

# **Innovation at Heritage Tourist Attractions**

Thesis submitted by

**Julia Margaret CROZIER, BA (Hons)**

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## Declaration of Originality

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If heritage attractions are to be economically sustainable, they must be relevant to their potential and current audiences. If they are to be socially and environmentally sustainable, they must also ensure their heritage significance does not fade with the passing of time. Heritage attractions arguably exist within an environment shaped by disequilibrium where public perception shifts constantly as each generation imposes their own attitudes and values on the past and how it is represented. If heritage attractions are part of a global inheritance they must innovate to meet changing demands at the same time as supplying new, meaningful experiences for each generation. Significance values are reflected by the choice of built heritage, artefacts, relics, myth and narrative; how these become mutable resources for innovation at the same time as providing a competitive advantage is a focus of this study.

In order to navigate through the constantly shifting environment, iconic heritage tourist attractions typically follow a pattern of innovation waves fluctuating between periods of activity and periods of inertia as they seek to maintain their relevance to a contemporary audience. With each wave of innovation, operators of heritage attractions gauge their level of acceptable risk and shape the innovation accordingly. Innovation occurs within parameters dictated by contemporary forces prevalent within the environment. How heritage attractions achieve innovative outcomes is an issue for the operators of heritage attractions.

Innovation is frequently slow and incremental, meaning it is almost invisible in the short term; therefore, a historical case study at a single heritage attraction, separated into three comparable and adjacent periods was used to identify innovation and its effects. Several types of innovation were identified; specifically product, process, position and paradigm innovations. The forces that drove and determined innovation at different times were also identified and a model developed which may be applicable to other heritage attractions in the future.

This research makes several contributions to knowledge. First it is shown that the heritage product can be defined in terms of access. This may be physical, virtual, emotional and/or intellectual. Second, the research presents a new definition of the process that occurs during the co-production of the tourist experience product. Third, viewing the access product as a component of the tourist experience product provides a different lens for considering whether heritage attractions are innovative.

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