As previously noted, there has been a particular focus on valuing heritage based on economic criteria. The concept of spirituality is growing in popularity as researchers embrace alternative paradigms and seek to unearth a more personal, humanistic research agenda (Tribe, 2005; Wilson & Harris, 2006).

Conceptually, *spirituality* is argued to be the expression of being human; that is, it involves every individual's search for meaning, transcendence and connection within life (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Marra, 2000; Miner-Williams, 2006). While these three constructs are also the core constructs of religion (Benjamin & Looby, 1998; Bown & Williams, 1993), every person is considered spiritual, not solely those with a religious belief. In this way, spirituality is a broader, more all-encompassing concept than religion that could be used to explore the personal meaning individuals derive from heritage. To further scholarly understanding of the personal significance of heritage buildings to visitors, this paper aims to explore the spiritual meaning individuals imbue on a selected group of heritage buildings; the Art Deco and Spanish Mission buildings of Hawke's Bay, New Zealand, through exploring international tourists' experiences of the buildings. Through understanding the spiritual importance of heritage buildings to individuals, the accountability of heritage building preservation can be viewed in greater terms than solely their economic value.

STUDY METHODS

The methodology adopted within this paper is adapted from two previous studies of tourists' experiences of heritage buildings (see Willson & McIntosh, 2007 and Willson, 2008). Since this period, the authors have undertaken extensive research exploring the spiritual dimensions of tourism. With their new knowledge and perspectives, previous results elicited from these studies have been re-analysed with fresh eyes to explore the spiritual dimension of heritage buildings. This approach, known as 'retrospectivity' is advocated as it maximises the contributions of a study and allows researchers to form new conclusions and theories from previously published work (Jennings, 2001).

The case study of Hawke's Bay, New Zealand was considered an appropriate methodological approach as case studies allow for research to be grounded in a practical real-life situation (Robson, 2002). Further, a case study approach has been used in a number of previous studies of tourists' experiences of heritage resources (for example, Beeho & Prentice, 1997; Howard & Pinder, 2003; Majumbar, 2004; McIntosh & Siggs, 2005). Specifically, Hawke's Bay was deemed an appropriate case study region because it has a high concentration of heritage buildings (New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 2001), thus allowing tourists' experiences of a wider heritage townscape to be examined. In addition, the loss of heritage buildings is regarded as a current threat to the historic fabric of Hawke's Bay (Art Deco Trust, 2011). Hawke's Bay is a region on the East Coast of New Zealand's North Island with a population of approximately 150,000 (Hawke's Bay Tourism, 2011). For the year ended June 2011, it generated 244,884 international visitor nights (Tourism Research Council New Zealand, 2011). A significant number of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings were built after a massive earthquake hit Napier, the region's largest town, in 1931. To rebuild the town after the earthquake, architects and planners opted primarily to build Art Deco and Spanish Mission style buildings because they were fashionable, safe, cheap, and could be a source of pride for the community (Art Deco Trust, 2011). New Zealand's leading heritage agency, The New

Zealand Historic Places Trust, has identified 311 historic places in Hawke's Bay; of which many of them are now protected against future development. On a regional level, The Art Deco Trust works with The New Zealand Historic Places Trust to preserve and promote heritage tourism and coordinates associated tourist activities, such as guided walks around the region's heritage buildings and 'The Art Deco Weekend', an annual five-day festival celebrating all things Art Deco.

Over a seven-month period, sixty-six photograph-supported interviews were conducted with international tourists. Each interview lasted for approximately 20 minutes. As photographs are central to tourists' experiences (Fairweather & Swaffield, 2002), they are reported as effective in eliciting tourists' narratives. Furthermore, photograph methodologies take researchers into the everyday world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and, indeed, it has been advocated that when tourists look at photographs, they are triggered into re-opening particular experiences (Garlick, 2002). Studies that have used photographs to examine tourists' experiences include Mackay & Fesenmaier (1997), Markwell (1997), Albers & James (1998), Fairweather & Swaffield (2001) and Fairweather & Swaffield (2002); there remains a lack of heritage-based studies that have used photographs as a tool to elicit deep insight into the lived world of tourists.

Thematic content analysis was conducted on the photograph-supported interviews. This technique involves "determining the importance of certain features or characteristics in a text, and then carrying out a search for them in the text" (Hay, 2000, p.125). Importantly, this method yielded results shaped from respondents themselves. Data was analysed multiple times by the researchers themselves to ensure no themes were missed and the implications of the findings would be understood, due to the familiarity of the researchers with the content (Carney, 1972; Patton, 1980). Thematic content analysis has been used and advocated by a number of researchers using visual methodologies to understand tourists' experiences (for example, Groves & Timothy, 2001; Turley & Kelly, 1997; Wheelan & Abraham, 1993).

STUDY FINDINGS

The findings revealed that Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings held deep personal meaning to its visitors. Individuals imbued their own life experiences and circumstances onto the heritage buildings in order to elucidate experiences that reinforced issues of their own heritage and identity. Specifically, individuals deeply connected with their culture or nationhood, past life experiences, friends and families through their experiences of the heritage townscape. As a result, it was revealed that for many individuals, Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings held what arguably may be termed '*spiritual*' value. Although 'spirituality' is generally considered to be a 'fuzzy' or confusing phenomenon, and one predominantly associated with religion, many scholars view the concept as involving the general search for meaning, connection, transcendence and identity within life (for example, Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Benner, 1989; Bown & Williams, 1993; Burack, 1999; Elias, 1991; Francis, Muller, & Goddard, 2003; Miner-Williams, 2006). Spirituality differs from the concept of religion, as while not all individuals believe in God/Higher Power, every individual can experience, and indeed yearns for meaning, connection and identity, and can experience transcendent experiences (ibid). That heritage buildings could be considered to have spiritual value is an important finding for those charged with preservation decisions.

To illustrate the potentiality of Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings in holding 'spiritual' value, research participants often became emotional when discussing the personal meaning of the heritage buildings; they represented much more than simply transfixing the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990). For example, one young woman became teary when describing her experience to the primary researcher about a photograph of a heritage cinema building. She commented, "Gosh, this reminds me of going to the cinema with my Dad. I really wish he was still here and could see this". For this individual, Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings evoked strong memories of previous time with her now deceased father; they elicited a rich, personal connection. She commented, "these buildings really help me to remember all the fun times with my Dad". Another research participant smiled when she observed a photograph of an Art Deco building that had previously been used by the fire service. She commented, "I really love that building because it brings to me a lot of pride; my brother is a fire fighter, and reading the stories of that building makes me think of him". The individual continued; "you know, thinking about him reminds me of how important he is, I have just been so busy working recently, I need to cut that down, and I am going to contact him again soon!". This quote illustrates that the particular Hawke's Bay's heritage building assisted this individual in determining what was personally meaningful within her life; her family. As such, it could be argued that this experience held *spiritual* meaning to the individual; an experience more personally meaningful and transforming than a tourist's 'gaze' of a heritage building.

Other research participants experienced Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings through the lens of the uniqueness of their particular cultural or national identity. To illustrate, one elderly woman commented, "I see some of these kiwi designs on the buildings and it teaches me about your culture; mine is particularly different and it's nice to learn about other people". Another research participant commented, "You know it's really interesting to compare the architecture here with what we have in Scandinavia (we're) very different people obviously". Others used Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings to revisit in their minds certain periods of their own national heritage; describing experiences of 'nostalgia'. Nostalgia has been conceptualised as a yearning for the past (Stern, 1992) or "a homesickness for a past era" (Prentice et al., 1998, p.9). However, for certain individuals, Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings evoked rich feelings of *personal nostalgia*. To illustrate, a number of research participants discussed how Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings reminded them of depression or war-time periods that they grew up in; the presence of the heritage buildings evoked a number of personal childhood stories about growing up during these times. For example, one individual discussed her experiences of a childhood growing up during World War II; she commented, "the buildings were just like this and I remember it was a really tough time but we all were there together as a family, and working out how to live on rations!" The heritage buildings particularly evoked memories of childhood amongst individuals; the most common way in which people prescribe personal meaning to nostalgia (Goulding, 1999). Others explained that the heritage buildings evoked memories of a time that was more personally comfortable; specifically, the small 'human-scale' of the buildings were said to represent a time where, according to one research participant, "everything was so much nicer, there was less hustle and bustle, less stress, less pollution, terrorism all of the nasty stuff we have today". Certain research participants felt they had 'lost' some part of themselves in their home environment and had 'found' this again through experiencing Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings. For example, one individual commented, "At home, you don't get time to think and reflect and look at your life, you are caught in the rat race, and feel like a rat in a cage. Here, I can take time to determine what is really important to my life". Reflecting upon one's life, and determining what is personally meaningful is a core

component of many scholars' conceptualisations of 'spirituality' (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Benner, 1989; Bown & Williams, 1993; Burack, 1999; Elias, 1991; Francis, Muller, & Goddard, 2003; Miner-Williams, 2006).

Personal connections being imbued onto the heritage buildings were a frequent finding of the study. For many, the personal stories associated with each individual building held personal value because they were experienced through the lens of each research participant's own life histories and circumstances. For example, one research participant commented "The story of the bank, and how the building was made so that it met the specifications of a bank was really fascinating to me because I work in a bank back home". Another research participant commented, "I've really been fascinated with this period in time so coming here, it helps me to learn more about the period in time, and I grow from that". These comments illustrate that certain research participants experienced Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings through connection with their family or themselves; their identity and belongingness to a certain group of people was reinforced. They also learnt about a different culture, period in time, and/or themselves; as such, it could be argued that through Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings, certain individuals transcended themselves through developing knowledge; transcendence too is a core conceptual construct of spirituality (for example, Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Benner, 1989; Bown & Williams, 1993; Burack, 1999).

The above discussion has illustrated that international tourists demonstrated the attainment of spiritual value from their experiences of the Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings, within the wider townscape. Specifically, they imbued rich personal value by imbuing their past experiences, life circumstances and future hopes onto the heritage buildings. Their experiences can be considered more than simply 'nostalgia'; they were deeper than a yearning for the past or homesickness for a past era. Rather, through the lens of their own personal life history, they represented an element of their identity, helped to re-establish what they derived personal meaning from, enlarged their knowledge of their personal history, and elicited personal emotion and meaning.

CONCLUSION

Traditional approaches to establishing the value of heritage have centred upon economic measuring criteria. However, this paper has illustrated that the value of heritage must be based on more than solely economic considerations; individuals imbue personal meaning from heritage based upon their life circumstances, past experiences and future hopes. This finding has important ramifications for decisions concerning the preservation, promotion and development of heritage buildings. Essentially, heritage is a part of our lives, it constitutes a part of who we are, where we've come from and what we hope to achieve with our lives. As such, this paper argues that heritage buildings are imbued not only with economic, personal, historical and cultural significance, but arguably *spiritual* significance also. That heritage buildings potentially hold spiritual value moves beyond viewing heritage as nostalgia or a more rosy view of the past. Tourists experienced more than simply a yearning for the past or homesickness for a past era; through their experiences of the heritage buildings, their identity and connections with themselves and others were reinforced; certain individuals also used Hawke's Bay's heritage buildings to re-establish what was personally meaningful to them.

As such, those in charge of making heritage preservation decisions might be advised to evaluate key subjective and intangible criteria in conjunction with economic measuring criteria to further strengthen the support for heritage preservation. This holds particular

credence for those in charge of rebuilding areas affected by disasters, such as those seen recently through Japan and in Christchurch, New Zealand; individuals evaluate heritage for much more than its economic value. This paper has evidenced the potential of heritage buildings within a wider townscape to be imbued with spiritual significance in one case study region, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand. However, there is a need to further explore the interpretation, personal meaning, and spiritual significance of different heritage buildings (non-religious and religious) for visitors (local and international alike) before buildings considered of popular heritage value are lost forever, and their stories remain untold through the remains of their tangible fabric.

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