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## **Heritage as Embodied Co-Creation: ‘Living the History’ of the Titanic in Cobh**

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### **Introduction**

Heritage refers to “things of value that are inherited” and to “things we want to keep” (Hall and McArthur 1998, p. 4). Fundamentally heritage indicates an interest in the past (Lowenthal, 1994; Nuryanti, 1996). Since the 1980s concern with heritage is particularly prevalent in Europe and North America, where diverse aspects of history, culture, and everyday life have been turned into marketable commodities through being re-classified as ‘heritage’ (Hewison, 1987; Prentice, 1993; Ashworth, 1994).

Heritage was traditionally concerned with “the preservation or reconstruction of material objects” through a process which effectively “isolates them from the flux of history” (Meethan, 1996, p.325). Detachment from history is enabled through *re-contextualisation*; a process in which abstract qualities, such as the nation, people, locality and the past are embodied in “narratives of material culture and localities, narratives that emphasise the continuity of the past in the present” (Meethan, 1996, p. 325). Heritage is understood to include any physical relic that has survived from the past. Besides physical relics, it encompasses all accumulated cultural and artistic productivity, the natural environment as well as non-physical elements including individual and collective memories. Cumulatively, these cohere as the ‘heritage industry’ and its associated commercial activity (Hall and McArthur, 1998). Given its

evolving nature and malleable character, heritage essentially defies definition (Brett, 1996).

Indeed, the term [heritage] celebrates every conceivable thing and theme: anchorites and anoraks, Berlin and Bengal, conkers and castles, dog breeds and dental fillings, finials and fax machines, gorgonzola and goalposts are topics typical of a thousand recent books entitled Heritage of \_\_\_\_\_ (Lowenthal, 1994, p. 42).

This expansion of heritage and intensified concern with the past is theorised as a symptom of the transformation of post-industrial economies into what Lash and Urry (1994) termed *economies of signs*. This transformation is intertwined with a number of related trends: increasing dominance of the consumer and the need for the producer to be more consumer-oriented; greater volatility of consumer preferences; the development of many new products, each of which has a shorter life; increased preferences for non-mass forms of production and consumption; increased aestheticisation of consumption, i.e. consuming products less and less for their functional and increasingly for their aesthetic and symbolic values (Urry, 1995). Information, images, symbols and desire assume prominence over materials and physical goods.

Also symptomatic of this transformation is an increasing reconceptualization of places from spaces of production to spaces of consumption; in other words, places are no longer centres for the production of goods, but centres for the consumption of services. This is evident in the increasing promotion of tourism in many post-industrial places across the globe and the expansion of cultural tourism as a tool to attract visitors and investment:

In order to attract investment capital and the spending power of the middle class, regions now differentiate themselves by emphasising the aesthetic qualities of material commodities and services that represent symbolic capital. Examples of this can be found in the use of museums, monuments and other heritage attractions in regional economic development strategies” (Richards, 1996, p. 267).

In re-imagining themselves as spaces of consumption (Miles, 2010) places invoke authenticity to create a sense of the past and encourage cultural tourism. What has

emerged, then, is a new ‘service’ class (Bourdieu 1984) to stimulate, attend to and legitimise this preoccupation with the past. Individuals within this new middle class possess significant cultural capital and express their need for status and social differentiation through different styles of cultural consumption, including tourism (Munt, 1994, Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997). These consumers are interested in consumption of goods that are perceived to be auratic rather than mass-produced and which provide metaphysical experiences (Holt 1998) and evoke authenticity (Prentice 2001). Museums and heritage attractions offer opportunities for meaningful, ‘authentic’ experiences because visitors and communities often use them in their construction of individual and social identities (see for example Newman and McLean, 2006; Gouthro and Palmer, 2010).

### **Heritage and the Search for Authenticity**

Concerns about the corrosive nature of modernity (Meethan 2001) are expressed in a nostalgic search for ‘authentic’ experiences (Goulding 2000) and a re-evaluation of tradition, accompanied by the consumption of products and services associated with heritage and culture (Jenkins 2000). Notions of a vanishing more authentic cultural life that existed outside the market, although contested, are prevalent in western society, which often locates authenticity in the past (Shepherd 2002).

Albeit problematic, authenticity attracts a strong interest in discussions around heritage and cultural attractions. For heritage management, authenticity is a valued concept because it is used to verify the originality of sites, artefacts and exhibits. Museum curators in particular, rely on authenticity as a measure of museum distinctiveness and a criterion for resource allocation (Chhabra 2008). In addition, marketers employ authenticity as a tool to promote tourism attractions. Prentice (2001) identifies myriad of forms and ways in which authenticity is promoted: authentication by direct experience, objectivist authentication, naturalness, location, associations with famous persons, place-branding or place myth, the offer of origins, extended authenticity through brand extension, celebration, learned authenticity, and constructed authenticity.

In this chapter we use the case of the Titanic Experience in Cobh (pronounced Cove) to explore emerging understandings of heritage and authenticity. More specifically, we consider how heritage is invoked for consumption, and how it is particularly tied to the making of tourist places. Our consideration of the Titanic Experience Cobh is based on our own experience of visiting, as well as by consideration of published material and online visitor reviews. We then revert to the extant literature to explore the multiplicity of claims to authenticity, from authenticity of the object, to opportunities for authentic tourist experiences. Finally, we offer concluding comments regarding the implications for heritage management.

### **Titanic: The Unsinkable Ship**

The Titanic was heralded as the most impressive and luxurious ship of the early twentieth century. Built in Belfast, her maiden voyage began at Southampton where most of its crew of 900 men were picked up, and her intended destination was New York. Passengers boarded at Southampton, in the South of England, Cherbourg, in France and Queenstown (now Cobh) in the South of Ireland. The ship left Cobh with around 1,300 passengers on board but unfortunately never made it to New York having hit a submerged iceberg en route. The ship sank within three hours on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1912 with a loss of almost 1,500 lives.

Within weeks of the sinking, movies, songs, poems, and books about the calamity were in circulation, and macabre memorabilia were on sale, most notably a black teddy bear by Steiff. The shock waves reverberated for decades in cities like Southampton, where most of the crew resided, Belfast, where the allegedly unsinkable ship was built, and New York, which lost numerous eminent citizens, including Astor, Straus, and Guggenheim ... All erected Titanic memorials in due course, as did many other places, including Liverpool, Halifax, Queenstown, and Washington, DC. All were determined never to forget that fateful night ... (Brown et al., 2013, p. 599).

While the sinking of the Titanic was a significant event in 1912, its importance increased exponentially with the passing of time. Since the 1950s interest in the Titanic has been re-kindled by a raft of documentaries, books and films on the subject. *Titanic*,

a fictional romance-disaster big budget movie by James Cameron, was released in December 1997. It was nominated for 14 academy awards in 1998 and won 11 of these including Best Picture and Best Director. While the film broke box office records at the time, its re-release in 3D form on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2012 was to push it towards breaking new records. As such, it became only the 2<sup>nd</sup> film ever to gross more than two billion worldwide! While the success of the movie might be attributed to Cameron's abilities as a Director and to the investment by Paramount Pictures, it seems that there is more to the story than this. There is an appetite for understanding what happened or might have happened on board the fateful ship. There is a dedicated website for Titanic memorabilia<sup>1</sup> and in 2017 the last known letter to have been written by a fatality was sold at auction in the UK for £126,000. The letter was written by Alexander Oskar Holvason a first class passenger to his mother, and, according to the auctioneer is "exceptional on several levels including content, historical context and rarity" (Annonymous, 2017).

The story of the Titanic, laden with mythical overtones perpetuated by the media ever since the fateful night of April 14<sup>th</sup> 1912, is a point of global fascination (Brown et al. 2013). Significantly, to mark one hundred years since the sinking of the ship, in 2012 several Titanic Experiences were launched in commemoration. For example, Belfast, the birthplace of the Titanic, erected "a striking, six-story, steel-clad, star-shaped, staggeringly expensive commemorative centre" (Brown et al., 2013, p. 599) beside the original slipway, graving dock and drawing office. Not only has this contributed to the gentrification of the dockland area, it has had a massive impact on tourism in the area. While Belfast pins its authentic link to the Titanic on the basis of its construction, other places claim their links based on other historical facts as well as on the reconstruction of collective and personal memories and stories.

Smaller in size than the attraction in Belfast, Titanic Experience in Cobh is located in the building where the White Star Line Ticket Office stood. Launched in 2012, the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.titanicmemorabilia.net>

building overlooks the original pier, which, on Thursday April 11<sup>th</sup> 1912, was the last port of call of the Titanic during its maiden trip to New York. Cobh's historical associations extend beyond the Titanic; the town has a strong link to Ireland's colonial past; from 1849 until 1920 the town was named Queenstown in honour of Queen Victoria's visit to the town. More importantly, it had commercial, shipping and military significance for the British Empire (Neville, 2015). As Ireland's main sea passage to North America and Australia, Cobh is also deeply associated with exile and emigration; from the deportation of nationalist campaigners to Australia to the mass emigration of the Irish during the Great Famine (1845-1849) (Neville, 2005). The Titanic is one of the many ships that left from Queenstown (Cobh). Most of the 4.75 million people that left Ireland for the USA between 1841 and 1925 passed through Queenstown (Neville 2005). Remembering such an association, Cobh already had 'The Queenstown Experience'<sup>2</sup>, a long-standing and very successful visitor centre.

In terms of heritage, it seems that what 'we want to keep' (Hall and McArthur, 1998) is not just the memory of a sinking ship, but somehow we wish to *know* what the experience of being on the Titanic might have been. Because Cobh was the last port visited by the Titanic it has certain unassailable claims to authenticity. Some of the passengers who boarded at Cobh perished in the disaster while others were lucky enough to survive. Thus, the Titanic Experience at Cobh is very much part of what Lennon and Foley (2000) refer to as 'dark tourism', a fairly recent manifestation of the heritage industry involving the commodification of occasions and locations associated with death and destruction (Seaton, 1996; Stone and Sharpley, 2008). In total, 123 passengers boarded the ship on that day (of whom only a family of four were travelling first class, fifteen were travelling second class and the remaining 104 were travelling third class). Cobh offers a 21<sup>st</sup> century interpretation that uses modern technology to help transform the experience.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.visitcobh.com/index.php/reviews/cobh-the-queenstown-story/> accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017.

Authenticity is established by nature of its location, and in particular through association with the original White Star Line Ticket Office as well as the pier (also known as heartbreak pier). However, the artefacts exhibited are in the most part replicas and copies rather than original. This might be considered problematic if we only consider the authenticity of the objects, but less so if we shift focus from the originality of the toured object to the potential for existential authenticity (Wang, 1999) or the realisation of the self through tourist experience. This is particularly true of the Titanic Experience at Cobh where the attraction centres on the experience of the story of the Titanic as narrated with the aid of audio-visual technology: cinematic shows, scene sets, holographic imagery and touch screen technology<sup>3</sup>. Significantly, tourists are offered the opportunity to engage in a really meaningful experience. This is evident in the attraction's motto, which invites visitors to *Live the history - Feel the story*.

The experience consists of 30 minutes guided tour, followed by unguided exploration of the exhibition area. As with many contemporary museums and heritage experiences, visitors are offered the opportunity not only to interact with the space, and the objects, but also, to interact with other visitors and staff. In particular, the Titanic experience is a space for multisensory interactivity. Moving away from the concept of object authenticity, the focus is truly placed on the experience. In this sense, space and objects become part of this experience, in an attempt to enhance it. The attraction's motto (*Live the history - Feel the story*) promotes the multisensory and embodied aspect of the experience. Although the space and objects have their own claims to authenticity, the real opportunity for the visitor is to immerse him or herself in the experience in different ways at the different stages of the attraction. According to the virtual visitor website<sup>4</sup>:

The visitor experience is presented in two parts. The first is an exciting immersive audio visual tour retracing the steps of the 123 passengers who boarded Titanic from Cobh on April 11th 1912. Importantly, this is the sole exhibition with a focus on the passengers who boarded at Cobh highlighting the intimate Irish connection to this legendary story. The second part of Titanic Experience examines how it all went wrong; the unbelievable and "almost" impossible sequence of events that occurred to cause Titanic to sink. Finally,

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.titanicexperiencecobh.ie/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.virtualvisittours.com/titanic-experience-cobh/> accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017-10-22

the Story Room of Touchscreen Computers allows one to look at the personalities on board the ship and in particular to discover the fate of the 123 Queenstown passengers.

Having visited Titanic Experience in the summer of 2017 we understand that ‘feeling the story’ and ‘living the history’ results in a truly embodied experience. Below, we try to share our experiences including the very personal nature of the quest, how the experience stimulates the imagination and (re)locates the visitor to the past. Its engagement with personal and collective memories as they are evoked and (re)constructed throughout the tour and how it simultaneously fascinates and repulses the visitor creating ambivalent emotions.

### *Personal quest*

Upon admission, the visitor is given a replica of a boarding card as a ticket. The card shows the personal details of one of the 123 passengers who boarded the ship at Queenstown. It is with this boarding pass that the visitor’s personal quest begins. As little is known about that passenger beyond their name, age and class, a sense of curiosity about their fortune emerges. This immerses the visitor into the narrative early on. As you are taking the tour, the personal quest is aided by information about the conditions under which different classes travelled, but also with the shocking details of the sinking of the Titanic through cinematography, visuals, sonic accounts and holographic audio-visual narratives.

### *Transference and imagination*

*The tour is designed to simulate the boarding of the Titanic. We are now the passengers on our boarding cards. While the tour begins in a lobby where initial information via a guide and audio-visual means is provided, we are briefly taken outdoors to a balcony overlooking the pier before moving to the main attraction. This movement between the lobby, the balcony, and the former first class waiting room is a process that sparks the imagination. The lobby is insipid and dark, with no natural light, which triggers feelings of ambiguity, but also anticipation about the tour. Going outside, we are faced with the natural conditions of the third class*



*passengers waiting outside at the pier to board the Titanic. The combination of the stories given by the guide, as well as the conditions –in our case wind and rain- allows you to begin to imagine what it would be like for those passengers. We are in the present, yet imagining the past.*

*All aboard! The bell on the wall, next to the entrance of the first class waiting lounge is a playful trigger for further immersion. The guide rings the bell once calling you to board the ship. We, along with other passengers, playfully repeat that action, ringing the bell as we go in one by one. Interaction with the object here is encouraged by the interaction with others.*

*We are now inside again. There is no natural light, as the windows are covered with period photographs of the first class lounge and passengers. And this is the end of us being in the present. The space, the artefacts, the story is taking us to the past, to the day the Titanic left for it's first and final journey. This movement from indoors to outdoors and then back indoors, creates a sense of discontinuity, both spatial as well as temporal, engendering the transference of the visitor from Cobh to Queenstown, from present to past.*

Transference and imagination is aided by audio-visual technology, but also the use of smells. A funnel-shaped artefact hosts 4 lids reading: “Guess the smell? Where is it on titanic? Lift the flap”. The lids are placed at children’s height level. Families, but also adults interacted with the exhibit, but children played an important role in engendering interaction with these particular objects. Importantly, children’s (inter)actions with the exhibit, also triggered interaction amongst the adult visitors themselves. The smells are intended to transfer the visitor to different rooms and functions of the ship.

### *Personal Stories and Collective memory*

The experience involves the interplay between personal and collective memory. We are given personal accounts of the lives and circumstances of specific people involved, either as passengers or staff or rescuers, including a sailor who failed to report for duty

and was thus saved. These stories are enacted through photographs, and exhibits of personal belongings: Family portraits, articles of clothing, letters etc. These are juxtaposed with general information about the construction and specifications of the ship, the journey, the disaster and the aftermath. Once again, oral accounts, audio-visual presentations, holographs, cinematography, audio recordings and textual displays guide us through the personal and the collective.

Personal and collective memories are evoked and constructed throughout the tour. The experience taps into the collective memory of emigration to the new world, leaving poverty in hope of a better life, particularly vivid in Ireland, as these narratives are part of the Irish identity. This aspect of the Irish identity is relevant to both domestic and American visitors due to the deep connection between Ireland and the United States. It is important to note however, that narratives of emigration to the United States are not unique to Ireland, which makes a point of connection for visitors from other places as well. For instance, two of the researchers who visited the attraction, even though coming from Greece, felt part of the experience, as the exhibits and stories also tapped into the collective narrative of Greek migration. Indicative of this was a conversation among the researchers about a Greek film titled *Nyfes* (Brides)(2004), which narrates the story of women that emigrated to the United States aboard the SS King Alexander, in 1922, told through the perspective of a Greek mail-order bride. The collective memory intertwines with the personal.

Personal, more intimate memories from family (hi)stories of emigration are also triggered, depending on each visitor's personal history. An American visitor enthusiastically proclaimed: "my family came from Ireland, I'm here to find out my history!" while buying his ticket at the reception. While a Greek visitor (one of the researchers) remembered her maternal grandfather, born in Chicago in 1910, and family stories about the months-long journey on ship to the States.

### *Ambivalence*

The experience of the tour, the movement through the different rooms and spaces, the interaction with objects and people, induces a range of feelings and emotions. In particular feelings of ambiguity are invoked throughout the tour. The story of the Titanic itself has cultural significance as an ambiguous myth: it is the archetypal disaster story (Brown et al. 2013). This simultaneously fascinates and repulses. From the moment one decides to visit the attraction, this ambivalence kicks in as the experience verges on the edge between celebration and dark tourism. This is further perpetuated upon entrance, when the boarding pass with the passenger's details is handed and the tour begins in the dark, insipid lobby room.

Then there is ambivalence between immersion and detachment. On one hand this is an intimate experience due to the personal stories and the imagined fortune of the passenger whose boarding pass you are holding. Yet, on the other hand, throughout the tour one also maintains a sense of detachment, as one is aware that this is a construction and is reminded of this fact by the addition of displays with impersonal information as well as children-friendly activity exhibits.

The stimuli also produce ambivalent, even contradictory emotions: apprehension, knowing how the story ends, but also excitement, at embarking into an experience the specifics of which are yet to be discovered; a sense of excitement and amusement in interacting with some of the exhibits, such as the bell at the start of the tour and the guess the smell exhibit later on; sorrow over the tragedy expressed through personal accounts aided by audio-visual technology; shock and tension when witnessing the sinking of the ship and listening to the cries of people running to their rescue; (partial) closure when looking up 'your' destiny (the name on the boarding pass).

Our experience is shared by other visitors as evident from the selection of reviews<sup>5</sup> below:

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.tripadvisor.ie/ShowUserReviews-g211925-d2718185-r532929975-Titanic\\_Experience\\_Cobh-Cobh\\_County\\_Cork.html](https://www.tripadvisor.ie/ShowUserReviews-g211925-d2718185-r532929975-Titanic_Experience_Cobh-Cobh_County_Cork.html)

This is a very cool piece of history. This is the original location of the White Star Line Ticket Office. This is the location for the final boarding of the RMS Titanic. You get to see what is left of the original pier which is in definite need of repair. It was nice to take a picture by the window that you can see in the movie and in pictures from that time in history. It's a great experience to learn more about the Titanic, Queenstown(Cobh), and the RMS Carpathia. What a tragedy. I like how they give you a ticket of one of the 123 who boarded here and you can see if the person survived. I thought it was a great tour with the guide and clips showing the story. Great experience!

Titanic Experience very dramatically and creatively conveys the 'human' tragedy of the disaster.

We were really impressed by the short time in this experience. The first half an hour we were on a guided tour with a very good guide taking us to the dock where the last bunch of unlucky passengers boarded the Titanic before its fateful disaster, and setting the scene well describing how impressive the ship was and giving good historical context. After she finished guiding us, the rest is self-guided, and really captivating. Utilizing technology well, it shows staggeringly scary statistics of who perished, has good letters from passengers giving testimonials to the horror, and shows with disturbing clarity what would have happened to the human body upon submerging with the icy waters. Really good hour well spent.

The Titanic Experience Cobh offers a multisensory experiential approach to the consumption of heritage. For the most part, visitors enjoy this opportunity to feel the story and live the history. This allows us to understand that authenticity is not just in the object, but can be found in the story and in the experience. We locate this shift from object authenticity to experiential authenticity in the discussion below and consider the significance of embodied experiences and interactions in the co-creation of meanings in relation to art, heritage and identity. Finally, we offer some concluding comments.

### **Authenticity in heritage tourism: from objects to experiences**

While many commentators acknowledge authenticity as a marketing tool for museums and heritage attractions (Prentice 2001, Apostolakis 2003, Chhabra 2008),

understandings of authenticity can be located on a continuum of theoretical streams from pure *essentialism* to pure *constructivism* (Chhabra 2008). Essentialism tends to reify particular traditions and cultures (especially those that continue from pre-modern times) as authentic, constructivism views culture as dynamic and flexible (Chhabra 2008), thus questioning the existence of an original moment (Shepherd 2002). A middle ground is *negotiation* of essentialism to address the fluidity of authenticity (Chhabra 2008). Negotiation is linked to the concept of emergent authenticity (Cohen 1988), which observes that something initially thought of as inauthentic may become authentic with the passage of time, particularly when a culture is in decline. Hence, while authors in Europe and North America align themselves with one of these stances, discussions are often framed around the existence or impossibility of authenticity.

However, engaging with such dualisms can limit the scope and usefulness of the concept for museum curators and heritage managers. For example, the very process of removing artefacts and placing them in museums, as well as the acts of abstraction and interpretation involved in doing so, render the authenticity of these objects questionable (Prentice 2001), because “[e]very relic displayed in a museum is a fake in that it has been wrenched out of its original context” (Lowenthal, 1990, cited in Prentice 2001, p.6). While there is no need to dismiss considerations of the authenticity of the object, authenticity can be evoked in other important ways. For example, Wang argues that authenticity is “not a matter of black or white, but rather involves a much wider spectrum, rich in ambiguous colours” (1999: 353). He proposes a different stance, *existential authenticity*, which doesn’t necessarily focus on the originality of toured objects but has predominantly to do with the realisation of the self through tourist experiences (Wang 1999). Existential authenticity is therefore activity-related:

Existential authenticity refers to a potential existential state of Being that is to be activated by tourist activities. Correspondingly, authentic experiences in tourism are to achieve this activated existential state of Being within the liminal process of tourism. Existential authenticity can have nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects (Wang 1999, p. 352).

Existential authenticity involves *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* processes. Intrapersonal authenticity relates to bodily feelings and is an important part of tourism

as it involves relaxation, rehabilitation, diversion, recreation, entertainment, sensation-seeking, sensual pleasures, excitement, play etc. This involves body and mind. On the one hand it involves the sensual, that is, the body as subject/body as feeling, and on the other the symbolic, where the body becomes a display of personal identity (health, naturalness, youth, fitness, movement, beauty etc). Intrapersonal authenticity is therefore essentially concerned with 'self-making' (e.g. Kim and Jamal 2007). For example, it provides tourists with opportunities to experience risk, daring and uncertainty – which their everyday lives do not allow.

Interpersonal authenticity relates to the formation of touristic 'communitas' (Wang 1999). Building on Maffesoli, Wang notes "the toured objects or tourism can be just a means or medium by which tourists are called together, and then, an authentic interpersonal relationship between themselves is experienced subsequently" (1999, p. 364). Tourism can therefore involve a search for 'communitas', characterized by 'liminality', that is, "any condition outside of or on the periphery of everyday life" (Turner 1974, cited in Wang 1999, p. 364). Tourist journeys thus afford tourists opportunities to alleviate "the pressures stemming from inauthentic social hierarchy and status distinctions" (Wang 1999, p.365). For example, a study of Renaissance festival reveals tourists' active participation in bonding, friendship, identity seeking and transcendence (Kim and Jamal 2007). Furthermore, it reveals how participants' experiences of the festival were implicated in self-making, meaning making, and belonging. Such interpersonal experiences play an important role in consumers' re-enchantment with the world (Rojek 2000) and as such are transformative not only for their members, but for business practices and society in general (Cova et al. 2007).

Authenticity therefore depends on the tourists' experiences, as these experiences are constructed through sensations, interactions and in tourists' imagination. Tourist products are reconceptualised as experiences (Prentice 2001). Experience value is gaining renewed interest in the tourism literature (Prebensen et al. 2014). Facilitating a range of embodied and relational experiences, tourism and heritage attractions are contexts in which authenticity is constructed and negotiated. In our case, the Titanic Experience offered opportunities for discovery, excitement and wonder, as well as

personal meaning through connection to intimate and collective stories, as well as opportunities for reflection beyond the remit of our everyday realities.

### **Multisensory experiences and co-creation of meaning in heritage attractions**

Visitor experiences at heritage and cultural attractions are not one-dimensional or passive; they engage body and mind. In the case of the Titanic, as we have seen, this was engendered by the experiential, multisensory design of the attraction. Yet, it is important to note that the consumption of culture and heritage is an embodied experience, rather than a mere cognitive reception of historical facts. Hence, consumption of heritage can be best viewed as *multisensory, synesthetic experience* (Chronis 2006). Multisensory refers to the involvement of the senses, while experiencing particular attractions, while synesthetic refers to the emotional experience as opposed to impersonal knowledge (Chronis 2006). Thus, the visitor comes to appreciate history and culture in an embodied way. Heritage artefacts should not be simply understood as distant physical objects, but rather as tangible multisensory mnemonic devices, because of the emotions, memories and meanings they evoke, which produce perceptions of cultural identity (Chronis 2006).

Furthermore, *somatic* experiences (Joy and Sherry 2003) are important, because they inform our thinking about culture and the past. Joy and Sherry demonstrate how museum visitors' reasoning and imagination is shaped through important embodiment processes:

Perception is both a physiological and intellectual judgment, for perceiving an object requires grasping the object as a whole as well as in terms of its parts. It is also closely linked with imagination for it is through virtual body enactments that creative projections are possible and an individual's skill acquisition improves. Although one acquires knowledge primarily through the eye and the act of seeing, many participants found themselves in situations where seeing allowed them to engage in other sensations –touch, taste, and smell. The order in which these sensations are experienced depends on the stimuli in question (2003, p. 278).

In addition, these embodied experiences are relational. Visitors interact with objects, but also with other visitors and staff. In interactions with objects, visitors employ the senses: seeing, listening, touching, smelling, tasting. In interactions with other visitors and staff, visitors influence and learn from each other how to move through space, how to interact with the exhibits, or even which exhibits have more value over others. Visitors make sense of the exhibits “through a range of activities, including walking and looking, glancing and inspecting, pointing and showing, talking and discussing and so forth” (von Lehn 2006, p. 1353). The multisensory, synesthetic, relational, somatic nature of the experience triggers the fantasy and imagination in a quest for meaning. Museums and heritage attractions as contexts thus become spaces for the social construction of knowledge, collective memory and identity.

### **Concluding Comments**

In this chapter we used the case of the Titanic Experience in Cobh, to explore emerging understandings of heritage and authenticity. In doing so, we discussed the consumption of heritage as a *multisensory, embodied* and *relational* experience. Appreciation of the combined role of embodiment processes, sensations and interactions opens up opportunities for heritage managers in the facilitation of meaningful heritage experiences. Furthermore, it opens up possibilities for retaining the integrity of the experience through personal connection even when object authenticity or large-scale spectacle is not feasible. In the case of the Titanic Experience in Cobh, this was achieved in a relatively small-scale attraction, with very few original artefacts.

Concern with heritage and desire for authenticity preoccupy individuals in contemporary society. Although heritage was traditionally concerned with the preservation or reconstruction of material objects, understanding of what heritage is has been dramatically expanded. Understanding of authenticity has also expanded to move beyond authenticity of the object to appreciating the potentialities of existential authenticity in the context of tourism. Together they open up the possibilities for the production and consumption of heritage. The heritage industry is no longer limited by a preoccupation of material objects that have been authenticated. Rather, claims to



authenticity can be made with reference to experience, location, association or myth. Moreover, freed from the constraints of object authenticity, and bolstered by modern technology, the past can now not only be experienced from the comfort of the present but it can truly be appreciated via more personally meaningful experiences.

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