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## Part III: Narratives and Storytelling

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# 10 Managing the co-creation of narratives in the heritage sector: The Surgeons' Hall Museum, Edinburgh

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**The objectives of this chapter are to:**

- Link together theoretical approaches to storytelling and narrative creation with the co-creation of heritage experiences;
- Identify and discuss management practices and associated opportunities for narrative co-creation;
- Present the case of Surgeons' Hall Museum as a site which considers narrative and storytelling as a critical management challenge;
- Propose that co-created narratives could lead to more engaging, individualised and memorable heritage visitor experiences;
- Present lessons for heritage management, including a need for narrative co-creation to be considered within strategic heritage planning and operational decision-making.

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**Keywords:** storytelling, narratives, co-creation, heritage, experiences, management.

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## Introduction

It is widely accepted in the academic literature that tourism and leisure are experientially driven industries (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). However, the role of the customer in the creation of memorable experiences has faced significant debate. From an experiential perspective, Frochot and Batat (2013) argued that the customer has become an economic actor who is actively involved in the consumption experience. Conversely, the business acts to facilitate and assist the customer in the production and achievement of their own experience. Increasingly in tourism, the concept of co-creation has proliferated in the experiential literature; however it has only recently been applied to the heritage sector. This is interesting, due to the unique nature of heritage tourism products, that often seek to establish a personal, emotive and symbolic connection with visitors (McIntosh, 1999). In addition, work in heritage management highlights the value of strong narratives in the creation of memorable visitor experiences (Magee & Gilmore, 2015; Moscardo, 2010). However, little research has explored how these can be co-created within the heritage experience, and subsequently how these can be fostered by heritage marketers and managers. The overall aim of this chapter is to reframe the academic understanding of heritage narratives within experience co-creation theory. Furthermore, the chapter aims to question how managers can encourage the co-creation of narratives in the heritage sector.

Following an evaluation of the existing literature in both narrative creation in heritage and experience co-creation, the chapter introduces the case of Surgeons' Hall Museum (SHM) in Edinburgh, UK. A brief background provides the necessary context before data is presented from an in-depth qualitative interview with a member of the interpretation team. The chapter concludes with the implications for managers with regards to managing the co-creation of narratives in the heritage sector.

## Experience co-creation

The concept of co-creation has become firmly embedded in business and management disciplines. Drawing on wider paradigm shifts in service marketing, co-creation argues that the service experience (and its subsequent value) is developed incrementally through dialogue, interaction and personalisation between several actors within the service setting. Thus, the customer becomes an active co-creator of their own experience rather than it being predetermined by the service provider (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Increasingly, as the conceptual discussions surrounding co-creation have advanced, so have the questions over how it is managed. While the literature stresses

the autonomy of customers in the co-creation of experience, a number of authors highlight the importance of management practices that can support this process (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Payne et al., 2008).

Increasingly, co-creation has been applied to experiential contexts such as tourism, hospitality and events. Early work by Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) suggested viewing tourism experiences from a network perspective. The authors argued that tourists sat at the heart of a complex network of various actors, each with various relationships and connections. Conversely, it is the co-creative opportunities, engagements and interactions that exist between each of the actors which can generate value in the tourism experience. Similarly, a number of scholars have argued that with increased co-creative opportunities comes greater visitor attention and memorability after the experience (Campos et al., 2016; Zatori et al., 2018). Finally, from a commercial perspective, there is an argument to suggest that the successful co-creation of tourism experiences leads to increased visitor satisfaction and increased loyalty (Mathis et al., 2016).

While the popularity of co-creation is evident throughout tourism research, its application to the heritage sector has been slower. This is interesting as the heritage sector, being driven to generate quality visitor experiences, is particularly well-placed to consider co-creation as a worthwhile management strategy. Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson (2014) argued that heritage organisations face significant competition both from within the tourism industry and from associated leisure providers. As such, heritage sites are increasingly adopting innovative ways to attract and retain audience groups. The authors further identified active visitor involvement in heritage experiences as being a significant driver for co-creation. Thyne and Hede (2016), however did highlight the balance between visitor empowerment and management control as a challenge for heritage sites, due to the fragile nature of their core resources. As a means to provide co-creative opportunities without compromising the heritage resource, new innovative technologies have been suggested as a way to enhance content and diversify the presentation (Jung & Tom Dieck, 2017). While a number of the studies above question the tools that can be used in co-creation, few studies have linked these to the co-creation of narratives and storytelling – which can be seen as a critical part of the heritage product (Chronis, 2005).

## **Narrative creation and storytelling in heritage**

Storytelling has long played a significant part in consumer research and continues to interest researchers from a variety of disciplines. A daval

and Wyerjr (1998) argued that stories provide the basis for: understanding new experiences; making judgements about people, objects and events; and developing personal attitudes and beliefs. Grounded in tourism research, Moscardo (2010) advocated the importance of stories and themes in the construction of tourism experiences, however the author was critical of the lack of conceptual development in this area. Tung and Ritchie (2011) highlighted the strong link between storytelling and memorability in tourism experiences. The authors suggest that as tourists construct stories and then share these with their social groups, they crystallise the story into memory, which can then be recovered and remembered later. This was supported by Servidio and Ruffolo (2016), who note that in viewing tourism as an emotional and highly personal activity, the creation of narrative can have a profound effect on the memorability of tourism experiences.

Furthermore, Moscardo (2017b) explored the link between storytelling and mindfulness in tourism experiences, and argued that powerful stories can act as a mechanism to support mindful visitor behaviour that deepened engagement with the presented subject matter. The value of a memorable tourism experience for businesses is well documented in the literature. A number of authors have cited increased competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003), increased sales (Woodside, 2010), and increased visit and revisit intentions (Kim & Youn, 2017) as potential outcomes of memorable tourism experiences.

The role of stories and narratives are especially significant in the heritage sector. In addition to offering unique experiential products, heritage sites are often driven by an underlying story that is hoped to be communicated with visitors. Through the use of interpretation, heritage sites can engage a range of audiences and foster participation in the heritage product, in addition to supporting conservation objectives and sustainability (Moscardo, 2014). Similarly, as highlighted by Mitsche et al. (2013), stories have the power to enhance and enliven existing material heritage resources for a wide range of visitors. Focussing on the visitor dimension, Chronis (2012) argued that heritage tourists have an active role as 'story-builders' within their own experience and suggested that they progressed through a three-stage narrative construction process. The author concluded that museum visitors took part in narrative enrichment (or an engagement with resources), followed by a period of narrative imagination (developing the story by their own imagination) and concluded with narrative closure (personally connecting with the story). Dimache, Wondirad and Agyeiwaah (2017) took this idea further by highlighting the inherent fluidity in heritage narratives and the subtle