

Hamlet Live: The 7 I's Experiential Strategy Framework for Heritage Visitor Attractions

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Abstract

In an increasingly competitive market for tourist destinations, visitor attractions play a key role in enticing visitors to the destination, and as such must continually develop new extraordinary experiential offerings to keep visitors coming. The Renaissance castle of Kronborg, a Danish heritage visitor attraction and the setting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, has shown the way by staging *Hamlet Live*, an interactive theatrical experience. Its success is due to the professional actors' co-creative performances and improvisations. In this study, based on observations, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of TripAdvisor reviews, we identify and describe seven interconnected elements that have made *Hamlet Live* successful in terms of revenue and visitor satisfaction. These elements form an experiential strategy framework that other heritage visitor attractions could use to create extraordinary experiences. We provide recommendations on which types of heritage visitor attraction could replicate the achievements of Kronborg's *Hamlet Live*.

Keywords: Heritage visitor attractions, co-creation, storytelling, experience economy, authenticity, theater

1. Introduction

Tourist destinations find themselves in an increasingly competitive market where they must be creative and offer unique and exciting experiences to gain tourists' attention (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2011). Visitor attractions play a vital role in tourism as they provide motivating factors to attract a broad range of tourists as well as local residents (Leask, 2018). It is therefore important that visitor attractions develop experiences that appeal to visitors' desires, emotions, and imaginations.

One such visitor attraction is the Renaissance castle of Kronborg, a Danish heritage visitor attraction (HVA) north of Copenhagen. A World Heritage site recognised by UNESCO as a property of outstanding universal value (Kempiak, Hollywood, Bolan & McMahon-Beattie, 2017), Kronborg is also widely known as the backdrop for Shakespeare's famous play *Hamlet*. Every summer since 2016, the castle has been used as a setting to stage *Hamlet Live*, an interactive theatrical experience. Professional actors act out scenes from *Hamlet* at various locations around the castle, co-creating and improvising with the audiences. Since the launch of *Hamlet Live* there have been very positive reviews on, for instance, TripAdvisor and setting new records in visitor numbers (Nationalmuseet, 2018). The staging of *Hamlet Live* has thus transformed Kronborg from being a traditional passive museum visit into a multi-experiential attraction that offers entertaining episodes, educational elements, and escapist activities in an aesthetic environment (Pine & Gilmore, 2020).

This research examines what makes *Hamlet Live* successful with the objective being to identify the various elements involved in creating the immersive theatrical experience. Based on a combination of observations, conversations, semi-structured interviews, and a thematic analysis of TripAdvisor posts, we identify seven dynamic, interconnected elements that the experience directors collectively used to engage visitors and potentially transform their identity (or self-image), and thus create an engaging, memorable, and highly valuable experience. The

seven elements form an experiential strategy framework that other HVAs could use to replicate the success of *Hamlet Live* by creating extraordinary experiences themselves.

2. Literature review

The literature review provides the theoretical underpinning for the research through discussion of HVA visitor motivations, interpretation and experiences. It further examines the theory of how visitor attractions can generate authentic, extraordinary, and transformative experiences through co-creative encounters, which the experiential strategy framework consequently demonstrates that *Hamlet Live* does in practice.

2.1. Heritage visitor attractions and motivations

Heritage tourism as defined by Timothy (2011) refers to travellers seeing or experiencing built heritage and living culture, while visitor attractions are “a permanent resource, either natural or human-made, which is developed and managed for the primary purpose of attracting visitors” (Hu & Wall, 2005, p. 619). Therefore, HVAs are sites with assets that relate to elements of human history that offer experiences for visitors who may be motivated to visit for a variety of reasons (Leask, 2018) including education, entertainment, personal connection (Poria et al., 2009) and curiosity (Goh, 2010). Heritage itself thus may not always be a primary motivating factor (Kempiak et al., 2017) and attract a diversified set of visitors (McKercher & du Cros, 2003; Bakiewicz et al, 2017) who perceive the heritage site differently, thus influencing their experiences and affecting their levels of satisfaction.

Hamlet Live is a theatrical performance, a form of interpretation used to communicate and present information to audiences. Van Dijk, Smith and Weiler (2012) discuss how live interpretation can be divided into two types: those that use a first-person representation (FPR)

to recreate social and political events in the form of theatrical performances or re-enactments, and those that use a third-person representation (TPR), in the form of presentations and tours to convey activities and events of the time. There are advantages and disadvantages to both interpretations, but TPRs generally perform better on a cognitive level (ibid.). FPRs by costumed interpreters, on the other hand, appear to lead to positive visitor outcomes among most visitors to outdoor history museums. When performed effectively, live interpretation communicates the significance of heritage and establishes a connection with audiences through learning, understanding, and empathy (ibid.). Thus, live interpretation plays a significant role in enriching visitors' experience and has a significant impact on visitor satisfaction (Peirce & Putnam, 2014).

2.2. Creating extraordinary experiences

The Experience Economy emphasises the importance of creating engaging, personal, memorable experiences for consumers. As Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 98) state, "an experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event". Hence, memorable moments happen through scripted acts of theatre staged by workers (Pine & Gilmore, 2020) and require active interaction between firms and customers (Mascarenhas et al., 2006). In the context of tourism, Selstad (2007) defines the tourist experience as a novelty/familiarity combination involving the individual pursuit of identity and self-realisation. Hence, it is in the process of consumption that experiences emerge when customers have sensations or acquire knowledge that arises from activities and the physical environment, as well as the social meaning embedded in the activities (Ritchie, Hudson, Morgan & Hemmington, 2009). Experiences are thus highly subjective and can only be interpreted via reflection by the specific individuals involved.

Experiences in HVAs can be “extraordinary”: hedonic consumption experiences that entail high levels of emotional intensity, are meaningful and unique, and have the power to foster participants' self-transformations (Husemann, Eckhardt, Grohs & Saceanu, 2016). Extraordinary experiences can be created when visitors offer an escape from mundane structural life (ibid.), where they often “travel” into a different world; hence they are actively involved and immersed in the experience, enabling them to escape from daily routine and everyday activities (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Kempniak et al., 2017). Furthermore, the act of spontaneity often distinguishes extraordinary events from everyday routines (Abrahams, 1986). Extraordinary experiences thus draw from antistructure (Turner, 1969), which is the dissolution of the institutionalized social structure that consists of an arrangement of hierarchical positions between individuals (van Gennep, Vizedom & Caffee, 1977). HVAs can create these extraordinary experiences when they offer escape into a new temporal and social setting.

2.3 Authenticity, co-creation, and identity transformation

The search for authenticity motivates visitors and influences their perceptions (Lu, Chi & Liu, 2015), playing a key part in generating satisfaction. Gilmore and Pine (2007) argue that authenticity is personally determined, as economic offerings are ontologically inauthentic but can be phenomenologically perceived as authentic. Thus, authenticity derives from the enjoyment of tourists, their bodily and emotional involvement in liminal spaces, and is constructed by tourists' perception of “how genuine are their experiences” (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010, p. 654; Wang, 1999). Satisfaction with heritage tourism, therefore, relies not on the actuality of authenticity but rather on tourists perceived and existential authenticity (Chhabra et al., 2003; Wang, 1999), which Gilmore and Pine (2007, p. 5) define as “purchasing on the basis of conforming to *self-image*”. In other words, a tourist's image of the offering matches

or aligns with their own perceived self-image, or *identity*, who individuals believe themselves to be.

Co-creation is the phenomenon of consumers increasingly participating actively in the process of designing and creating experiences and value in cooperation with businesses and other consumers (Banks & Deuze, 2009; Prebensen & Foss, 2011). Chronis (2005, 2012) observes that consumers and marketers jointly co-construct and shape experiential “storyscapes” in which narratives emerge through the interaction and performances of producers and consumers. An HVA can stage a transformative storyscape by delivering a mix of co-created authenticity and enhanced interpretation while simultaneously facilitating socially symbolic meaning that may help to improve individual visitor’s understanding of themselves and broaden their worldview (Magee & Gilmore, 2015). Visitors can participate in and interact with rites of intensification and integration, and then return to an everyday world transformed (Abrahams, 1986).

As Pine and Gilmore (2020) argue, businesses can guide transformations that have a lasting and profound effect on customers. One or more experiences guide customers in changing some fundamental dimension of self – their identity – yielding new insights that lead them in new directions. Transformations are distinct economic offerings from services and experiences where the customer *is* the product. They are necessarily co-created, for the transformation elicitor can only be a guide; individuals must change themselves through the experiences staged on their behalf (ibid.). Such transformative experiences enable visitors to revisit and renegotiate their individual identities – sometimes for a significant moment of time, and often with a more enduring effect. As part of their escapist motivations, visitors challenge, negotiate, and reconfigure alternative subject positions as part of a dynamic identity construction or “self-transformation” (Ulusoy, 2016). Tourists encounter transitional experiences that may affect their everyday life through changes in identity and self-perception

(Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). Hence, experiences permit visitors to encounter stories that can manifest into a transformed self (Noy, 2004).

In this study, we argue that Kronborg's *Hamlet Live* delivers extraordinary experiences that can transform visitors' identities by offering emotional, co-created moments that feel authentic, and thereby greatly enhance visitor satisfaction. We have therefore explored these concepts in the preceding literature review. Our contribution to research is, through an inductive and dialogical process with directors and actors of *Hamlet Live*, to identify and analyse the seven interconnected elements that jointly produce these authentic transformative experiences. On that basis, we ascertain an experiential strategy framework that other HVAs can use to improve visitor satisfaction through interactive theatrical experiences.

In the next section, we describe the origins and setup of *Hamlet Live*, before we proceed to the methodology. Subsequently, we use the data to develop the experiential strategy framework and outline its various elements.

3. *Hamlet Live* at Kronborg: An introduction

The inspiration for Shakespeare to write his famous play *Hamlet* in 1601 came from three of his actor friends who had visited Kronborg (Hamletscenen, 2021). *Hamlet* has been performed regularly at Kronborg by various theatre companies since 1837 and has thus become part of the Castle's heritage and identity. To celebrate Shakespeare's 400th anniversary in 2016, the Head of Communication at Kronborg commissioned writer, actor, and director Peter Holst-Beck a year before to develop a concept in which interaction and storytelling should be key features in telling the story of *Hamlet* within the historical setting of Kronborg. The English-born director and writer Barry McKenna later joined the project, contributing with his expertise in Shakespeare's work. *Hamlet Live* had its grand opening in the summer of 2016.

Kronborg can be categorized as a human-made entity that represents history, culture, and tradition (Timothy, 2011) and attracts visitors who desire to gather new information and have experiences that satisfy their cultural needs. *Hamlet Live* is one form of interpretation offered to visitors for three months (June – August). Comprised of fourteen professional actors divided into two teams, they play the seven essential characters of Hamlet (see Figure 1). Scenes of the play take place in various spots throughout the castle for up to 10 minutes each within a 3-hour period. There are more than 30 scenes performed in total, some of them taking place simultaneously. As Holst-Beck states, these scenes are simultaneous by design so that each visitor can create their own *Hamlet Live* experience where the story progresses on different levels. Some visitors follow Ophelia and her struggle for sanity in a male-dominated society, while others shadow Hamlet as he riots against the king. Every character has its own storyline and place in society, and visitors can choose to follow specific characters or simply watch whatever scene comes along during their walk around the castle. The idea is to use a fictional story to communicate accurate facts about hierarchy, religion, political issues and division between the sexes in that time period.

Throughout their visit, visitors proceed down parallel journeys: they physically explore the castle, moving from one room to the next taking in the traditional museum experience with its historical information, while simultaneously encountering the chronological story of *Hamlet* through various scenes. Some are listed on a blackboard in the courtyard while others take place unannounced, drawing visitors further into the story.

In staging *Hamlet Live*, the producers changed Shakespeare's dialogue to adapt to a scene length of 5-10 minutes. While maintaining the Bard's rhythm and dramatic arc (and many of his phrasings), they re-wrote the scenes in contemporary English so visitors from different countries and of different ages can follow the story. The actors of *Hamlet Live* do not follow the script slavishly as they are on a platform stage with a proscenium arch. Being within

the castle, and more importantly amongst the audience, they interact with visitors and incorporate them into the story. They even assign roles to particular visitors who then engage in impromptu dialogue with the actors. Visitors co-create the scenes with the actors, who learned the history of the castle as well as improvisation techniques to deftly interact in unrehearsed exchanges with the audience while maintaining their characters within Shakespeare's story arc.



Figure 1. Scene from Hamlet Live. Left: King Claudius interacts with visitors. Right: Hamlet in a sword fight with Laertes (Holst-Beck, 2019).

Hamlet Live has been a success financially and in terms of visitor satisfaction. Kronborg had 270.000 visitors in 2015, the year before the experience first launched (statistikbanken.dk) and 326.000 by 2018. The rise in visitors was seen mainly in the months where *Hamlet Live* was performed even though the ticket price during *Hamlet Live* was 60% higher (145 DKK from 90 DKK) to cover production costs. The reviews on TripAdvisor articulate the success of *Hamlet Live*, with 268 English-speaking reviews during 2017-19. Of these, only one review saw the experience as “Terrible”, none as “Poor”, and only 15 as “Average”, while visitors posted 68 “Good” reviews and 184 “Excellent” ones (TripAdvisor, 2020). One said, “*Hamlet Live* was the highlight of my trip!” (Reviewer 207) while another wrote “Wonderful! We all

loved it---especially Hamlet Live!” (Reviewer 47). A third said it was “A true must-see for castle/history/Shakespeare fans” (Reviewer 83). Hence, the visitor numbers and reviews illustrate the popularity of *Hamlet Live*, which in turn demonstrates the efficacy of its staged experience in the heritage visitor attraction that is the castle of Kronborg.

4. Methodology

4.1. Developing the experiential strategy framework

The lead author saw *Hamlet Live* in 2018 and, intrigued by its interactive, fluid and impromptu storyline, became interested in pinpointing the elements used in creating such an immersive experience. In cooperation with directors Holst-Beck and McKenna and the actors, the lead author embarked on inductively conceptualising an Experiential Strategy Framework for HVAs (see Figure 2) for other HVAs to use to create comparable immersive experiences with matching consumer appeal. This research, therefore, offers a *post hoc* analysis of what Holst-Beck and McKenna developed intuitively due to their vast experience with theatre. While other experience stagers will work with other contexts and challenges, they could use this conceptual framework to stage their own compelling experiences.

4.2 The research design

The data were collected using four qualitative methods: observation, conversational sessions, thematic analysis, and semi-structured interviews. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) observe, qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive practices that make the world visible. Hence, it seemed the most appropriate method to understand the social interactions taking place in *Hamlet Live*. The research is therefore positioned within the interpretivist paradigm where researchers aim to understand and explain reality from a subjective point of view (Hall, 2010).

Firstly, observations were carried out by the lead author three times at Kronborg during the 2018 *Hamlet Live* season using the method of participant observations that Marshall and Rossman (1995) define as “the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p.79). The *Hamlet Live* scenes with the actors’ performances and interactions were observed and Holst-Beck, the director of the play and co-author, supported this activity with insights during and after the research period. The lead author noted his observations and took photos to support them.

Secondly, the strategy framework started to materialise through an interactive dialogical inductive method between the lead author and the directors of *Hamlet Live*. A 2-hour conversational session took place that was circular and dynamic in that the lead author introduced theoretical concepts (known from tourism, marketing, experience design, and visitor attraction research) to Holst-Beck and McKenna that were then discussed in relation to the approaches used in creating *Hamlet Live*. The directors then explained other significant approaches in *Hamlet Live* and the lead author positioned these within extant theoretical concepts which he subsequently again put to the directors. The discussion continued after the session through email.

Thirdly, a thematic analysis was performed on 268 TripAdvisor reviews from June through August 2019, 2018, and 2017. This amounted to 45 A4 pages of reviews, sufficient data for a comprehensive netnographic analysis (Kozinets, 2010). The objective was to search for opinions, attitudes, and emotions about *Hamlet Live* to see how they could feed into the development of a framework. The use of TripAdvisor for data collection is justified as researchers have previously used TripAdvisor to assess consumers’ emotions and attitudes (see Lee, Benjamin & Childs, 2020; Lund et al., 2019) and the 268 reviews provide a substantial qualitative data sample for understanding visitors’ opinion. Thematic analysis was chosen as a data reduction and analysis strategy by which large volumes of qualitative data are categorised

and reconstructed to capture and interpret the important concepts (Lapadat, 2010). The analytical strategy used was coding, a process of thoroughly inspecting texts to look for recurring themes, topics, and relationships (ibid.).

Fourthly, the emerging 7 elements of the strategy framework and their associated approaches were further explored in semi-structured interviews with 3 actors of *Hamlet Live*, specifically those who played Hamlet, Polonius, and Gertrude (referred to respectively in the findings section as Actor 1, Actor 2, and Actor 3). They were asked a variety of open-ended questions to obtain information about their views, ideas, and experiences (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The objective was to further explore and expand on the provisional elements identified in the meetings with Holst-Beck and McKenna as well as through the themes found in the TripAdvisor reviews, to see if any other elements emerged. These insights from the actors provided the final step in developing the seven elements of the strategy framework, prior to a final discussion with the directors. Each interview took approximately 1.5 hours followed by a thematic analysis using the same techniques as for the TripAdvisor reviews.

5 The Seven I's Experiential Strategy Framework for Heritage Visitor Attractions

In the following section we analyse the elements, referred to as the 7 I's Experiential Strategy Framework for HVAs (see Figure 2) that emerged from the data analysis and discussion how it could be used in other HVAs.

5.1 Framework structure

The Experiential Strategy Framework for HVAs (see Figure 2) that encompasses seven elements. The flow of the framework starts at the top with *Imagining*, the envisioning and creation of the drama that is performed by the actors on the historical stage in *Imparting*. This

second element thus provides the conduit through which the drama and script of *Imagining* enacts the theatre and performance that the audience encounters (Schechner, 1988, p. 78). This enactment leads to *Interpreting* as visitors renegotiate their social roles and their own performances to adapt to the environment of *Hamlet Live*, while *Interacting* then is the co-creation of the experience with (and within) visitors. As we move down through the framework, we are progressing step by step from the staged experience of *Hamlet Live* and through to the internal emotional state of the visitor, from external experiential stimuli to visitors' responsive inner experience. *Improvising* and *Initiating* provide the two "dramatizing" elements that differentiate *Hamlet Live* from normal staged productions, as the free-flowing and intimate setting facilitates surprising and unexpected experiences: initiating impromptu encounters between visitors and actors, the latter of whom then must go "off script" to improvise, while staying in character and continuing to enact the drama. The application of the first six elements jointly creates a strong emotional, authentic, and potentially transformational experience, one in which the interactive performances of *Hamlet Live* enter and impact the minds of visitors, creating a personally powerful experience that becomes part of the *Identity* of each one.

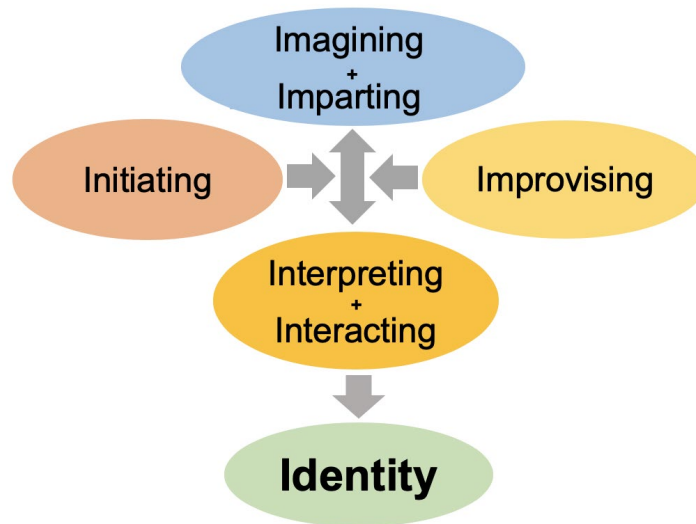


Figure 2. The 7 I's Experiential Strategy Framework for heritage visitor attractions

5.2 Imagining: Theatre and Dramaturgy

The first element is called “Imagining” as it exemplifies the creative, exciting imaginary world produced for and co-created with visitors through dramaturgy and theatre. Dramaturgy is the art or technique of dramatic composition and theatrical representation, with actors enacting the script on a stage. It can push limits of what one can perceive, imagine and articulate (Behrndt, 2010) and involves creating a script with a plot, a story structure, characters, and dialogue (Tomaric, 2011), which produces an imaginary world with exciting themes that people can share (Hakkarainen, Brèdikytè, Jakkula & Munter, 2013),

Dramaturgy plays a very explicit role in *Hamlet Live*. The staging of scenes up to ten minutes in length requires that original Hamlet be cut into short theatrical events. As director Holst-Beck says, “it was challenging to edit Hamlet into such short scenes and piece the script together as an interconnected chronological narrative and drama”. However, that is exactly what *Hamlet Live* manages to do according to the TripAdvisor Reviews. For instance, Reviewer 17 notes, “They have people reenacting and interweaving history while staying in character”.

According to Holst-Beck, it is very important that the actors are experienced professionals with the ability to personify a three-dimensional believable character where no one is purely evil nor wholly good. The TripAdvisor reviews confirm the actors' abilities: "what made it truly unforgettable was the performance of *Hamlet* by very talented actors" (Reviewer 7), while Reviewer 20 observed, "The castle itself has its own rich history and beautiful interior but what I truly enjoyed about it was the live Hamlet scenes that played out before visitors at set timings. The acting was superb, the castle setting absolutely perfect and the people behind the masks great to talk to!". Such positive comments support the argument of Hakkarainen et al. (2013) that dramaturgy produces an imaginary world with exciting themes that people can share. The directors thus succeeded in Imagining a consistent narrative, where the script and the subsequent staged theatrical performance construct the experience of *Hamlet Live*.

5.3 Imparting: (Hi)storytelling

Imparting of the story is the second element in the 7 I's Experiential Strategy Framework. Storytelling provides the medium through which *Imagining* is imparted. Singh and Sonnenburg (2012, p. 192) state that storytelling is "a continuous ongoing and improvisational process made up of interlinked content". A fluid, dynamic and collective co-creative practice, storytelling enables social interactions and generates an emotional shared experience (Lund, Scarles & Cohen, 2019). Storytelling is thus an effective tool in creating engaging experiences (McCabe & Foster, 2006) as it can transform otherwise indifferent spaces into attractive tourist destinations (Chronis, 2005).

The actors of *Hamlet Live* not only study the script of *Hamlet* but also study the history of the castle and its role in Danish history. They can thus tell factual stories about the castle in terms of the political and religious system in the 16th and 17th centuries (when the story of

Hamlet takes place). They also learn about cultural practices and how the different social classes lived. This is particularized to each character, so the actor playing Claudius, for example, studies warfare, diplomacy, religion, and so forth, while Ophelia's actress studies how to be a woman in that era's society, how banquets unfold, how to entertain men, etc. As Actor 2 (playing Polonius) observes, the historical characters almost step out of a painting, come alive in front of the visitor, and then disappear again. TripAdvisor reviews underscore the actors' abilities to combine history and theatre: "a group of actors performed a part (sic) of *Hamlet* in the different parts of the castle giving the interiors the new gist" (Reviewer 14); "Inside they have done a wonderful job of combining Danish history and Shakespeare" (Reviewer 102).

The dramaturgical reimagining of Kronborg revives and reanimates a historical period, confirming the argument by Chronis (2005) that stories can transform otherwise indifferent spaces into attractive tourist destinations. As Reviewer 28 states: "Actors perform short scenes from *Hamlet* throughout the castle. You get caught up in searching for a ghost, chatting with the new king and watching Ophelia fall apart. It's truly unique and makes this an incredible attraction". In the context of HVAs, the storytelling mediated through the castle and *Hamlet Live* could therefore be called *(hi)storytelling*, as the actors convey the history of Kronborg while staging the fictional play about *Hamlet*. (Hi)storytelling is thus a dramaturgical vehicle to establish an emotional connection with visitors and mediate the history of Kronborg with the drama of *Hamlet*. As Reviewer 154 succinctly states, "Great combo of history and theatre".

The *Hamlet Live* experience offers dynamic performative spaces switching between TPRs and FPRs. While Kronborg offers third-person narratives through scheduled tours with professional guides, *Hamlet Live* creates first-person theatrical re-enactments (Van Dijk et al., 2012). However, the actors sometimes assume the role of third person reenactors to maintain the flexibility of two-way communication afforded to most guide-visitor interactions (Roth, 1998). This corresponds well with the argument of Van Dijk et al. (2012) that the best approach

for heritage tourism sites is to use a range of interpretive activities that collectively maintain historical authenticity while addressing the necessary commercial objectives (Peirce, 2014; Leask, 2016).

The first two elements of the model, Imagining and Imparting, are mainly produced and communicated by the directors of *Hamlet Live*. While visitors are to some degree part of the Imagining, immersing themselves into the Imparting narrative, it is within the next two elements – Interpreting and Interacting – that they fully participate in the dramatization of *Hamlet*.

5.4 Interpreting: Performances and roles

Interpreting focuses on visitors' understanding of *Hamlet Live* and how they adjust their roles to the actors' dynamic performances. Following Shakespeare's dictum that "All the world's a stage", Goffman (1959) states in his pioneering book *The presentation of self in everyday life* that human interaction should be studied from a dramaturgical perspective, just as Pine and Gilmore (2020) argue that work *is* theatre. In any setting people establish a social role and status by presenting the routines best relating to that social role across a series of occasions in front of the same kinds of people (Goffman, 1959). They are all actors or players who with the help of props, sets, and costumes put on performances that constitute social life (Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum & Carr, 2010).

Hamlet Live challenges the notion of fixed roles and performances of visitors. Through *Interpreting* all the components of the experience (the original play, the historical setting, the social roles of today and of the play's setting), it breaks the routines of visitors' established social roles (Goffman, 1959). Before visitors arrive at the castle, they are in their own social group, often with family or friends, performing their routine social roles. The actors step into character to perform roles according to the script, while also urging visitors to play a part in

the *Hamlet* narrative and therefore perform new social roles. There is thus a mix of performances of roles, professional and non-professional, scripted and improvised, routine and unfamiliar. All visitors are addressed as honoured guests, here for the king's party (Actor 2, playing Polonius). Some visitors are engaged via answering questions and conversing with the actors, such as when Hamlet asks people to help him write a poem for Ophelia, while others are assigned new-to-them character roles such as spies, guards, or soldiers, and thus help drive the story of the play forward for the rest of the audience.

Some visitors are challenged on their integrity and allegiance as they try to fit into the new social setting. For instance, one minute they support Yorick, who advocates overthrowing the king, the next minute they help Polonius punish Yorick for his treachery. Actor 1, playing Hamlet, observes that visitors like to see people lose status. Others are complicit in the murder of Hamlet as they help poison the sword used to kill Hamlet in the final battle scene (Actor 2). Hence, visitors like to play characters that compromise their own personal beliefs. As Actor 1 states, visitors like to be naughty and mischievous; they are fascinated by King Claudius because of the evilness exemplified in his actions. Hence, visitors are immersed in a liminal space of self-expression engaging in non-ordinary activities (Wang, 1999). However, while visitors can perceive *Hamlet Live* performances as real and authentic, there is an implicit contract between actors and visitors that it is "only" a theatrical performance (Actor 2).

The TripAdvisor reviews reflect immersion into new social roles. For instance, Reviewer 4 writes "Then we 'ran into' the characters of Hamlet who were interacting with guests while in character as well as acting portions of the actual play. My son got to play chess with King Claudius, while my teen daughter gawked over Hamlet himself", while Reviewer 178 observes: "Particularly enjoyed the ghost and puppet scenes, as well as my conversations with the Jester and Hamlet. Even got the Jester to (try to) teach me how to juggle!".

Such experimentation with social roles offers an example of Turner's (1969) antistructure, the dissolution of the institutionalized social structure that can generate leisurely experiences. Visitors enter liminal spaces and join new *communitas*. "Liminality" refers to a phase of transition (van Gennep et al., 1977), while "*communitas*" refers to a sense of community that develops when individuals from various backgrounds convene, share ritual experiences, and create special social bonds (Turner, 1969; Turner & Turner, 1978). These experiences of existential authenticity thus represent spaces of playfulness and mischief in which "*communitas* emerges as a characteristic of a social antistructure that frees visitors from their normal roles and statuses through shared ritual experiences and common goals" (Tumbat & Belk, 2011, p. 45; Wang, 1999). Reviewer 76 states: There are actors here and there that when you come into a room, make you feel right at home ... in Hamlet's time". Thus, the visitors are having, as Husemann et al. (2016) would term it, an extraordinary experience in which a co-existence exists between antistructure and structure, or "anastructure", between the structure of the museum and the drama of *Hamlet Live*.

The actors are encouraged to spot the so-called "anti-social" visitors; the ones who just want to see the castle and do not want to participate or buy into the story of Hamlet. These visitors therefore reject the immersion into the antistructure (Turner, 1969) of *Hamlet Live* and instead choose the traditional structure of an HVA. In such cases, the normal social roles and routines of guests are not challenged but rather met with a "breaking of the wall" where the actors come out from behind the mask, invite visitors into the 'back region' and talk to them like actors (MacCannell, 1999). *Hamlet Live* therefore to some degree tries to adapt to each individual's needs and consequently customise the experience for each visitor.

5.5 Interacting: Co-creating

There is a high degree of co-creation in *Hamlet Live* as actors *Interact* with visitors and assign them roles, which enable the latter to participate in the story, driving it forward. As Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson (2014) argue, visitor attractions adopt innovative approaches to attract visitors, with more co-created experiences providing a strong point of difference in the competition for leisure time. *Hamlet Live* goes further in innovative approaches when it removes the fourth wall of theatre and let visitors enter and co-create certain stories of the play in close interaction with the actors. Actor 3, playing Gertrude, notes that the actors cannot fake it as the audiences are so close, they can see if the actors really have tears in their eyes when they express sadness. This provides Kronborg with a unique selling proposition, confirmed by reviews such as “Breathtaking at every step” (Reviewer 24) and “*Hamlet Live* was absolutely marvellous” (Reviewer 142).

According to Minkiewicz et al. (2014), co-creation consists of different factors: co-production through active participation and physical interaction, engagement through emotional and cognitive immersion, and finally personalisation through tailoring the experience and interacting with employees and technology. *Hamlet Live* manages to offer each of these different factors. As Reviewer 23 states: “Guests follow the characters through the courtyard and various rooms of the castle and get close to (and indeed, sometimes interact with) the characters as the play progresses”, and Reviewer 166 observes “In first room, one character of play asked me and my wife to act something short play which has been guided by him. They make (sic) these live plays by interactive way/involving visited audience in the room”. Visitors thus encounter a tailor-made experience engaging in improvised dialogue with the actors as they move physically through the castle. They are active participants in the drama, while also learning about the history of Kronborg.

Visitors are more than just active participants; they also influence the narrative. As Prebensen and Foss (2011) argue, visitors and their hosts can be seen ‘actors’ in various plays and dramas in changing scenes. visitors and hosts jointly co-construct and shape the experience through the interaction and performances (Chronis, 2005, 2012). visitors can thus be active agents by forming the experiences according to their personal agendas and perceptions, filling in the gaps and renegotiating the narratives using their backgrounds and imagination (Chronis, 2012). *Hamlet Live* offers just such an experience. Visitors interact with the actors and the historical spaces of the castle and create little sub-narratives that blend in with the scripted drama of *Hamlet Live*.

The first two elements, *Imagining* and *Imparting*, facilitate visitors’ immersion into Hamlet’s story within the setting of the castle of Kronborg. Through *Interpreting*, they escape their normal social role as the stories provide them with mechanism for escape (McCabe & Foster, 2006) to co-create the drama and experience (Kempiak et al., 2017). Through *Interacting* they reimagine and create new narratives (Chronis, 2005). This combination of elements is what makes *Hamlet Live* so original and appealing for visitors as they feel part of the drama unfolding, exactly what HVAs need to do to stay competitive (Minkiewicz et al., 2014).

Two additional “dramatizing” elements play a significant role in intensifying and magnifying the emotional experience of visitors.

5.6 Initiating: Impromptu encounters

A unique element in *Hamlet Live* is the *Initiating* of impromptu encounters – unexpected, surprising, and unforeseen scenes from *Hamlet* that visitors happen across. The importance of surprises in creating emotional experiences, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth is acknowledged in research by Tung and Ritchie (2011) and Vanhamme (2000). In *Hamlet Live* half the scenes

take place without being signposted. While extant research argues it is important for heritage sites to provide exact, clear, and accurate information (Calver & Page, 2013; Kempniak et al, 2017), Kronborg intentionally withholds information from visitors in order to create extra value through impromptu encounters. As actor 1, playing Hamlet, argues, this unexpectedness is the key concept of *Hamlet Live*; it surprises guests when they suddenly see the king walking through the room; they feel like flies on the wall of a performative experience.

Of course, the directors of *Hamlet Live* plan these unexpected scenes, but they appear as impromptu to the guests. As Reviewer 203 states, “Then we ‘ran into’ the characters of Hamlet who were interacting with guests while in character as well as acting portions of the actual play”. Such scenes create an energy among visitors with an air of anticipation of what will happen next. This experience of unexpectedness adds to the excitement of experiencing *Hamlet Live*. Reviewer 8 points out, “throughout the day there were various scenes acted out from sword practice with Hamlet to the Lady of the Castle doing needlepoint in an upstairs room. We were even visited by a ghost!” Visitors like to have experiences that go beyond what is expected (Tung & Ritchie, 2011), and here each impromptu encounter differs depending on the co-creative involvement of the guests, who jointly shape storyscapes and experiences.

The uniqueness of the impromptu encounters is further accentuated as scenes happen at the same time around the castle. It means that every visitor experience will be different as visitors taking different routes around the castle experience different scenes from *Hamlet*. Furthermore, as Actor 1 observed, most guests experience something unique as visitors’ interactions impact how the actors perform. Each *Hamlet Live* experience is unique as it relies on the initiation of co-creation, improvisation, and impromptu encounters.

5.7 Improvising: Adapting

Improvisation is a theatre form that involves unscripted performances (Medler & Magerko, 2010) that yet rely on technique to be engaging (Pine & Gilmore, 2020). In *Hamlet Live* the actors quite often improvise with visitors, deviating from the script at any time, as long as they keep the core dialogue (Actor 2). Actor 3, Gertrude, recounts how some audiences are eager to play along, to act as tailors, servants, maids, or dukes. As a queen, she has the authority to order them around and they prove willing. The improvisations may be as simple as guiding visitors toward the next scene, or as complex as acting out various emotions when visitors work with the Jester to keep Ophelia from losing her mind. Visitors recognise the use of improvisation; as Reviewer 156 points out, “they have actors in different parts of the castle acting out scenes from Hamlet - with some improvisation and interaction with visitors. They're very good and well used to people's unusual reactions.”

Improvising creates dialogue and various happenings in the castle. It generates the ability to adapt to various situations as well as to tailor to different kinds of visitors while following the core script of *Hamlet Live*. As Pine and Gilmore (2020) observe, what defines the Experience Economy are memorable moments through scripted acts of theatre, while Selstad (2007) argues that experiences centre on novelty. The moments of improvisation co-create novelty within the larger narrative and allow each actor's personal characterizations to show through.

Improvisations and the initiating of impromptu encounters are termed dramatizing elements as they aim to support and strengthen the interactive experiences between actors and audiences (see Figure 2). They create surprises and unique moments for visitors and can thus further contribute to the valuable extraordinary experiences HVAs aim to generate, for they offer an escape from everyday mundane structural life and daily routine (Husemann et al., 2017; Kempniak et al., 2017). This in turn enables visitors to be active agents (Chronis, 2012) where

they co-create new unique experiences based on their own personalities and backgrounds, “traveling” into a different world where they become absorbed in an experience they help generate (Kempiak et al., 2017). The improvisations and impromptu encounters in which visitors create a distinctive co-created experience can therefore be a key dramatizing element in the Experiential Strategy framework.

5.8 Identity: Authenticity and Transformation

The multifaceted offerings of *Hamlet Live* aim to deliver memorable and perhaps even transformational experiences that affect how visitors view their own identities. Given identity is all about self-image, to achieve this *Hamlet Live* must also come off as authentic to have these effects. As MacCannell (1976) states, visitors are generally on the search for something real and authentic, and *Hamlet Live* offers an experience that visitors may perceive as authentic on three levels.

On the first level, the experience renders *objective authenticity* based on the genuineness of objects and sites verified by experts (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). The experience takes place within a real castle from the 16th century. Historians ensure that all costumes, weapons, facilities, etc., are as authentic as possible. Visitors thus get a feel for how it was like to live in the 16th century. As Reviewer 58 states about the experience: “Real Medieval Ambience. With so many reviews, I will just add a note that, of all the castles in Europe, I thought Kronberg (sic) to be furnished in the most evocative way, faithful to what one would expect of Medieval/Renaissance Danes”.

On the second level, *Hamlet Live* offers *staged authenticity* (MacCannell, 1973; Gilmore & Pine, 2007). As a visible, public representation of social structure the castle and its props help create the environment in which performances and co-created interactions are staged for the commercial consumption of visitors in a way that they perceive as authentic

(MacCannell, 1999, p. 39). As reviewer 186 observes: “You really feel like you're in Hamlet's castle”. For instance, the actor Polonius wears a costume created according to what people wore back in the 16th century. However, underneath he wears modern underwear. Even the castle hosts lend authenticity from their third-person perspective, such as bowing to and greeting audiences appropriately for the time period.

On the third level, Kronborg and *Hamlet Live* together provide *existential authenticity* as visitors feel they are more authentic than in everyday life since they have an emotional response to the surroundings and the liminality of the staged events and express their identities through co-creating the experiences (Wang, 1999). Hence, the authentic unexpectedness of the interactive theatrical experiences delivers something more than the regular ‘obligatory rites’ of ‘must see’ HVAs (MacCannell, 1999). As Reviewer 122 states: “As you know that it is the castle of Hamlet you feel special atmosphere, history and power of imagination joins and creates (sic) special feelings”. Visitors let go of their fixed social roles (see 5.3 Interpreting: Performances and roles) and immerse themselves into Hamlet’s world. For instance, audience members shift roles when at the urging of Polonius to help him punish Yorick, even though they supported Yorick in the previous scene. As Reviewer 9 states: “We liked to way the actors drew the ‘audience’ (visitors) into the scene” while Reviewer 234 argues, “There wasn't a whole lot of other stuff in the castle. But *Hamlet Live* made the whole castle come alive and made it magical.” Hence, the pleasure of participating in Hamlet is an existential authentic moment in which visitors have an emotional response. Visitors come not to see a play but rather to see real human life play out on Kronborg’s stage (Actor 3).

The analysis of the first six elements of the 7 I’s Experiential Strategy Framework (see Figure 2) demonstrates how the experience guides visitors into an adventure: an authentic, extraordinary experience that takes them on an interactive co-constructed journey where they can perform characters with the actors in a dramaturgical setting. As Reviewer 45 states: “An

extraordinary and fantastic experience was the live theatre performance of Shakespeare's Hamlet moving from room to room in the castle". Moreover, the spectacle of *Hamlet Live* may therefore provide guided transformation, not least because people are most open to change when they get out of their daily routines (Pine & Gilmore, 2020).

This guided transformation is seen in the TripAdvisor reviews. For instance, Reviewer 198 stated "My sons loved it so much they voluntarily picked up Hamlet and read it afterwards". The visit is not only educating and memorable – perhaps the normal expectation – but affects visitor lives as well, changing their view of self (e.g. "I am a reader of Shakespeare"). For instance, Reviewer 30 states, "Our visit was no longer just another castle or palace - it was an experience to remember an educational one as well". Hence, the reviewer describes a cathartic experience that triggers ideas and insights. Reviewer 145 claims: this was a real highlight of our holiday and an experience I'll remember for a long time". *Hamlet Live* therefore delivers a transformative storyscape by delivering a mix of co-created authenticity and enhanced interpretation that may broaden their worldview and even improve individual visitor's conception of themselves (Magee & Gilmore, 2015).

5.9 Recommendations

The 7 I's Experiential Strategy Framework should be seen as a guiding framework for the transformation of other HVAs. It is particularly appropriate for HVAs connected to well-known historical events, mythical tales, an historical era, or (as with Kronborg) fictional settings that can be communicated through dramaturgy and storytelling. There are many castles, villages, and other locations where famous battles, romantic encounters, or a host of other political, social, or environmental incidents occurred. For instance, The Forbidden City in Beijing was the stage for many important historical events of the past 800 years; in its comprehensive setting actors could play out stories about specific Ming or Qing emperors, or

they could re-enact the rise of the Communist party. Or an HVA that has played a part in a well-known piece of literature or film, such as Bran Castle in Romania, which provides the setting for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Essentially, wherever there is an interesting story to tell within a defined space of cultural or historical value, HVAs could apply the 7 I's Experiential Strategy Framework.

While the 7 I's should be seen as a guiding framework for the transformation of other HVAs, it is also important to note that the framework has its limitations and not all HVAs can follow a similar path of development. First, some HVAs may not have the resources, the size or capabilities to implement similar theatrical performances as *Hamlet Live*. However, they could still utilise the Framework's principles as inspiration in constructing interactive narratives with their visitors. Second, the HVAs have to consider their heritage and the public's perception towards them. Perhaps the attraction's history does not make co-creative dramatic performances viable or appropriate. Concentration camps such as Auschwitz serve as such an example. Finally, it is vital to observe that each HVA builds its story on its particular cultural, historical and social antecedents that enable it to create a unique experience utilising the 7 I's as a guiding framework. The Framework's essence is therefore not to start a process by which tourist destinations and their attractions become increasingly alike, but rather to enable HVAs to discover which distinct and appealing stories they can use and stage in order to attract and encourage visitor participation and immersion.

6. Conclusion, managerial implications, and future research

In this study, we examined why *Hamlet Live* is so successful with audiences in terms of both revenue and visitor satisfaction. In collaboration with the directors of *Hamlet Live* and grounded in the analysis of TripAdvisor reviews and actor interviews, we demonstrate how a carefully orchestrated mix of theatrical performances and impromptu improvised interactions

with visitors, which generate extraordinary experiences and long-lasting memories, are produced by seven dynamic and interconnected elements. These elements form an Experiential Strategy Framework that illustrates a step-by-step process in which the elements steer visitors from the external staged acting performances of *Hamlet Live* through to an internal authentic and emotional state in which some visitors' identities are transformed. The seventh element *Identity* is identified as the core value of *Hamlet Live*, as audiences are willing to pay extra for the guided transformation of *Identity* delivered through interactive improvised theatrical performances of the production (Pine & Gilmore, 2020).

The findings of this study make a noteworthy contribution to existing research. First, we constructed a conceptual framework of interconnected dynamic elements (the 7 I's Experiential Strategy Framework) drawn from various theoretical concepts known from tourism (Chronis, 2012), theatre (Behrndt, 2010), experience design (Pine & Gilmore, 2020), and visitor attraction research (Leask, 2018), and thus propose a method of how to stage experiences and guide transformations of identity at HVAs. The identification of the dramatizing elements creates a pathway for HVAs to introduce new forms of personal, interactive, and surprising experiences that are unique for each visitor. Second, we displayed the possibilities of creating multi-levelled authentic experiences by joining objective, staged, and existential authenticity (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Gilmore & Pine, 2007), mixing the seriousness of historical heritage with theatre and storytelling to immerse visitors in the performances and generate an unforgettable experience.

The managerial implications are significant as the 7 I's Experiential Strategy Framework can be used by other HVAs to replicate the success of Kronborg's *Hamlet Live* and thus improve visitor satisfaction and visitor numbers. As a guiding framework, it can rejuvenate other HVAs and is particularly appropriate for HVAs that are connected to well-known historical events, mythical tales, an historical era, or (as with Kronborg) fictional

settings that can be communicated through dramaturgy and storytelling. From a tourism destination perspective, popular HVAs with appealing narratives may be used by destination management organisations to strengthen their marketing and thus attract new visitors.

The limitations of this research also provide a path for future research. First, the Experiential Strategy Framework is based on the analysis of *Hamlet Live* at Kronborg. The conceptual framework should be tested at other HVAs to examine its worth in different contexts and circumstances. Some unique conditions may apply at Kronborg that may be difficult to replicate elsewhere. Second, the research only focused on HVAs. However, other types of visitor attractions may also be able to apply the conceptual framework to their advantage. For instance, purpose-built attractions (Leask, 2018), where the setting can be modified and adapted to theatrical performances and dramaturgy more easily. Finally, we used TripAdvisor reviews to gauge the satisfaction and emotions of visitors. To get a stronger understanding of the performances of social roles and guided information, semi-structured interviews with selected visitors would be beneficial in future studies of the conceptual framework.

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