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Futures

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/futures

Original research article

Terror park: A future theme park in 2100

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Tourism
Future
Scenario
Dark
Entertainment
Park
Futures
Disasters
Terror
Theme

ABSTRACT

In the future, tourism and entertainment could be displayed as spectacles of horror, where consumers are offered and opportunity to revisit the tragedies of the past. Current displays of death where the past is exhibited and consumed as fun, scary and as entertainment productions are widespread. The movie industry provides horror to all ages, children can be exposed to the goulash past in various forms, such as the popular book series 'Horrible Histories'. Theme parks, rides and roller-coaster often take a dark and scary approach to enticing consumers. Another popular and well established product (especially in western societies) are 'fun factories' (Stone, 2009), such as the dungeon attractions owned by the Merlin Entertainment Group. The market for death and horror based attractions and entertainment is growing. Since the dawn of time death has been a guarantee that awaits us all. Society is well connected to death, however and significantly, the consumption of death and its social transformation historically to present, both in practice and meaning have changed, evolved and continue to do so. The meaning, practice and consumption of death and its evolution into the future will be a significant representation of future societies. This paper, considers how society is moving into a new period, the 'spectacle of death'. By researching and understanding past and present social realities, it is possible to generate knowledge, ideas and predictions of the future, in this study, the future role of death as tourism entertainment. This paper presents original and challenging potential future scenarios in which tourists engage with death as a form of entertainment, around the year 2100. Uniquely, the paper considers the use of horrific and tragic events that have overwhelmed the world in the early 21st Century (including the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York). Accordingly, presenting innovative narratives exposing how these will become spectacles of death in a 'terror park'; a lighter form of dark entertainment in the future.

1. Introduction

"People who see life as anything more than pure entertainment are missing the point" George Carlin.

The purpose of this research is to consider the spatial time in which a dark attraction, one related to dark historical events associated with death and suffering, can progressively become an entertainment attraction. The question is, could dark realities of the 21st Century be played out to future tourists, as a spectacle of pleasure? Berger (1967) noted the role and importance of death as an essential human condition, in which individuals are required to develop mechanisms to help them understand and cope with their eventual end. According to Berger (1967), disregarding and avoiding death is to neglect a universal parameter in which the individual and the collective self is constructed. Death taboos have long been challenged by authors and in our social world, at a time when the individual is consuming death in a multitude of ways and through different formats. Harrison (2003) explored how the dead are absorbed into the living world by graves, images, literature, architecture and monuments. It is suggested by Lee (2002) that the

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2017.11.002>

Received 7 August 2017; Received in revised form 20 October 2017; Accepted 2 November 2017

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disenchantment of death in modernity has made its way back into social consciousness, advocating that death is ‘coming out of the closet to redefine our assumptions of life’ (Lee, 2004: 155). Current social environments have led us to a time and place where individuals are willingly or unwillingly consuming and engaging with real and commodified death and suffering through a variety of audio-visual channels, for many purposes, be it media driven, popular culture (Sharpley & Stone, 2009) and the arts, education and or entertainment.

Future tourists could visit attractions that display our current suffering. Tragedies, horrors and disastrous events from recent history including terrorist attacks such as 9/11 or the Paris shootings, or recent natural disasters such as the Sichuan earthquake and Hurricane Katrina could be used to entertain future visitors. On the surface, this notion is potentially, moderately uncomfortable to contemplate, especially considering how recent these attacks and atrocities are to present day. However, if one is to consider the frequently cited lighter dark tourism attractions or fun factories, such as the dungeon experiences in western countries, and considers the brutal historical realities displayed in these consumer places, then our misery as future entertainment suddenly becomes more realistic to envisage. In line with this, the aim of this research is to provide original ideas and forecasts for the future of themed entertainment that focus on the darker side of history. Six scenarios including natural disasters and human atrocities from the 21st Century are considered. This topic could ‘raise eyebrows’ it is emotive and could generate criticism. The aim is to engage the reader with the realities of human engagements and developments in the lighter dark tourism attractions that exist currently and could potentially exist in the future. By highlighting our current dark entertainment tourism practices, it provokes readers to consider their own moral ‘double standards’, in reference to their own touristic engagements with the darker side of the past. Whilst writing this research, the author felt somewhat uncomfortable with the possibility of future entertainment attractions based on current tragedies, but likewise, has visited lighter forms of dark historical sites, ones that veneer towards fun, entertainment and spectacles based on the horrors of the past. We live in the present, a world that bombards us with visual images of suffering and horrifying death, be it in natural and unnatural forms, thus to escape the issue of death and its role in society would be escaping one of the only guarantees in life – our own inevitable end. This paper initially explores death, dark tourism and entertainment before offering unique potential future insights into the future of lighter dark entertainment attractions through a scenario planning approach, based on secondary data analysis. Thus, presenting original literature and innovative research approaches to the field of tourism futures.

2. Research methodology: scenarios and narratives

“..Scenarios give people a ‘memory’ of the future” (Allan, Fairtlough, & Heinesen, 2002: 186)

The valuable application of scenarios is noted by Rasmussen (2005: 229) who suggests, “scenarios are flexible means to integrate disparate ideas, thoughts and feelings into holistic images, providing the context and meaning of possible futures” The term scenario is allied with extensive industries and disciplines, ranging from policymakers, business planning, local, national management and governments, to global environmental and development perspectives, and academics and consequently, an extensive range of methodological approaches and classifications have emerged (Fortes, Alvarenga, Seixas, & Rodrigues, 2015). It is beyond the scope of this research to explore the depth of application and methodological approaches of scenarios. Thus, this section will clarify the approach to scenarios taken by this study, which used narrative writing as a means to present a future scenario. Furthermore, this research examined the structural and transitional nature of society, through a social-constructivist lens. Such an approach often explores environmental, social and economic concerns and considers their evolving nature over time (Postma, 2015).

It is common for authors to classify the presentation and justification of their scenarios accordingly to the nature of their data, be it qualitative, quantitative or mixed. Various authors (Rotmans et al., 2000; van Notten, Rotmans, van Asselt, & Rothman, 2003) who use the qualitative data approach present narratives, stories, as their method and approach to scenario presentation. These include visuals, storylines and plots, in so doing, establishing images of the future for the reader. Moreover, within this approach authors express drivers, often without issuing and or relying on numerical figures as means of justification. Consequently, a common criticism of the qualitative approach to scenario presentation is their ‘unscientific’ nature. Nonetheless, through a constructivist lens, a qualitative approach in creating and presenting future scenarios is applied, where narrative writing and stories are the central aim in visualising the future for the audience. Chase (2005: 651) suggests that narrative inquiry is still considered “a field in the making.” The narrative epistemological approach to research provides an alternative method to more scientific perspectives, taking human experience and subjectivity as valued based, in contrast to pragmatic approaches, where abstract experimentation is deemed valuable. In support of the narrative approach Polkinghorne (1988) notes, the narrative mode should not be seen as a new epistemology, rather it is one that has roots to the earliest forms of pervasive human experience, and arguably, one that precedes the more logical and pragmatic hard-science epistemologies applied to human understanding and natural-environment sense-making. Rasmussen (2005: 230) identifies that, “the narrative approach allows the scenario designer to provide holistic views of the future”. Narrative writing is an effective way of presenting future scenarios, as they provide stories that are engaging and informative (Lindgren & Bandhold, 2009). Bunn and Salo (1993: 294) state “...scenarios are built from realistic combinations of key driver values, which are elaborated into fully-fledged narratives...” Further stating, “scenarios should present credible description of the future environment.... By giving each scenario a ‘label’ and storylike characteristics...” (Bunn & Salo, 1993: 294). To realise this, uniquely, the research uses actual 21st Century events that have already befallen society as the basis for its narratives. Thus, providing authority to the narratives presented (as they are genuine historical events), but in so doing also ensuring the audience is capable of engaging and understanding the stories presented. The events selected are dark and morbid events and to some extent, their realness also adds to the provocative and profound propositions presented in the narratives within the future scenario.

Rotmans et al. (2000) note that the overarching value of scenarios does not necessary exist in their capability to predict the future,

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