



HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Enhancing the Socio-Cultural Sustainability of Visitor Attractions: Empowering Family Visitors
Author(s)	MELVIN, John
Citation	CATS 叢書, 18, 45-69
Issue Date	2024
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/93802
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	CATS18 (5).pdf



Enhancing the Socio-Cultural Sustainability of Visitor

Attractions: Empowering Family Visitors

John Melvin

Associate Professor, Department of Global & Interdisciplinary Studies,
Hosei University, Tokyo, Japan



Enhancing the Socio-Cultural Sustainability of Visitor

Attractions: Empowering Family Visitors

John Melvin

Associate Professor, Department of Global & Interdisciplinary Studies,
Hosei University, Tokyo, Japan

Keywords: heritage attractions; interpretation; socio-cultural sustainability; family visitors; VRM

“Each interpreter should strive to communicate a sense of place or a sense of historic meaning in a personal, individualized manner. The many facets of interpretation are part of what makes it so fascinating... [telling] the story behind the scenery or history of an area... [can] help convey a fuller appreciation and understanding of a place.” Beck and Cable (2011: xxi–xxii)

Abstract:

Despite the ubiquitous nature of families within tourism, there has been an inexplicable dearth of studies with families as the research subject. For many visitor attractions, imparting the site's importance to visitors and educating them on its significance are highly desirable outcomes, so better understanding families can have significant implications for the site's socio-cultural sustainability as well as providing useful important business insights. Using marketing frameworks and visual research methods, this paper makes an important contribution to analyse families' experiences within a UK visitor attraction. 14 families took part, from a range of nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds. This was complemented by nine interviews with operational- and managerial-level staff. Important insights are revealed into the approach of the site towards its interpretive resources and how families actually experienced a site, including their interactions with the site's interpretation. The paper identifies the benefits accrued from their interactions, and the outcomes attained.

Introduction

One of the consequences of the rise of critical tourism research is the awareness of the need to actively seek out and include the voices of minority or neglected groups, such as families and young visitors, whose voices have been consistently overlooked (Carr, 2011; Gamradt, 1995). Despite the importance of the family visitor segment to both international and domestic tourism (Schänzel, Yeoman & Backer, 2012) and oft-repeated calls for more family-focused research (e.g. Carr, 2011; Michie, 1986; Stringer, 1984), they remain curiously neglected within the tourism literature. Within the limited body of research featuring families, studies usually fail to address diversity in terms of cultural backgrounds and family composition, assume too much homogeneity and rarely include negative aspects (Bronner and de Hoog, 2008; Schänzel, 2010). In addition to being an economically-significant visitor segment, families play an important role in socio-cultural sustainability. As education and learning are among their desired outcomes from family tourism, better understanding families is conceptually important too (Carr, 2011). This study focuses on the experiences of various families at Edinburgh Castle, particularly the meanings and learning that family members collectively and individually gained from their visit as a result of engaging with the interpretative resources and discusses ways how attractions can better facilitate visitors' experiences.

Heritage Visitor Attractions

This research adopts Hu and Wall's definition of heritage visitor attractions (HVAs) as "... a permanent resource, either natural or human-made, which is developed and managed for the primary purpose of attracting visitors." (2005: 619). As noted by Prebensen (2024), HVAs occupy a unique position within the social fabric of destinations, potentially providing economic, social, cultural and educational value to both visitors and the wider community. HVAs provide interpretation for visitors to help them engage with the site; this is defined by Beck and Cable as "*an informational and inspirational process, designed to enhance understanding, appreciation, and protection of our cultural and natural legacy... [through] rendering, by which visitors see, learn, experience and are inspired first-hand.*" (2011: xxi) Visitors engage with the HVA through various interpretive media, using both traditional methods, such as sign boards and models, as well as audio-visual technology and human re-enactors to learn and make sense of the site.

Due in part to higher visitor expectations and greater competition within the leisure

sector, HVAs are having to become less ‘curatorial’ and more welcoming in their approach, and are becoming more professional and visitor-focused (Minkiewicz, Evans & Bridson, 2014; Park, 2014). Providing a memorable, rewarding and meaningful experience for visitors is central for the competitiveness and survival of HVAs, and allowing them to achieve their organizational aims, such as conservation, education or generating profit (Leask, 2022). Despite this, much of the potential learning and meaning-making is only latent within the HVA service environment and gaining desired outcomes is dependent on visitors building on their own understanding and knowledge and playing a more active role in their value creation/co-creation (Grönroos & Ravald, 2009)

Families

Families have a range of motivations for engaging in tourism-related activities together. The benefits of interacting with loved ones through shared experiences include enhancing relationships, having fun, meaning-making and learning (McCabe, 2009; Melvin, 2020; Webster, 2012). HVAs offer a unique blend of learning and entertainment; the actual experience is an outcome of the motivations, expectations, affective and cognitive perceptions formed by the visitor in an interpersonal, interactive process (Apostolakis, 2003). Drawing from recent marketing conceptualisations of value creation, rather than value being created in a simple customer-organisational dyad, family members can gain much value (e.g. learning and meaning-making) not just as an *outcome* of their interactions within a service environment, but also from the *process* of interacting with each other, with other customers, as well as the HVA’s interpretation (Gummerus, 2013; Melvin, 2020; Mohd-Any *et al*, 2014).

While various models exist on family behaviour, the Framework of Identity Interplay (FII) can help us to most accurately capture families’ activities as well as account for these (Epp & Price, 2008; Melvin, 2024). As shown in Figure 1, FII posits that families

The Family Unit

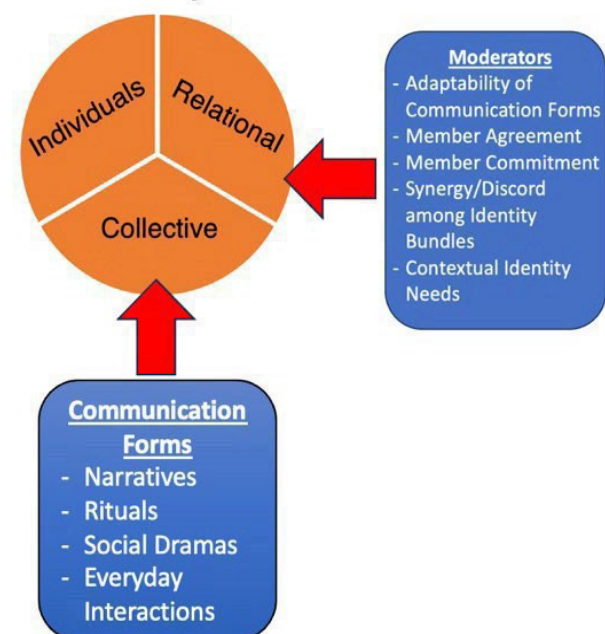


Figure 1: Framework of Identity Interplay (FII) (adapted from Epp & Price, 2008)

are an amalgam of *individual*, *relational* and *collective* identities, and the interplay of these drives their interactive behaviours, rituals and narratives (Epp and Price, 2008). In addition to family members' individual identities and a collective family identity, the relational identities encompass 'coalitions' (such as between siblings, or mother-daughter) and have a significant impact on family behaviour.

This study also utilises a conceptualisation of value creation from Grönroos & Voima (2013) to understand how family members individually and collectively create value during their visit. From their conceptualisation, traditional views of 'value-in-exchange' do not accurately account for current customer-organisational relationships and more active and empowered customers. Instead, value creation is more complex,

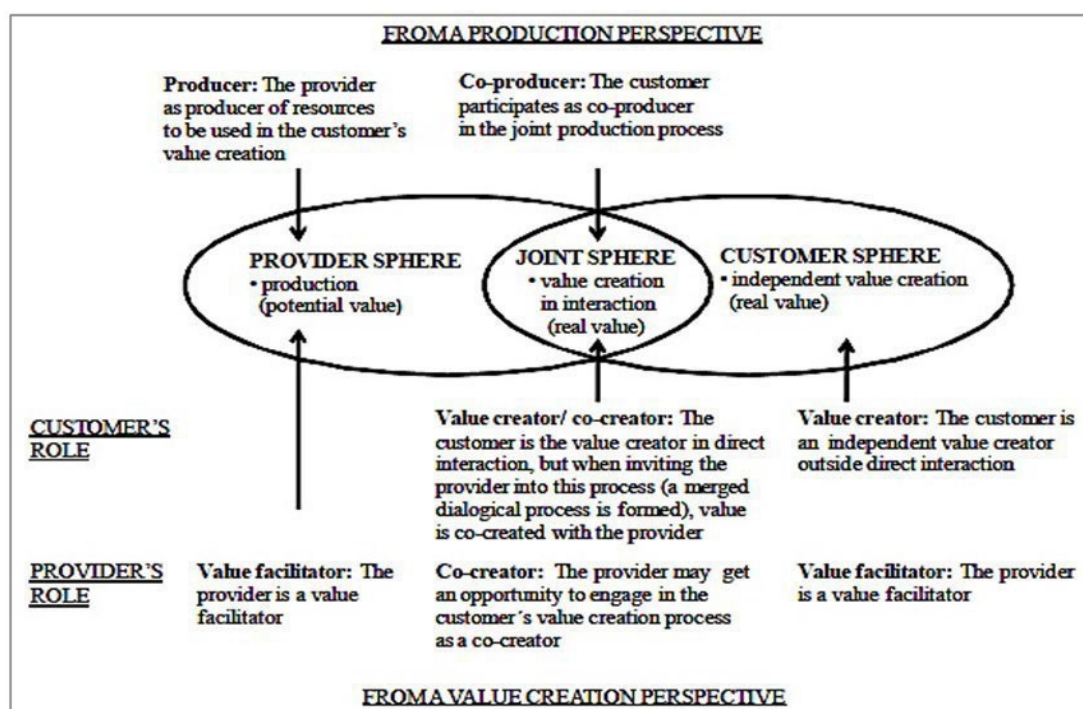


Figure 2: Value Creation Spheres (Grönroos & Voima, 2013)

interdependent and dynamic and *interactive value* is a more accurate term. Interactive value is the process where value is socially created "... *through the integration of firm-provided resources with other private and public resources*" (Vargo and Lusch, 2008: 148). These resources include customers' skills, knowledge and experience. In light of visitors' more active role in learning and meaning-making that this conceptualisation implies, this research can help to reveal the congruence between the experience that the HVA seeks to provide, and visitors' evaluations of how they actually experienced (Gummerus, 2013).

Figure 2 illustrates that this can be achieved through direct interactions with the castle's

various visitor-facing interpretive resources (using tangible and intangible resources in the ‘joint sphere’) as well as by interacting with each other and other visitors (in the ‘customer sphere’). Here the family members become independent value creators, with the castle adopting a passive value facilitator role.

Research method and methodologies

Research context

The research context is Edinburgh Castle (EC). Located in the historic city centre of Edinburgh, it is one of the most popular and iconic HVAs in the UK. It is operated by Historic Environment Scotland (HES), a quasi-governmental body responsible for the safekeeping of some of Scotland’s most important historical resources. It receives the majority of its funding from the Scottish government; its organizational remit includes social goals, e.g. widening access, education and conservation. To work towards triple-bottom line sustainability, HES acknowledges it “...*must champion a better understanding and sense of ownership... reach out to communities, ensuring that people of all ages and socio-economic groups better understand, enjoy and value their local historic environment.*” (HES, 2012: 3).

For Scottish people in general, and Edinburgh residents in particular, EC is an important symbol of national pride and cultural identity. It plays an important socialising role for locals as it is a repository of historical and contemporary artefacts covering its contribution to Scotland’s social, political and military past stretching back nearly 1,000 years. It also includes two regimental museums and a National War Memorial (see Appendix 1 for a map of EC). As a government-funded organisation it must be mindful of the story it tells; the underlying social values guiding the development of its interpretation have changed in recent years (Edelheim, Joppe & Flaherty, 2022), e.g. to acknowledge the role of Commonwealth soldiers and women.

In addition to its important role in socialisation, it was chosen as it is popular among both international and domestic visitors and attracts many school/educational trips. In light of its status as the HES ‘cash cow’, it is professionally-managed by a semi-autonomous team, generating vital revenue for the organisation’s conservation and outreach activities. It offers a range of interpretation to meet the needs of different visitors, from purposeful cultural tourists with a deep interest to casual tourists who may only have very limited pre-existing knowledge. In 2023 it attracted 1.9 million visitors (see Appendix 2 for recent visitation trends), and has consistently received a five-star rating

from VisitScotland, Scotland's national tourist promotion agency. For the purpose of this study, it ensures that the castle is operating at a certain externally- accredited standard, has full-time staff with experience in management and marketing, and has the ability to develop and manage an entertaining and educational experience (Campo-Martinez, Garau-Vadell and Martinez-Ruiz, 2010).

Research methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, multi-method approach, aligning grounded theory methods with a critical realist ontological base. Semi-structured interviews were held with both visitors and HES staff. They were complemented by visitor observations. It was felt that using mixed methods would help generate different ways of understanding in order to better capture the complex and dynamic process of family learning and meaning-making (Mason, Augustyn and Seakhwa-King, 2010).

Through two local schools in Edinburgh, 14 families were recruited, with a total of 57 participants. Each family had at least one school-age child. These were mixed in composition and also socioeconomic background; six nationalities were included. Appendix 3 shows that eight families were traditional 'nuclear' families, and the others were a mixture of single parent and 'blended' families, where one parent and a partner/other parent were living together but were not married. The sample size was in line with other qualitative studies that have aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of consumer behaviour, as opposed to generalisable results (Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany, 2012).

As social construction of tourism experiences occurs "*a priori, in situ and a posteriori*" (McCabe and Marson, 2006: 105), semi-structured interviews were held in families' homes both before and after their visit. Conducting these in a familiar and safe environment helped to make the families comfortable participating, particularly children or quieter family members. It helped convey the message that I was conducting research *with* families, as opposed to *on* families – an important distinction. It also provided me with greater insight into the group dynamics of the family and identify the 'relational' units of the FII (see Section on **Families** above).

As visual research methods (VRM) can facilitate the involvement of participants who have difficulties fully articulating their thoughts (e.g. children) and also reduce reliance on memory- based and researcher-driven interviews (Echeverri, 2005; Geeson, 2007; Rakić & Chambers, 2010), families were given recording devices to take pictures and videos during their visit. Guidance was deliberately vague, allowing families to use their

creativity and judgement in choosing what to record and share during the post-visit interviews.

Interviews were complemented by covert observations over a 2-month period of non-participating visitors to see the various forms of learning, meaning-making and interacting within the castle. To complement this with a provider perspective, interviews were also held with several staff members of HES, including EC managerial and customer-facing staff. Appendix 4 has details of the nine HES staff members interviewed.

The interviews were recorded with the families' consent and lasted between 35 to 90 minutes. They were manually transcribed then analysed independently by 3 researchers. A grounded theory approach to the analysis was adopted, and an iterative process of data collection and analysis was followed. Coding went through a 3-stage process: initial, focused and then axial, helping to categorize and unify the lower-level codes, and establish connections in the data (Charmaz, 2006). The FII framework proved invaluable in identifying different dynamics in families' interactions and the particular approaches of different family members that will be detailed in the Findings sections.

Findings

Provider Perspective

As noted in Section 4, HES manages historical properties all over Scotland. Its organisational remit is to manage its HVAs with the aim of making them more sustainable from a triple-bottom line perspective: this includes social sustainability, and the educational role of HVAs. While many in the industry still assume that visitors to HVAs with the sole purpose of learning, this has been disproved (e.g. Prentice, Guerin & McGugan, 1998; Prentice, Witt & Hamer, 1998). Those HVAs that are able to conduct market research will know learning is just one of their visitors' motivations. In order to survive in a very competitive industry and also to justify government funding – sometimes linked to how successful an attraction is in attracting visitors from a range of backgrounds – many HVAs now offer a blend of learning and entertainment (Leask, 2022), sometimes referred to as 'edutainment'.

From my observations, as well as content on the HES and EC websites and social media channels, interpretation at EC covers both 'high culture' of the social elites as well as the lives of other castle inhabitants, such as servants and prisoners and even pets, with the Dogs' Cemetery a hidden, but very popular feature of the castle. During an interview with the Executive Manager of EC, HES1, it became clear that this was a purposeful move to

make the castle more accessible by reconsidering their approach to interpretation. A greater understanding of what life was really like could be gained by exploring the perspectives of various inhabitants of the castle, including chefs and handmaidens to the royal family. As different visitors prefer particular learning mediums, the interpretation was extended to include more costumed reenactors, as well as more audiovisual exhibits. As the following quote reveals, this was partly motivated by market research, which had revealed that contemporary visitors were finding it more difficult to use their own knowledge and imagination to learn and appreciate the castle.

Excerpt 1: HES1, Executive Manager at EC

HES1: *...we were like a lot of people – we had this fantastically self-congratulatory market research all the time, going, 'oh yeah, we were great', and rather refreshingly, we started saying, 'Let's ask folk who don't come why they don't come?'*

Interviewer: Yes

HES1: *...[and] they said, 'Look, what you do is really important, these places they have to be there, it's quite right you do it, and we support your work but why not? Because they're worthy but dull'. You see that strapline, 'Just bring your imagination' [referring to a recent HES marketing campaign message]?*

Interviewer: Yes

HES1: *'We can't, we can't bring our imagination 'cause we don't have any.' You need to bring them [the castle's history] alive, and how do we do that? We stage events.*

This is a recognition that previous approaches to interpretation had not been successful in attracting and satisfying a range of visitors – with varying levels of knowledge and imagination. As the manager stated in Excerpt 1, in order to help bring it to life, the castle has been increasingly including more interactive experiences for visitors, such as hands-on sessions with artefacts, dressing-up sessions, falconry demonstrations and costumed re-enactors. This challenge was noted by HES7, an Events Executive at EC. *“...So it's about trying to make sure that, whilst you're both authentic it's also that little bit fun as well... but at the same time they're learning, and that balance is quite a difficult one to get... and it's about even as well trying to access all age groups as well, from kids to adults... now, and from other studies we've seen is that, because of history being taught*

less in schools, there's less of an overall perception of history, and so a lot of the time it's about using themes as opposed to the actual events."

Evidence of this approach was illustrated in Excerpt 2, during an interview with HES6, an Admissions Assistant who deals directly with visitors, including leading educational tours.

Excerpt 2: HES6, Admissions Assistant at EC

HES6: *They have made things more appealing to kids, you know, there's a lot more, I tell you there's a lot more colour than there used to be... you're maybe doing like giving them a bit of role-play, like there's costumes and stuff*

Interviewer: mmm, yes

HES6: *so they can dress up and you get them up in front and you say, 'Oh what do you think this person was meant to be?', and you've got like an executioner, and you've got a jester, and you know things like that, that gets them more involved, emm, and they do like weapons-handling sessions*

Interviewer: right, ok

HES6: *so obviously, like, you know getting like a mace... they try on the chainmail, and they're like, 'Wow, it's pretty', and they get to see, you know, that not everyone had armour*

Interviewer: [based on findings from my observations] *Kids especially seem to love the Prisoner of War bit*

HES6: *that's my favourite bit as well, I think it's fascinating* [laughs]

Interviewer: *The delight they get from the graffitied doors [in the Prisoners of War section], I don't know if it's because they can touch it, they can see that it's not just our generation that does graffiti*

HES6: *but I think one of these things that makes them think a bit more like, 'Right, people actually used to do this'*

Interviewer: Yeah, sort of personalising it for them

HES6: *yeah, 'Oh wait, we're not the first generation to have thought of that', which I think is what every generation likes to think*

Interviewer: [laughs]

HES6: *so... 'Oh, wait – this isn't cool anymore'.*

Although these observations are from the organisation's perspective, the reactions of the children as described in Excerpt 2 show the learning and meaning-making these hands-on, tactile experiences can provide. The sessions are clearly set out to make children think more about the lived experiences of people at the time, through considering artefacts and clothes. In a different way, seeing graffiti from hundreds of years ago, helped visitors including children to better personalise the lived experiences of prisoners in the dungeon and possibly imagine themselves in such a situation.

From observations of visitors, by experiencing the 'human story' of prisoners – such as through graffiti, and audio clips of imagined conversations – really connected with visitors and clearly helped create a more memorable impression. This is one of the fundamental aims of interpretation: Beck and Cable (2011: pp.1-2) note that in order to spark an interest, interpretation must relate the subject to the lives and situations of the visitor. Discussing the claim that people remember what they are interested in, they state *“Interpretive messages must be interesting to capture attention, meaningful so people care, and compelling so people no longer think or act the same after hearing them.”* The organisation's efforts at finding the balance between fun, learning and authenticity, and by using themes to connect with a broader range of visitors is evidence of their efforts to enhance their ability to educate as well as to facilitate visitors' learning and meaning-making. We can now consider the views of family members, discussing various aspects of their visit.

Visitor Perspective

From interviewing each family twice, it was possible to discern significant variations in their individual and collective levels of knowledge and orientation towards actively and passively interacting with the castle interpretation. These were even apparent within families, with some individual or relational units displaying notable differences, which the FII helped me to identify. Such differences naturally had a significant impact on their learning and meaning-making, as the following excerpts will show

In general, family members who lacked sufficient resources were less likely to realise the range of potential value from learning and experiencing the castle. Often, such family members were non-locals who did not have the same grounding of pre-existing knowledge about some of the historical events or individuals referenced in the castle's interpretation. Interviews also revealed that among the families, there were some members who simply lacked the ability to interact. This was often the case with younger visitors or family members who were from overseas, and who did not have the experience

of engaging with the service system within an HVA. For many visitors familiar with UK HVAs, the knowledge of ‘how’ to interact in an HVA by themselves in the ‘customer’ sphere (Grönroos & Voima, 2013) is assumed knowledge that is acquired through socialization; in some societies it is more common for passive interactions, or for visitors to be a member of a guided tour within the ‘joint’ sphere, where no active role is required.

Some family members with high levels of knowledge and experience were more comfortable with fewer – or more controlled – interactions with the interpretation, often avoiding opportunities to engage within the social dimension. Rather than interact with costumed re-enactors or the stewards, such individuals or relational units instead tended to favour interacting within the consumer sphere through tangible resources such as sign boards and models. They seemed to prefer the control that limiting their interactions offered. Such an approach was driven by preference, as opposed to the accessibility or appeal of the interpretation, and seemed to be a manifestation of their particular orientation towards interactions in general. This was in contrast to some family members or coalitions that were positively oriented towards interacting with the service provider in the joint sphere, yet lacked the private resources to more fully do so. Sometimes due to insufficient public-facing resources this led to instances of value creation being impaired. See Melvin (2024) for further consideration of visitors’ orientation styles and their value creating/co-creating activities.

The first example is the AD family who were living in Edinburgh but were from England. Their three daughters (aged 11, 14 and 17) had all been at least once with school or social groups, such as the Girl Guides. While they did enjoy family trips to HVAs, this was their first visit to EC together. The AD family had tended to do things as a collectively, though did sometimes break into two relational units of children and adults. The family had clearly been delighted with their visit, with the mother, ADF, commenting “... *we were very glad to go*” and the father, ADM, adding “... *we really enjoyed our day!*” However, during the interview, the family expressed mild frustration at how the castle had at times not provided sufficient resources to make up for their lack of knowledge and experience of the castle.

ADF had persuaded the family to take the 30-minute orientation tour, though Excerpt 3 shows that the family had gained only limited information from the guide. They had found it difficult to engage with the guide’s particular style, and this had contributed to them learning little new knowledge.

Excerpt 3: AD Family

ADF: *The guide wasn't particularly good, it has to be said...*

ADM: *I thought that he took us and said 'Well that's over there and this is over there and this is ... in this courtyard you've got this and this and this and this.' And you kind of were bombarded with dates and maybe we didn't take it all in but you think okay, yeah, I know where that is now. ADF: Well, he knew his stuff but...*

ADM: *And I think that really ... well for me it worked... [although] the girls were arguing that we could have done it with a map and a few signposts.*

ADD1: *He'd memorised it.*

ADF: *He memorised it and churned it out.*

ADD1: *I was just zoning out, I just zoned out a lot with it...*

ADF: *Well he knew his stuff but he was... it was just off-pat, so he robotically reeled off the stuff... ADD1 and I were earwigging the next guide and he seemed quite animated and funny.*

Despite the organisation attempting to make the interpretation (and learning) more accessible, the AD family had often not been able to connect with the stories or the themes. ADF went on to note “... *it's the little stories and all of that, they're the bits that remain with me. And I think you wouldn't have to use technology; you can tell stories however you want and they can come to life...*” This was backed up by the middle daughter, ADD2, who had been hoping for interpretation that can connect with visitors on different levels, stating that “*I don't know, I think it just goes back to sort of making, like Mum said, things coming more to life instead of just information... I think they should have made more of it [the castle's rich history]. There were a lot of bare rooms.*”

A similar account was made by the BC family, who were from Edinburgh. The mother, BCF, had worked in the tourism industry and had been a member of HES, so was highly knowledgeable; she went with her son, BCS1, (11). Both were confident about visiting attractions and both engaging with the interpretation in both ‘customer’ and ‘joint’ spheres to learn individually and collectively. Excerpt 4 shows how insufficient resources had impaired their ability to gain more value from parts of the castle. Here the family were recounting their experiences in the Royal Apartments, which are recreated rooms designed in the style of around 300 years ago. Despite being attractively designed and

steeped in history, BCF thought that they lacked ‘soul’ – and furniture – and they were critical of this. BCF and BCS1 had been disappointed in that they were not able to learn more and better appreciate the significance of the rooms.

Excerpt 4: BC Family

BCF: *I mean it's very interesting going round with two 11-year-old boys who just do not suffer fools... it has so much history it's almost like you don't know where to start... there's so many fantastic real-life characters that they could take forward... making it accessible... and grab the kids' imagination. It's lacking soul, but it's fabulous, you know, it's, it's obviously steeped in history, it's not, it's just not coming out...*

BCS1: *The Royal Apartments! They weren't very good. All they had was an electric fire, and walls and not very good feelings, and it wasn't very interesting... all you could do was look at the ceiling and go, 'Oh, that's nice,' and walk into the next room.*

The JP had a contrasting experience. Both parents were from Japan, but their daughters both attended local schools and the elder one, JPD1, had been to EC several times. Their collective learning experience was greatly enhanced by her pre-existing knowledge, which had facilitated a memorable and meaningful experience that had exceeded expectations. Thanks to her knowledge, she took the family to the ‘Dogs’ Cemetery’, which has the graves of dogs whose owners had lived in the castle. It is small and easily overlooked, but both parents recounted how it was one of their most memorable aspects. They had been moved by the poignancy of the cemetery, which had helped them better appreciate the human (and non-human) side of the castle, and imagine the role pets had played in filling the daily life of those who had lived in the castle, especially as they also had a pet at home. The father, JPM, shared how their visit transformed his previous views on visiting HVAs.

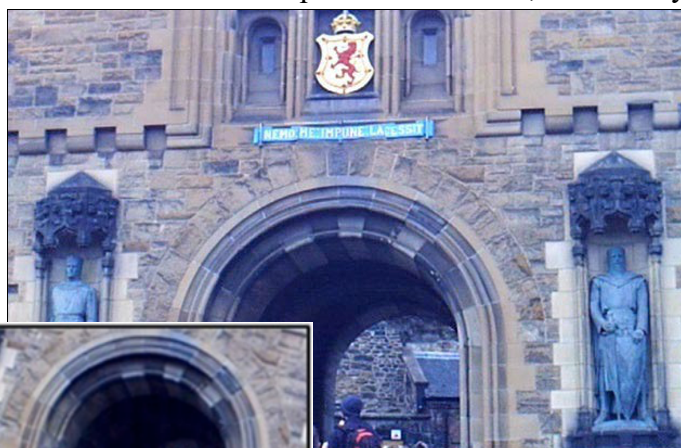
Excerpt 5: JP Family

JPM: *Yeah, but when I go alone I don't, I don't think it's so interesting. I think what, for me, all these times, I just go alone, it's quite boring. Everything is not so interesting, I think, so, so I actually don't like tourism that much if, especially if I'm going by myself, just alone, like when I go to*

conferences, so it was much better this time. If we go together again, because... to see them enjoying yeah, and seeing new things. That's great, and then you interact with them...

Their individual and collective sense of achievement had been heightened by this, and other such experiences, particularly as neither parent was familiar with the interactive style of UK HVAs, having been socialised in the more passive, tour-based approach that is common in their home country. Their uncertainty was eased through being in the hands of their older daughter, who proved a knowledgeable and engaging guide. She had clearly enjoyed the role of ‘facilitator’ and the strengthening of social bonds their collective meaning-making had led to.

Sometimes, families had gained much from ‘customer’ sphere interactions, where they collectively made their own meaning from aspects of the castle they were interested in. The WI family recounted an example of this. Both parents were Irish, and they had recently moved to Edinburgh; their three children were more knowledgeable, having studied about EC at school and been to many historical attractions on school trips. Figures 3-5 show screenshots from a video clip taken outside the castle. The family were collectively trying to establish the Latin inscription ‘*Nemo me impune lacessit*’ above the portcullis, and the



Figures 3-5: The children of the WI family facilitating collective *sense-making* of the Latin inscription and statues at the front of the castle (source: author)

identity of the two statues on either side of the entrance (they didn't know the information about this can be found inside the gate). The video clip shows the children telling their parents the meaning, having studied and visited the castle with school: the parents were told that it means '*No-one safely provokes me.*' This knowledge then stimulates further exchanges within the family, and they come up with the alternative translation of "*Don't mess with me!*" The video clip shows the children joyfully leading the discussion and 'teaching' their parents, including who the statues were of.

The final excerpt is of the SI family, who were locals. They had paid extra for the audio guides and had been supplied with quizzes for their young children. These are designed to get the children to explore around the castle, looking for key information. In the interview, the mother, SIF, described how the family had greatly benefitted from the audio guide, and the parents had been impressed by how much their younger and older children (twins, 12).

Excerpt 6: SI Family

SIF: In the Crown Jewels part, I had my headphones on and I found it really interesting. You know, just learning things that you maybe didn't know or really things that you'd forgotten and 'Oh yeah, that's right'... And I think that coupled with the quiz was quite good because you were looking for pieces of information rather than just kind of walking through and just waiting in the queue to get to the Crown Jewels. You were actually having to listen or having to look for information, so I found that really good. And I think that's probably one of the reasons why I looked at the map as well and that's why I found the Prisoner of War bit. Whereas normally you would just... well when we've been before, you just swan around and you don't really pay much attention, you know? Because as I said I've never been there before and it was great. And having the audio at that part was brilliant because it had the noises as if the men were in on their camp beds and they were you know, spooning up their food and things and... it made you feel like you were there.

It was clear that the interpretation had played a key role in their acquisition of knowledge and meaning-making. For several families, relational units and individuals the quizzes and audio guide had facilitated memorable experiences.

Conclusion

As tourism research primarily focuses on individuals, this one-dimensional understanding of tourism experiences limits the potential for conceptual development (Obrador, 2012). By focusing on the experiences of families, this study has gained rich insights into the HVA experience that can help advance academic and practitioner knowledge. It has also demonstrated the effectiveness of the FII and VRM in analysing family (or other groups) interactions and behaviours. As an exploratory and qualitative study, it has clear limitations yet has facilitated a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how families interact within an HVA and their learning experiences. There are plenty of opportunities for further research based on some of these findings, such as exploring this in different contexts, e.g. other service environments, different countries, alternative visitor groups, etc.

The provider interviews revealed the rationale guiding the design and deployment of a range of interpretive resources. While seeking to avoid overloading visitors with facts and achieving a balance between learning and entertainment, the interviews revealed a range of reactions from different family members. The pre-visit knowledge and experiences of family members clearly had a big influence on their orientation towards interactions and ability to gain knowledge from the interpretation, yet clearly more could be done to better facilitate visitors' attempts to create and co-create value. This is particularly important as the visitor interviews revealed a range of orientations towards interacting and learning among family visitors that was not related to their level of pre-existing knowledge.

HVAs are encouraged to provide tailored interpretation based on their visitor profile, including current segments who are not coming, but who they wish to attract. Beck and Cable (2011: xxiii) stress that interpretation should not just inform, but also entertain and enlighten. They quote Tilden to emphasise this: *“Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.”* Unfortunately, some HVAs are not able to conduct market research; the provider interviews showed how important it was in guiding the interpretive approach. Despite this, there was clear evidence from the interviews that there was incongruence between how the provider *intended* visitors to interact with the castle and its resources and how some visitors *actually* interacted (Gummerus, 2013); the interview excerpts show that this had considerable impact on their ability to learn and engage with the site.

HVA providers are encouraged to conduct market research to better understand their

visitors. They could also benefit from conducting observations and interviews with visitors to determine how visitors are *actually* interacting with the site. Also, interpretation aimed at children, and encouraging school trips, can be especially empowering, leading to enjoyable collective meaning-making and long-term value for the HVA, as this final quote from LK, the Admissions Assistant illustrates: “*I know a lot of the time, emm, once the kids have been, they're quite like, 'I'd like to bring my Mum and Dad back', you know, because then they get to show off what they've learned and be like, 'Well I know exactly what this is' ...kids like that sort of thing, so, I think as a family, there's a lot of things can be done together.*”

Like many HVAs, EC is run (indirectly) by the government, and so must aim to widen access, conserve the site as well as generate profit. By designing engaging interpretation and by focusing more on children, such as more active outreach programs with local stakeholders, such as school trips, HVAs can strengthen their links to the local community and also enhance visitors’ ability to learn and appreciate the site. Making interpretative resources available pre-visit, e.g. online, would also better equip visitors to engage in more meaningful interactions. Making things like guided tours and audio guides free may reduce vital revenue streams, yet there is a chance that this could lead to higher visitor satisfaction: this could increase spending, lead to positive reviews and improve the chances of repeat visitation, all of which enhance the efforts of the HVA to work towards long-term, triple-bottom-line sustainability.

References

- Apostolakis, A. (2003) The convergence process in heritage tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 30(4): pp.795-812.
- Beck, L. and Cable, T. (2011) *The Gifts of Interpretation*. Los Angeles: Sagamore Publishing
- Bronner, F. and de Hoog, R. (2008) Agreement and disagreement in family vacation decision- making. *Tourism Management* 29: pp.967-979.
- Campo-Martinez, S., Garau-Vadell, J. and Martinez-Ruiz, M. (2010) Factors influencing repeat visits to a destination: The influence of group composition. *Tourism Management* 31: pp.862- 870.
- Carr, N. (2011) *Children’s and Families’ Holiday Experiences*. London: Routledge.
- Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Echeverri, P. (2005) Video-based methodology: capturing real-time perceptions of

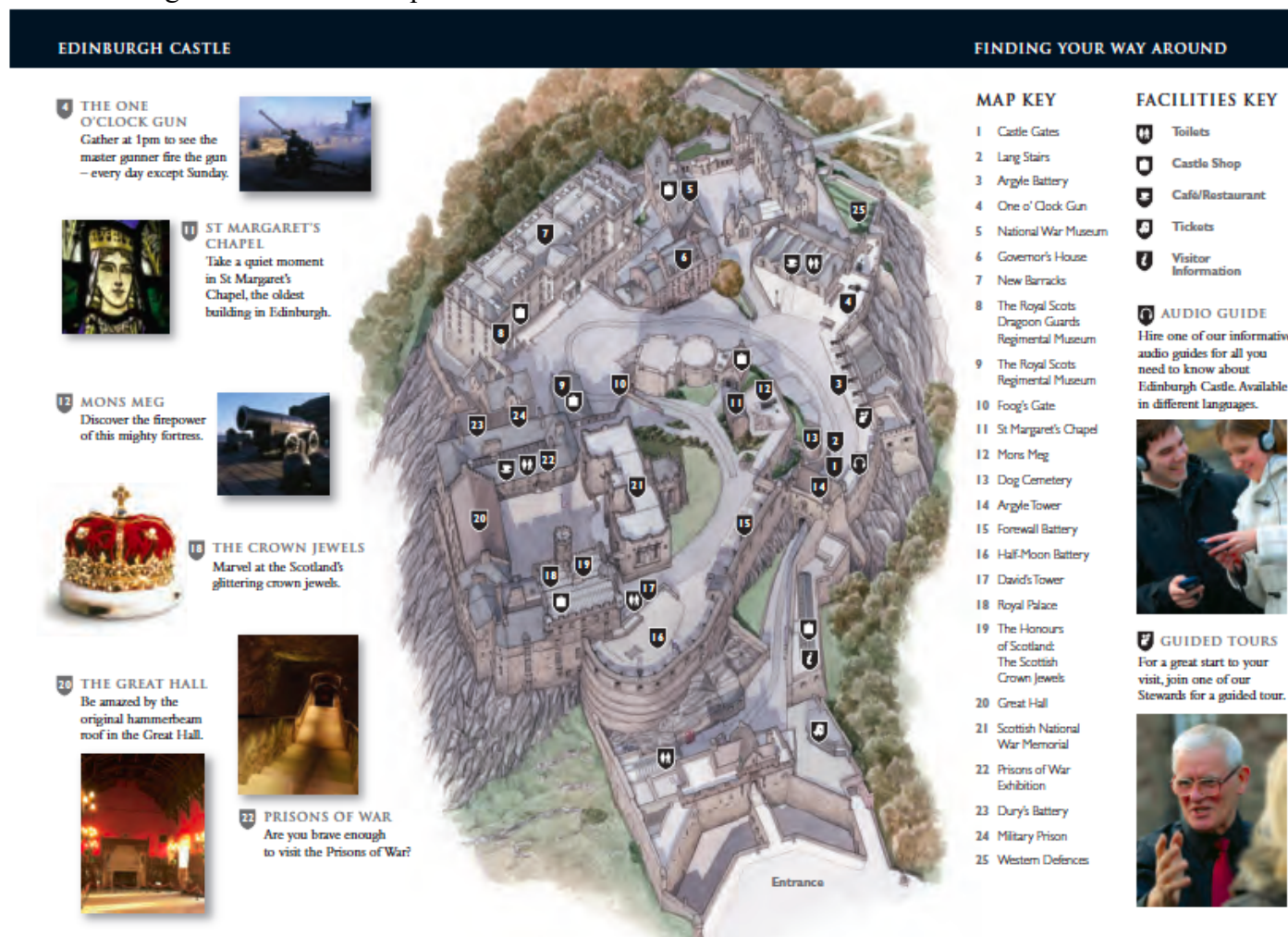
- customer processes. *International Journal of Service Industry Management* 16(2): pp.199-209.
- Edelheim, J., Joppe, M., & Flaherty, J. (Eds.). (2022). *Teaching tourism: Innovative, values- based learning experiences for transformative practices*. London: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Epp, A. and Price, L. (2008) Family Identity: A Framework of Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices. *Journal of Consumer Research* 35(June): pp.50-70.
- Gamradt, J. (1995) Jamaican children's representations of tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 22(4): pp.735-762.
- Geeson, A. (2007) Video research: A way forward for the industry. *Young Consumers* 8(2), pp.117-118.
- Grönroos, C. and Ravald, A. (2009) Marketing and the logic of service: Value facilitation, value creation and co-creation, and their marketing implications. June 2009 *Working Paper*. Hanken School of Economics.
- Grönroos, C. and Ravald, A. (2011) Service business logic: implications for value creation and marketing. *Journal of Service Management*. 22(1): pp.5–22.
- Grönroos, C. and Voima, P. (2013) Critical service logic: making sense of value creation and co- creation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 41: pp.133-150.
- Gummerus, J. (2013) Value creation processes and value outcomes in marketing theory: Strangers or siblings? *Marketing Theory* 13(1): pp.19-46.
- Historic Scotland (2012) *Scotland's Past, Scotland's Future. Corporate Plan 2012-15*. Edinburgh: Historic Scotland.
- Hu, W. and Wall, G. (2005) Environmental Management, Environmental Image and the Competitive Tourist Attraction. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 6(13): pp.617-635.
- Kerrane, B., Hogg, M. and Bettany, S. (2012) Exploring the co-constructed nature of children's influence strategies in family consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management* 28(7-8): pp.809-835.
- Leask, A. (2022) The nature and role of visitor attractions. In Fyall, A., Garrod, B., Leask, A. and Wanhill, S. (Eds.) *Managing visitor attractions*. London: Routledge, pp. 3-21.
- McCabe, S. (2009) Who needs a holiday? Evaluating social tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 36(4): pp.667-688.
- McCabe, S. and Marson, D. (2006) Tourist constructions and consumptions of space: Place, modernity and meaning. In: Burns, P. (Ed.) *Tourism and social identities: Global frameworks and local realities*. London: Taylor and Francis, pp.91-108.
- Mason, P., Augustyn, M. and Seakhoa-King, A. (2010) Exploratory Study in Tourism:

- Designing an Initial, Qualitative Phase of Sequenced, Mixed Methods Research. *International Journal of Tourism Research* 12: pp.432-448.
- Melvin, J., Winklhofer, H., & McCabe, S. (2020). Creating joint experiences-Families engaging with a heritage site. *Tourism Management* 78:104038.
- John, M. (2024). Deconstructing Family Value Creation Through the Framework of Identity Interplay and Service Logic. *GIS Journal: The Hosei Journal of Global and Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8: 15-59.
- Minkiewicz, J., Evans, J. and Bridson, K. (2014) How do consumers co-create their experiences? An exploration in the heritage sector. *Journal of Marketing Management* 30(1/2): pp. 30-59.
- Michie, D. (1986) Family travel behaviour and its implications for tourism management. *Tourism Management* 7(1): pp.8-20.
- Mohd-Any, A., Winklhofer, H., and Ennew, C., (2014) Measuring Users Value Experience on a Travel Website (e-Value): What Value is Co-Created by the User? *Journal of Travel Research* 23: pp.1-15.
- Obrador, P. (2012) The Place of the Family in Tourism Research: Domesticity and thick sociality by the pool. *Annals of Tourism Research* 39(1): pp.401-420.
- Park, H. (2014) *Heritage Tourism*. London: Routledge.
- Prebensen, N. (2024). Value creation, innovation, and quality of life in a cultural setting. In Chen, J., Prebensen, N. & Uysal, M. (Eds.) *Handbook of Experience Science*, London: Elgar, pp.249-261.
- Prentice, R., Witt, S. and Hamer, C. (1998) Tourism as experience: The case of Heritage Parks. *Annals of Tourism Research* 25: pp.1–24.
- Prentice, R., Guerin, S. and McGugan, S. (1998a) Visitor learning at a heritage attraction: a case study of Discovery as a media product. *Tourism Management* 19(1): pp.5-23.
- Rakić, T. and Chambers, D. (2010) Innovative techniques in tourism research: an exploration of visual methods and academic filmmaking. *International Journal of Tourism Research* 12(4): pp.379-389.
- Schänzel, H. (2010) Whole-family Research: Towards a Methodology in Tourism for Encompassing Generation, Gender and Group Dynamic Perspectives. *Tourism Analysis* 15: 555- 569.
- Schänzel, H., Yeoman, I. and Backer, E. (2012) Introduction: Families in Tourism Research. In: Schänzel, H., Yeoman, I. and Backer, E. (Eds.) *Family Tourism: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Bristol: Channel View Publications, pp.1-10.
- Statista (2024). Edinburgh Castle Visitor Numbers. Retrieved on 15/8/2024 from <www.statista.com/statistics/586822/edinburgh-castle-visitor-numbers-united-kingdom-

[uk/>](#)

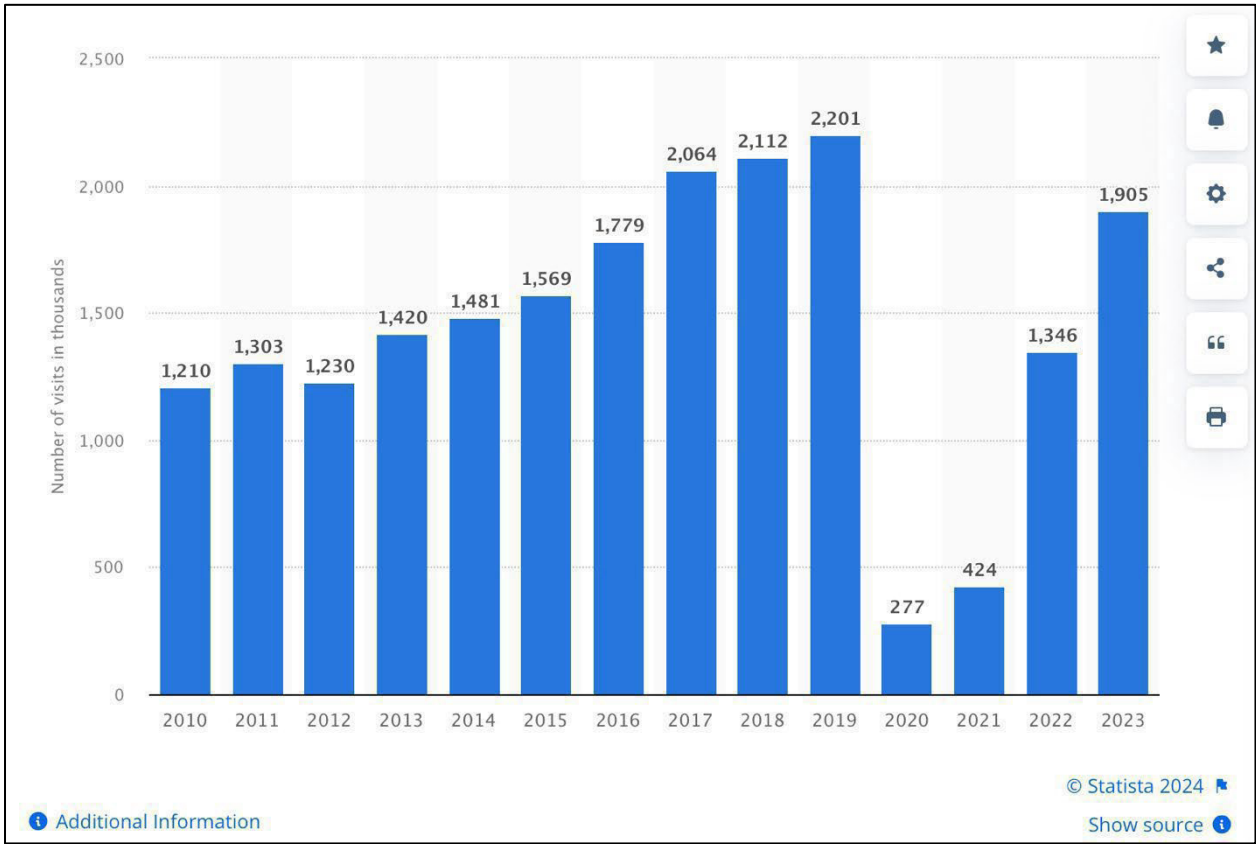
- Stringer, P. (1984) Studies in the socio-environmental psychology of tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 11: pp.147-166.
- Vargo, S. and Lusch, R. (2008) Service dominant logic: Continuing the evolution. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 36(1): pp.1-10.
- Webster, S. (2012) Consumer Kids and Tourists – Creatively Marketing a City to Young Tourists. In: Schänzel, H., Yeoman, I. and Backer, E. (Eds.) *Family Tourism: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Bristol: Channel View Publications, pp.143-155.

Appendix 1: Edinburgh Castle Visitor Map



Source: www.edinburghcastle.scot/plan-your-visit/access-guide

Appendix 2: Recent Edinburgh Castle Visitation Trends 2010-2023



Source: Statista, 2023

Appendix 3: Details of Participating Families

Family code	Family type	Family composition (M = male adult, F = female adult, S = son, D = daughter; numbers after 'S' and 'D' refer to order of birth; children's ages at time of interview are in brackets)	Video camera used
GR (Pilot)	Blended	GRM - service engineer GRF - shop assistant GRS (17)	No
BC (Pilot)	Single parent	BCF - retail manager BCS1 (11) BCS2 (8) friend of BCS1 (11)	No
BE	Nuclear	BEM - financial adviser BEF - financial adviser BED1 (21) BED2 (15) BES (13)	No
JP	Nuclear	JPM - assistant professor JPF - housewife JPD1 (12) JPD2 (7)	No
DE	Single parent	DEF - local council social department officer DES1 (17) DES2 (13)	Yes
KR	Nuclear	KRM - primary school headteacher KRF - primary school teacher KRS (13) KRD1 (10) KRD2 (7)	Yes
MR	Blended	MRM - electrical engineer MRF - housewife MRD (12) MRS (9)	Yes
KY	Nuclear	KYM - property maintenance engineer KYF - NHS manager KYD (12) KYS (6)	Yes
SI	Nuclear	SIM - IT executive SIF - housewife SIS1 (12) SID1 (12) SID2 (8) SID3 (5) SIS2 (4)	Yes
WI	Nuclear	WIM - medical researcher	Yes

Appendix 4: HES Staff Interview List

Interviewee Code	Position
HES1	Executive Manager, <u>Edinburgh Castle</u>
HES2	Portcullis (Main) Gift Shop Manager, <u>Edinburgh Castle</u>
HES3	Retail Manager, <u>Edinburgh Castle</u>
HES4	Steward, <u>Edinburgh Castle</u>
HES5	Admissions Assistant, <u>Edinburgh Castle</u>
HES6	Admissions Assistant, <u>Edinburgh Castle</u>
HES7	Events and Promotions Executive, <u>Edinburgh Castle</u>
HES8	Marketing Manager, <u>Historic Environment Scotland Head Office</u>
HES9	Head of Customer Insights, <u>Historic Environment Scotland Head Office</u>