

Chapter 1 /
Experiencing the Past
Introduction to
experience, strategies,
authenticity and
branding /
Linde Egberts



Historical objects
on a weekly market in
Strasbourg, France
(Linde Egberts, 2012).



Interest in our past and engagement with history is everywhere. Turn on the television and you will surely be able to find films or drama series set in the past. Take a stroll through any town and you will spot not only monuments and well-restored historic buildings, but also old-time cars, vintage clothing stores, and antiques dealers and second-hand furniture stores. Walk into any bookshop and you will find an abundance of historical novels, travel guides to historic places, and books on topics like art history or the Second World War. Researching one's own family tree, watching historical festivals, and playing computer games that are set in historic environments are common leisure activities. The vintage, the traditionally hand-crafted, and the historically or personally significant are guaranteed to find attention, engagement, and passionate defense when threatened with loss or destruction.

History is *hot*, and it seems it will not to go out of fashion anytime soon. Yet professional historians, archaeologists, curators, and cultural tourism professionals whose job it is to narrate specific histories to large audiences find themselves confronting a major challenge. For it is not to an easy task to match the academically approved or nuanced histories of experts with the appetite for experiencing the old, the nostalgic,



Cyclists use the statue of Ambiorix, the mythical, Batavian symbol of Tongeren, Belgium, as parking place on their stop in a Sunday morning tour (Linde Egberts, 2012).

and the authentic that is omnipresent in popular culture and daily life today.

This is particularly true when experts try to bring a lesser known chapter in our history to public attention on an international scale. In the past, European projects have been executed to promote a common history in several countries, for example the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostella and the educational project Discovering European Heritage in Royal Residences. This companion focuses on how to conceptualize international *heritage revivals* for large audiences and addresses the challenges and issues – but also the great advantages – of building bridges between professionals in the historical and cultural tourism sectors, on the one hand, and the public, on the other. To this end, it surveys existing European heritage practices, offering an extensive *tool kit* for facilitating a heritage revival, and, in the final chapter, draws on the material presented by its different authors to highlight the most innovative and successful concepts in the field today.

Conceptual fuel

This companion seeks to be a source of experience and insight for anyone needing to conceptualize the revival, on an international scale, of some specific portion of Europe's heritage. It takes into account the ways in which today's public expresses its interest in history and the way we Europeans engage with our past. It does not take the form of a practical handbook for organising such a revival, but offers, rather, *conceptual fuel* relevant to the many aspects involved in developing the concept of a new project. It offers a context, a broad range of possibilities, and the pros and cons of many of the means one might use. It is a guide to formulating goals and missions, to finding target audience, and to creating the right conditions for revival to succeed. The practical organisation of your project is the next step, to be taken only after the hard work

of conceptualization is done. The practical phase is not the main focus of attention here, although some more practical aspects of heritage revival are, in fact, mentioned throughout the companion.

Part 1 sketches the context for such undertakings. How does heritage work in today's Europe? What strategies do European institutions possess to stimulate the sense of a shared past and a shared European identity? How does heritage work on a regional scale, and what differences exist between professional historians and others who feel engaged in their regional or local histories? These questions are central issues in chapters 2 and 3, which treat different aspects of heritage and identities in present-day Europe. Chapter 2 focuses on the role of the Continent's early medieval heritage, in order to illustrate how one phase in European history can take on many different forms and have its own key issues when it comes to implementing heritage strategies on an international scale. Chapter 3 focuses on one particular region, the Arnhem Nijmegen City Region in the Netherlands, to illustrate how heritages are used in strategies for the construction of local and regional identities.

Part 2 contains a collection of articles on how to conceptualize a revival of a particular heritage by using different 'tools': media and methods that can be used to make a historical project or initiative come to life. Authors from many different disciplines were asked to offer insights into the benefits and strategies of using a particular 'tool', for example historical re-enactments, computer and alternate reality gaming, and spatial design.

Part 3 invites you to get ready for building a concept for a new heritage revival, perhaps even on an international scale, and it stresses several important aspects of working with history and reaching a broad audience. It sketches opportunities, raises questions, and highlights some key decision points encountered in every heritage project for a broad audience. Finally, it addresses several central issues which arise in the course of working on such a project, for example the multi-

dimensionality of authenticity and ethical issues such as the 're-playing' of history in films, games, and re-enactments.

This companion is written for archaeological and heritage experts, as well as tourism professionals working on a historical theme or body of heritage, be it the Roman Limes, a Second World War memorial, or a museum on Napoleon. It therefore does not focus on the presentation of the heritage of one particular period but seeks, rather, to introduce many strategies, approaches, and media relevant to different sorts of heritage from various periods. However, in writing a companion to developing concepts for a heritage revival, one cannot avoid mentioning the background of the particular heritage project that this companion itself is a part of, namely *Cradles of European Culture: Francia Media*, a pan-European cultural project devoted to the presentation of the Continent's early medieval heritage as a cradle of our diverse European cultures of today. This companion is thus rooted in the desire to make Europeans aware of the heritage of Charlemagne, and especially of the Frankish Middle Kingdom that was formed when his realm was divided by his offspring, highlighting the formative role of the period for today's Europe in the areas of governance, language, the arts, learning, and religion.

Heritage revival

This companion is centred around the concept of a *heritage revival*, a term chosen to stress that in order to reach large audiences, it is necessary to bring a history or heritage to *life*. Telling a story or showing what we (experts) know of a certain period is not enough to make people feel connected to this part of our common past. Creating a meaningful historical experience for the audience, and offering opportunities for personal development and self-expression are necessary ingredients if the enterprise of bringing a part of the past to life in the minds of an audience is to be successful. The task is even more challenging if one wishes to reach an audience in a large area,

encompassing several countries. Cultural barriers, differences in national senses of identity, and conflicting interpretations of the past complicate matters even further.

The term *heritage revival* carries the connotation of something man-made: a construction from elements of the past. Conceptualizing a project capable of bringing a part of the past back to life on an international scale resembles a work of construction in many respects. Contemporary goals and ideals determine what storylines and which representations of the past receive the most emphasis.

We need individual members of our audiences to become interested enough to go out of their way to involve their families and social networks in the online world as well as in physical places. What we need is a *joint venture*, a project that not only historians call *ours*, but one that is also owned by the public – people with other backgrounds than ours yet engaged because they feel part of the revival. Multiple media channels need to be involved, different platforms need to be reached, places over a vast area need to be connected, and multiple tools need to be used to engage people in a revival, which is nothing short of a new construction of a shared past.

There are several key issues one needs to be aware of when conceptualizing a heritage revival for any given aspect of history. These include authenticity and selecting the best ways of experiencing and representing the past today, taking into account the desire of professionals to be as nuanced, ethically conscious, and accurate as possible, but also the need to invite multiple audiences to engage in a way that is valuable to them.

In this Introduction, I offer examples of heritage practices and historical experiences involving audiences that do not have a professional archaeological or historical background. The many ways in which history is consumed by non-professional historians can generally be gathered under the term *public history*. This is history which is popular, multi-faceted, omnipresent, and which has many different connections to the professional field of historians, museums, and other cultural and historical institutions. This companion approaches the



subject not only as an important aspect of society with many links to professional organizations and disciplines, but also as an opportunity to bring new stories of our past to audiences by using existing media, networks, and platforms, though in new, creative ways.

Routes, networks and places

In this companion places, networks and, especially, routes are given a central role in the process of conceptualizing a heritage revival. Places are local, but networks and routes make a project truly and tangibly international in character, by integrating places, objects, and local meanings and stories into a larger body of heritage.

In heritage studies and the management of heritage sites – but also in spatial planning and design – a shift has taken place from preserving authentic historical material to

A former miner or “Kumpel” serves as a bicycle-tour guide on the former mining terrain of Zollverein, Essen, Germany (Linde Egberts, 2011).



a broader notion of *place*, one which also incorporates the 'connections between the material and spiritual, the tangible and intangible.'¹ In discourse concerning heritage, the *site* has thus been re-*placed* in response to a desire for a richer, dynamic approach to heritage which includes more than the values scientists and archaeologists assign to a place. Heritage sites that are approached as meaningful places are a suitable resource for a heritage revival. They offer a great opportunity for rendering authentic experiences and offer even more options if they are made part of a wider network of historical places.

Historic places are always part of a larger network of historic ties, but they are also part of a contemporary spatial context, one which, to a greater or lesser extent, is based on and evolved from these older networks. Connecting historic places by travelling from one to another brings different stories or aspects of the past together in one experience. The act of travelling adds an extra dimension to the experience, since it gives a person a physical sense of the distances and landscapes of

A runner in the Valkhof park, Nijmegen, the Netherlands (Linde Egberts, 2012).

which these places are part. Walking on historic roads, crossing (former) landscape barriers, and experiencing the vastness, chaos or natural beauty of an historical environment adds to one's understanding and feeling of connection to the past. Heritage routes create a *need to travel* and thus offer their designers an excellent opportunity to co-create meaningful experiences together with their audiences. As will become clear, heritage routes offer great opportunities for international heritage organisations. Travelling from one heritage site to the next, connecting histories to places which were important to them, and physically connecting parts of a story oneself is an ideal way of co-creating authentic experiences and is thus a great tool for an international heritage revival. As has been said before, conceiving a potential audience and gaining an insight into their desires is a very important condition for success.

Experience

When it comes to understanding the behavior and needs of consumers and strategies to involve them (and of course: make money), those with economic and commercial interests in the subject are much in advance of museums and the archaeological professional. While one might feel it is best to avoid too much commercialism in the case, for example, of publicly funded projects, one can still learn important lessons from studies of consumer behavior and marketing strategies and seek to apply them when appropriate.

This companion is based on the premise that a heritage revival can only be successful when the experience of the audience is the central concern, and marketing and business research offers us insight into how consumers, visitors, or audiences respond. Understanding consumer behavior in terms of *experiences* is an approach which developed around the beginning of the new century, and it offers great opportunities for a *heritage revival*, because museums and cultural institu-



Rusty coke oven
plant annex giant
wheel and ice skating
rink. World cultural
heritage site
Zollverein, Essen,
Germany (© Frank
Vinken/Stiftung
Zollverein).

tions, in general, are arenas where the notions of the *experience economy*² are particularly relevant.

In the twentieth century, the economy in the West changed from one with a focus on production to one focused on service, and now it is rapidly developing into an *experience economy*. For a long time, commercial thinking centred on how to offer a product or service to consumers who were seen mainly as passive subjects, and marketing was viewed as a means to bridge the gap between supply and demand.³ Cultural organisations and projects, it was assumed, should offer their audiences the opportunity to look, learn, and enjoy art, historical buildings or archaeological sites, and should promote them through advertisements and news items.

Thanks to recent thinking about how consumer experience things, they are no longer considered to be the passive subjects of marketing and communication strategies, but, instead, as communicative and self-directed individuals. Therefore, the focus of business has changed from the production of goods and the provision of services to the experience of joint

'co-creation' by consumers and organisations. The economy is now focused on the personal and socio-cultural values that an individual seeks to pursue and on the money he or she sets aside for creating the meaningful experiences which give shape to his or her life.⁴

When applying this approach to heritage revivals, one cannot simply provide information online, in books, or in a well-conceived exhibition and expect to reach the desired audience. A heritage revival also requires gathering knowledge about individual members of a potential audience and the sort of experiences they desire. In any given project, one must find an answer to the question which role it can play in the 'life world' of its potential audience members and in the way they wish to give shape and meaning to their life. The co-creation of meaningful experiences is the key to a heritage revival which will turn out to be durable and sustainable. This implies a concentration on the individual's need for experiences, in other words, for practices which promote having fun,

Reading time frames on an archaeological site, with the early medieval St. Laurence church in the background. Ename, Belgium (Linde Egberts, 2011).



creating meaning, and developing one's self-image. Travelling a heritage route, contributing to solving a mystery in an alternate reality game, or re-enacting an historical moment at an historic place are all ways which allow the audience to co-create experiences.

Authenticity

One of the main aspects of the experience economy is the importance of *authenticity*. It is at the core of consumer behavior: it is 'what consumers really want' in all their purchases and daily activities. Business authors James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine devoted a well-received book to describing the ways in which our entire economy is based on the desire for authenticity, a desire shared by young and old, and by the middle class and the very well-off. They stress the necessity for companies to invest in *rendering* an authentic experience for their customers in order to be successful.

The contradictory element, of course, is the fact that every business offer, just like every heritage revival, is in essence *fake*, because it is man-made. Yet, consumers long for authentic experiences and can indeed experience inauthentic offerings as being authentic to them. A project or a company can earn the privilege of being seen as authentic, only by rendering an authentic experience.⁵ Pine and Gilmore's ideas on authenticity are applicable to heritage practices and the cultural field. Customers, but also the audience of a heritage revival, tend to develop new desires for authenticity in whatever they do or spend money on.⁶ Rendering authenticity is therefore also a main concern for us when conceptualizing a heritage revival. But, what is authenticity and how can a heritage revival, itself being a contemporary construction based on the past, be authentic?

We need to ask a different question first: what is authentic? To archaeologists, historians and art historians, this might mean something completely different than to a member of the



In October 2012 the main 'battle' of Hastings was cancelled due to the safety risks caused by heavy rainfall (Oli Scarff/Getty Images, 2012).

audience of a heritage revival. The experience of authenticity can vary in many ways. There are, in fact, several different forms of authenticity which play a part in the dynamics of heritage and identities, and they are sometimes the cause of competition and debate. First of all, there is authenticity of *place* and of *object*, which is in many cases the form of authenticity that experts refer to. Authenticity of *place* refers to the *actual* place where an historic event took place; for example, the coast of Normandy is the authentic place where the Allied Forces launched the military operation known as Decision Day on June 6th 1944.⁷ Authenticity of *material* refers to the *realness* of historic material, for example historic documents or the archaeological soil archive.

There are others forms of authenticity as well, which can be called *relational*, *creative*, and *referential*. *Relational* authenticity is the experience of authenticity through the personal engagement of individuals in historic events, places,

or object, such as the storytelling of witnesses of a specific past event. *Creative* authenticity refers to the artistic unicity or integrity with which an object or place is shaped.⁸ *Referential* authenticity is the contemporary reference to an historic event or historic practice that is consciously and self-evidently produced, as the annual commemoration of the Battle of Hastings (1066) in England.

Complex combinations of these types of authenticity exist in many heritage projects, public history events, or commemorations. The annual commemoration of the Battle of Hastings in England between the Norman-French and English armies, for example, takes place on the location where the battle occurred in 1066 and also around the same date, October 14th. Here, we see the authenticity of place (and time), but also a complex form of referential authenticity. The commemoration takes the form of a re-enactment of the battle by hundreds of actors, who bring back to life the battle as it really was. 'Re-enactments create a dynamic, lifelike context in which participants can identify closely with historical events.'⁹ The developments of the role of history in the media and online add a further dimension to the complex notion of authenticity.

Conceptualizing a successful heritage revival that is perceived as authentic incorporates multiple forms of authenticity, more than only *place* and *material*. Involving audiences in the co-creation of the revival is an important factor in its success, since it gives individual members the chance to make the past their own, deciding for themselves what is authentic. The raw, original, and rustic is often perceived as authentic. It makes good sense to engage audiences in the project at a stage when ideas and activities are still being developed and need to be worked out further. Questions of historical accuracy and authenticity are very important when using television, 3D reconstructions, films, computer games, or other digital strategies to organize a heritage revival and convey a sense of authenticity with these tools (see Part 2 of this companion).



Re-playing the past

Building bridges between experts and a broad audience involves many different interpretations, selections of the past, and representations of heritage. It also raises moral and ethical issues. Throughout this companion, several of these issues will be mentioned only briefly, but they are, nevertheless, crucial, inasmuch as they can make or break a heritage revival in the world of experts or in the realm of public opinion. One essential issue needs to be considered when reading this companion and conceptualizing a heritage revival: should we replay the past and, if so, how?

The chapters in Part 2 of this companion all present a way of reviving the past, and many of them contain elements of performance, acting, and game playing. Take, for example, historical films, in which contemporary actors dress in period costumes and act out a story set in the past. How accurate should these films be about historic figures, locations, dress, or the language spoken? And what about television documentaries on historical topics? Should actors be used to clarify and illustrate a story if no contemporary film footage is available? More extreme examples are re-enactments, in which amateur historians in historical dress refight historic battles in front of (sometimes) huge audiences. What if women want to participate as soldiers in the re-enactment? And how should one deal with Nazi-ideologies if German SS groups need to be represented? And what stand should one adopt towards computer games in which war is idealized and the individual soldier becomes a hero by shooting as many enemies as possible? Is that OK – and without placing any limits on the degree of violence depicted – if it proves effective in engaging new audiences with the past? Finally, who is responsible for historical accuracy and respect for different interpretations of the past, if experiences are co-created with audiences? What happens when the past becomes a game?

It is not possible here to give satisfactory answers to all these questions here, but it is clear that moral and ethical issues

Banning all motorised traffic from highway A40 area attracted 3 million visitors on foot, by bike and on inline skates. For one day it was possible to experience the central highway of the German Ruhr region, once designed for speed, in a slow way (Linde Egberts, 2010).



Visitors exploring German Halde Norddeutschland, an artificial mountain formed through past coal mining, which now functions as artwork, panorama and location for cultural and sports events. (Object: Hallenhaus by Observatorium) (Linde Egberts, 2010).

regarding our heritage are unavoidable and need to be given careful consideration. This does not mean that only experts can decide what a correct representation of the past is. A fine balance needs to be established in the course of every project. Involving the audience in these matters can be a precarious, but also a valuable step for a heritage project.

Discussions about authenticity are closely related to discussions about performance, acting, and game-playing, as the chapter on re-enactments will illustrate. Many re-enactors are very serious about re-presenting the period of their choice as accurately as possible. They use online networks to order their gear, but also experiment with ancient production techniques to acquire the authentic outfits they need.

Branding Europe

Another topic needs introduction here, as it forms the backdrop of many international heritage revivals and is also mentioned throughout this companion: branding. Many international heritage projects, such as cultural routes, travelling museum exhibitions, and educational programs originate in an ambition to improve the image of places, regions, or even an entire continent, as is the case with Europe. They are also very often funded with the aim of contributing to a more positive image of the area in question.

Images of places, regions, countries, or continents are very stable. The reputation of a country in the rest of the world barely changes over time. Branding strategies, with their slogans and logos are too one-dimensional to be effective for places (or for regions, countries, or continents). To change the public opinion of a place, it is necessary to highlight its richness and complexity, as these are always 'valuable image attributes'.¹⁰ Places or countries should not try to become mere *brands*. 'Governments need to help the world understand the real, complex, rich, diverse nature of their people and landscapes, their history and heritage, their products and their resources: to prevent them from becoming mere brands.'¹¹ The only way to do so is to create more engagement with the rest of the world, as 'higher visibility does tend to go together with stronger appeal.'¹² Deeds, not logos and images, create public opinion. It is not hard to make the jump from the notion of improving the image of a place by *doing* rather than by *saying and showing* to the idea of co-creating experiences together with the audience.

As to the Europe's reputation in the rest of the world, we know that the continent as such has a very good image: it is the top scorer in an international ranking of national 'brands'. Yet, it seems that the international public does not differentiate between the European Union as a governmental institution and Europe as a continent: perception in this regard is not pre-

cise. In pursuing the question, it becomes clear that contemporary European culture scores extremely high, but European governance scores low. It was an unpleasant surprise to learn that heritage and tourism are the weakest points in Europe's reputation in the world. It is thus clear that we have our work cut out for us if we hope to carry out a successful European heritage revival!

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