

Assignment feedback		
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<i>Module code:</i> AHAC6007 <i>Module title:</i> Museums, Heritage and Representation	<i>Student ID number:</i> 1400683	<i>Educational support needs:</i> Yes
<i>Assignment title:</i> How important is the concept of authenticity in the presentation of heritage?		
<i>Assignment due date:</i> 1/5/18		
<i>Assignment Number:</i> 1 <i>(i.e. 1,2,3)</i>		
<i>Marker's signature:</i>		<i>Date:</i>
<i>Provisional.</i> NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.		

SELF-REFLECTION SHEET.

PLEASE COMPLETE BEFORE SUBMISSION AND ATTACH TO YOUR WORK

Date:

Module:

Name:

Guidance: You might consider the following elements:

- Argument: does it have one/ is it backed by sufficient evidence/ how lucid is it?
- Structure: how clear is it / is my essay easy to follow/ does it help my argument?
- Analysis: is more/less analytical than narrative/ does it address the question?
- Reading: was this sufficiently broad/ have I referenced properly?
- How might I improve my performance in future?

Strengths

Answered the question with an in-depth analysis examining the importance of the concepts of authenticity in the presentation of heritage.

Weaknesses:

I could have found more case studies to examine and compare, looking at different types of dark tourism.

General Comments:

It was difficult to allocate sufficient time to this essay due to the submission date being in close proximity to the deadline for my dissertation. I would have liked more time to write this essay without it competing with the dissertation for my time.

Please give a mark for your work: 2/2

(for eg: 1st = 70+: 2/1 = 69-60: 2/2 = 59-50: 3rd = 45-49: pass = 40-44: fail = 39-)

How important is the concept of authenticity in the presentation of heritage?

Authenticity can be defined as the quality of being authentic, truthful or genuine (Jones 2009: 3). Within the presentation of heritage, the concept of authenticity has often been associated with the notions of objects or contexts being of the 'original' or the 'genuine' form (Pye 2001: 58). It is acknowledged as a universal value and it is an essential driving force which motivates tourists to travel to heritage sites (Cohen 1988). Belhassen and Caton (2006) suggest that authenticity is a concept alive in the minds of the tourists visiting these sites. However, it is up to the scholars to understand the importance of the concept of authenticity. Olsen (2002) mainly conceives authenticity as a value or a motivational force, which can be categorised into various different types, such as attributes to objects, which plays a role in the heritage sector (Kolar, Zabkar 2010: 652). This essay will discuss the concept of authenticity through examining the different types of authenticity present in the heritage industry and case studies.

Authenticity, or at least the perception of it, is an important attribute of the heritage industry (Boniface, Fowler 1993) with the idea that authenticity connotes an exhibition or representation of a traditional culture and origin. It provides a sense of the heritage as being genuine. (Chhabra et al 2003: 703). Understanding the concept of the authenticity of heritage attractions is important as the presentation, interpretation and the verification have a direct bearing on the visitors' motivations to visit and engage with heritage tourism sites (Bryce et al 2015). Costa and Bamossy (2001) suggest that the concept of authenticity reflects the complexity of the interacting phenomena and the cultural conflict. The initial dispute regarding the concept of authenticity is the question of whether authenticity is an objectively identifiable property of objects and cultures or as a socially and individually constructed perception of them (Kolar, Zabkar 2010: 653). Wang (1999: 350) uses the term "constructive" or "symbolic" authenticity to suggest that the tourists' experiences can be authentic even when they are aware that the presentation of heritage has been contrived (Cohen 1988). By conceiving authenticity as constructed, as a perception or an experience, it implies that the heritage sector will inevitably draw on the cultural assumptions and resources to appeal to tourists (Lavine, Karp 1991: 1); essentially a socially and an individually-constructed and evaluated perception or experience (Kolar, Zabkar 2010). The constructive approach of authenticity is not an ontological condition, but a label or perceived status determined according to socially constructed criteria (Leite, Graburn 2009). As such, authenticity is result of the signs and symbols which are projected by the society from the understandings they already have obtained (Culler 1981). In essence, the object-centred approach on both objective and constructive authenticity seems to imply a dichotomy of objective-subjective orientation in the presentation of heritage (Zhu 2012: 1498). Having situated authenticity as a cultural construct, it seems as if the layers of authenticity can be simply wrapped around any object, irrespective of its unique past (Jones 2009: 5).

From a postmodernist position, which acknowledges fragmentation, imperfection and blurred boundaries, authenticity is not a concept which is based within a genuine intellect. Instead it is through emotional experiences, such as the chance for visitors to participate in a re-enactment (Jensen, Lindberg 2001). Leigh et al (2006) suggest that authenticity can be considered as an antecedent or input of tourist behaviour, agreeing with the postmodernist idea of authenticity put forward by Jensen and Lindberg (2001). It therefore implies that the concept of authenticity is one which is developed through the interaction of visitors and the heritage industry; authenticity in terms of the objects being a genuine article is not, according to a number of academics, the priority. Rather, the perception of the authentic within the presentation of heritage seems to be given the most importance. The idea that people respond to what they believe is real, and the expectations are satisfied by the location, the site of the heritage provides the ideal stage for a fictionalised

performance (Casey 2003: 11). An authentically sited heritage attraction can regularly encourage visitors to suspend disbelief when considering unusual forms of material evidence (Casey 2003: 11).

The mendacity of objects and their authority, and authenticity, is a notion that is all too familiar to those involved with the presentation of heritage (Crew, Sims, 1991). "The problem with things is that they are dumb. Not eloquent. And, if by some ventriloquism, they seem to speak, they lie." (Crew, Sims, 1991: 159). In most cases, the heritage industry's concern, especially in regards to museums, is with the authentic object; a notion rooted in the habits of collecting and researching the past (Ames 1985: 7) and will carefully and subtly warp the presentation of heritage in order to support the message that they wish to convey. As Crew and Sims stated, objects are dumb, it is the messages that the curators place on them which are considered to be authentic (Crew, Sims 1991). The idea that Crew and Sims puts forward in regards to authenticity is one that is echoed by other academics. When tourists interact with the presentation of the heritage that they are visiting, they experience a sense of the genuine, truthfulness or the definition of authenticity that the objects articulate (Jones 2009: 5), even if the articulation of the objects seems to 'lie'. Artefacts are easily altered as chronicles resulting in the idea of authenticity altering depending on the context in which it is used (Crew, Sims 1991: 161). As such, authenticity is not about factuality or reality, but about authority. Handler (1986: 4) argues that the contact with artefacts which have been authenticated by heritage institutions and museums "allows us to appropriate their authenticity, incorporating that magical proof of existence into what we call out 'personal experience'". Therefore, authenticity is not simply a facet of the internal essence of discrete isolate entities but rather a product of relationship between things (Jones 2009: 11); for example, the relationship between the object and the authority which places the object into its context. The authenticity of heritage objects is bound up with the intrinsic qualities of, not just the past owners, but all of the past experiences, people and places they have been connected with (Jones 2009). Managers can influence authenticity, whether that authenticity is claimed, presented, assured, authorise or promoted (Kolar, Zabkar 2010: 654). Ryan (2000) states that as people we adopt a post-positivist stance, which states that objectivity, no matter how desirable, can only be approximated. As such, through the influence of the individuals in authority, the concept of authenticity can be warped to suit the messages being presented within heritage.

Other scholars who have examined the concept of authenticity within the presentation of heritage, such as Boorstin (1991) argue that the authenticity of objects and events are stages and distorted to suit the needs of both the visitors and their hosts. MacCannell (1974) coins the phrase "staged authenticity" where the fabricated image has precedence over the real if it holds ore aura, magic or contributes significantly to the learning of the tourist. As Kontogeorgopoulos (2004: 9) states, authenticity of both people and settings can be and are staged to meet the demands of visitors; the clever 'staging' of natural authenticity. According to MacCannell (1974: 592), sightseers are motivated by a desire to see life as it is really lived with guided tours offering a staged quality that lends to an aura of superficiality which is not always perceived by tourists; they only perceive the 'authenticity'. Boorstin (1991) however argues that visitors to heritage sites will go to what they recognise and feel comfortable with; something in which they can identify themselves. However, in terms of authenticity, tourists demand it (MacCannell 1974). The dialectic of authenticity reflects an ontological anxiety of existence about what we are what is genuine and objectively true (Jamal, Hill 2004: 355). As a result, tourists are entering heritage sites expecting an authentic experience; a fact that would definitely have an impact on the presentation of heritage.

With the different perceptions of authenticity that have been examined in mind, it is clear that the concept of authenticity has a significant role to play in the presentation of heritage. However, from

just examining the types of authenticity, it is evident that authenticity by its definition as “a site or object of undisputed origin, not a copy: genuine” (Oxford Dictionary 2018) does not have an emphasis placed on its importance. However, when taking into consideration the ideas of authority and ‘staged authenticity’ (Crew, Sims 1991, MacCannell 1974) in terms of presenting heritage which the visitors will expect to engage with, the importance of the concept of authenticity is heightened. The second part of this essay will discuss two case studies in terms of concept of authenticity with the presentation of heritage by examining the role of authenticity in the presentation of dark heritage; in this case, Holocaust sites and museums.

Deaths, disasters and atrocities are becoming an increasingly present form of heritage presentation providing tourists a way in which to gaze upon real and recreated death (Stone 2006: 145). One of the main conventions is how sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, a ‘dark-history’ site, are given a dominant portrayal as “real” or “authentic” whereas heritage attractions such as museums, according to Stone (2016) are suggested as having the tendency to romanticise and distort past dark deeds. Macdonald (1997) highlights the impact authority has over authenticity within the presentation of heritage. By bringing to attention the relationship between authority and authenticity, it is suggested that visitors to such dark tourism sites are being enticed with the knowledge that they will be seeing and interacting with the authentic. Seaton (1999) notes, as do another of academics (see MacCannell 1976), that the production and presentation of dark tourism is driven by consumer tastes; bringing two types of authenticity to the forefront. Both the ideas of constructed and staged authenticity play a role according to Seaton (1999). For example, the product and experiences at the death camp site of Auschwitz-Birkenau are conceivably darker than the one that the visitors will engage with at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC (Miles 2002). It does not make the US Holocaust Memorial Museum any less authentic than Auschwitz-Birkenau however, but clearly demonstrates the different concepts of authenticity at play within the presentation of heritage; the museum is associated with death and has been staged to suggest authenticity whereas Auschwitz-Birkenau is steeped in death and possess a crucial locational authenticity (Stone 2006: 152).

In terms of Holocaust heritage, there is no site as well-known as that of Auschwitz-Birkenau. When examining Auschwitz-Birkenau, it is clear that authenticity, in the literal sense, serves primarily as a function for education, generating credibility and presenting historical documentary and emotional meaning of objects (Lopuska 2019: 2). However, Dalton (2009) questions what the need for authenticity and the emphasis on its importance in the presentation of Auschwitz-Birkenau means in such a site. Walter Benjamin (1985: 215) suggests that the authenticity of such a site is embedded with idea of the location being real; it is the knowledge that you are a site of such death and atrocity which creates the idea of authenticity. Nonetheless, the concept of authenticity at Auschwitz-Birkenau is one that is continually referred to as important. One just has to examine the Auschwitz-Birkenau website to see the word repeatedly applied to the museum and the memorial (Auschwitz-Birkenau 2018). The following will examine the concept of authenticity at the museum located in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

What is the most striking aspect of the museum based at Auschwitz-Birkenau is that the interiors of the blocks have morphed from the buildings where intense suffering occurred to museum exhibitions, even though they are still encased within the same shell. From this, it is evident there is a distinct shift in the type of authenticity used in the presentation of the dark heritage. The blocks are no longer in their original format; the literal authenticity not playing a role. Instead, the idea of constructed authenticity, as proposed by Wang (1999) is more appropriate when examining the museum. All the exhibitions have been constructed by voices of authority in order to best convey



Fig 1. Artificial limbs on display in Block 5 (Sawicki 2018).



Fig 2. Photographs of registered prisoners in Block 6 (Sawicki 2018).

the powerful message of what had occurred. One clear example of this can be seen in Block 5 of the Museum (Fig 1.) From figure 1, the showcase filled with the artificial limbs of the victims' takes precedence in the room. The rest of the room is bare. The display, and its presentation, would have a striking impact on visitors; more so because the artificial limbs are the genuine article (Auschwitz-Birkenau 2018). However, although the limbs are authentic in the literal sense, their location and how they are arranged are all a result of the curators attempting to construct a site for visitors to engage with. Crew and Sims' argument that artefacts are 'dumb', have no eloquence, and can only speak the messages that the figures of authority wish them to have (1991), applies significantly to these exhibitions. Each display has been carefully constructed, the rooms have been changed to represent the views of those running the museum. For example, Block 6 (Fig 2.), would not have looked the way it currently does during the 1940s. The photos would not have been placed on the walls. The room has been constructed to create an impact on the person who enters the exhibition. The rooms in the museum at Auschwitz have been constructed to convey the meanings the curators wish to present. The items being put on display are genuine artefacts from the 1940s or photos of people who were present at the site; the importance of authenticity is evident as there are no replicas of artefacts. However, how the items are displayed, as previously mentioned, are a clear example of constructed authenticity (Wang 1999, Kolar and Zabkar: 2010). When people arrive at Auschwitz-Birkenau, they have preconceived ideas of what to expect; the curators and museum directors would draw on these cultural assumptions to create a site that people would visit (Lavine, Karp 1991: 1). However, this doesn't draw away from the importance of authenticity at this site. It is the different concepts which vary in importance rather than authenticity as a whole.

There is a stark contrast between the presentation of heritage at sites of dark heritage, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, and sites which have little connection to the locations of dark heritage, such as Holocaust Museums located around the world. The following example will discuss the importance of authenticity within the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC.

Notwithstanding the gravity of its subject matter, neither the site of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, nor many of its displays have an authentic connection with the Holocaust (Lennon, Foley 1999: 47). The Holocaust was a predominantly European affair, having almost been "Americanized" by the US government to infer greater meaning to the predominantly American visitors (Lennon, Foley 1999: 49). Here, the argument which Crew and Sims puts forward (1991) of authenticity being subject to authority is best applied. The US government remains the ultimate authority and influence regarding the museum, maintaining control over the individuals involved with the presentation of the Holocaust.

However, Ochsner (1995) states that the US Holocaust Memorial Museum retains a high standard of authenticity required to refute Holocaust revisionism. In his article (1995: 241) Ochsner argues that the one purpose of the museum is to prove the reality of the events which occurred during the Holocaust by creating a clear distinction between authentic artefacts, in the most literal sense of the word, and reconstructions. Authenticity, in terms of its definition, is critical for the museum, whereas other history museums might intentionally combine the inauthentic, such as reconstructions, and the authentic artefacts in order to bridge the distance between the visitors and the events being presented (Weinberg 1993). However, the concept of authenticity in the literal sense, although important in regards to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, does not negate the value of other concepts of authenticity within heritage presentation. It is evident that, with the Memorial Museum, the literal authenticity of the artefacts being presented to visitors is of extreme importance, not only because of the delicate subject matter being examined. The knowledge that

the museum will provide the visitor with authentic artefacts to support the prior knowledge that they already had gained, helps to make the experience for the tourist in a sense, more real; something with Ford Bell highlights continuously (CNN 2017). However, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum seems to be overlooking the benefit of “authentic replicas” and the idea of staged authenticity. Objects that aren’t “authentic”, for example replicas of items from the Holocaust, still evoke the horror and the violence of the event (Landsberg 1997: 71). It can still provide a connection between the event and the visitor. The objects, which Landsberg (1997: 71) defined as “inauthentic”, are those which did not “see” the Holocaust in a literal way. However, they nonetheless become embedded in the logic and significance of the Holocaust. These “inauthentic” artefacts are contributing to the learning of visitors, an involuntary solidification of the authenticity of the genuine objects.

There are a variety of exhibitions and artefacts presented in the museum which could be discussed that would provide an extremely in depth look at the different concepts of authenticity and how each one applies to the presentation of heritage; in particular, their individual importance in the museum. However, for this essay, particular focus will be drawn to the Identity cards which are presented to visitors as they enter the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Upon entering the Permanent Exhibition, visitors are presented with Identification Cards documenting the lives of victims of the Holocaust (Fig 3, Fig 4). Whilst in possession of these cards, visitors to the exhibition are able to follow the lives of the people on the ID cards through four sections and discovering whether they lived or died (US Holocaust Memorial Museum 2018); getting visitors to engage with the other imagery and artefacts presented. Young (1993: 343) states that the issuing of the ID cards turns the visitors into victims of the Holocaust for the day. The ID cards encourages a certain critical blindness as imagining oneself as a victim as a potential victim is a stark contrast to remembering past victims or imaging others in the same way (Young, 1993: 343). Not only does it make an event, which was predominately based in Europe in the middle of the 20th Century, more real, the experience provides a sense of authenticity for the individuals. As Rosen states “the irony is that many Jews during the Holocaust scrambled to acquire false papers in order to survive the war...there is a reverse principle at work here, as if everyone were expected to enter the museum an American and leave in some fashion, a Jew” (Young 1993: 343). In essence, the issuing of the ID cards gives the visitors a feeling of authenticity; they are now the people who suffered during the Holocaust, they have that connection. They have participated in the ‘staged authenticity’ (McCannell 1974: 589) put forward by so many academics. Boorstin’s idea that people are most likely to engage with heritage sites if they are able to situate themselves within the site, and identify themselves in the past (1991), is clearly present in the use of the Identification Cards. It is also reiterating the statements that Crew and Sims (1991: 159) put forward about the idea that it is the individuals in positions of authority which shape authenticity to suit the presentation of heritage that they wish to put forward. In this case, it is giving the exhibitions more validation by putting forward the authentic experience for visitors to engage with. The figures of authority have put in place a mechanism in which they can solidify the authority of the museum, located at a site which has no connection to the events of the mid-20th Century in Europe. Nonetheless, the constant emphasis from scholars, discussing the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and from the museum itself, on the presence of authenticity, in whatever form or concept it takes, highlights the importance placed upon it in the presentation of heritage.

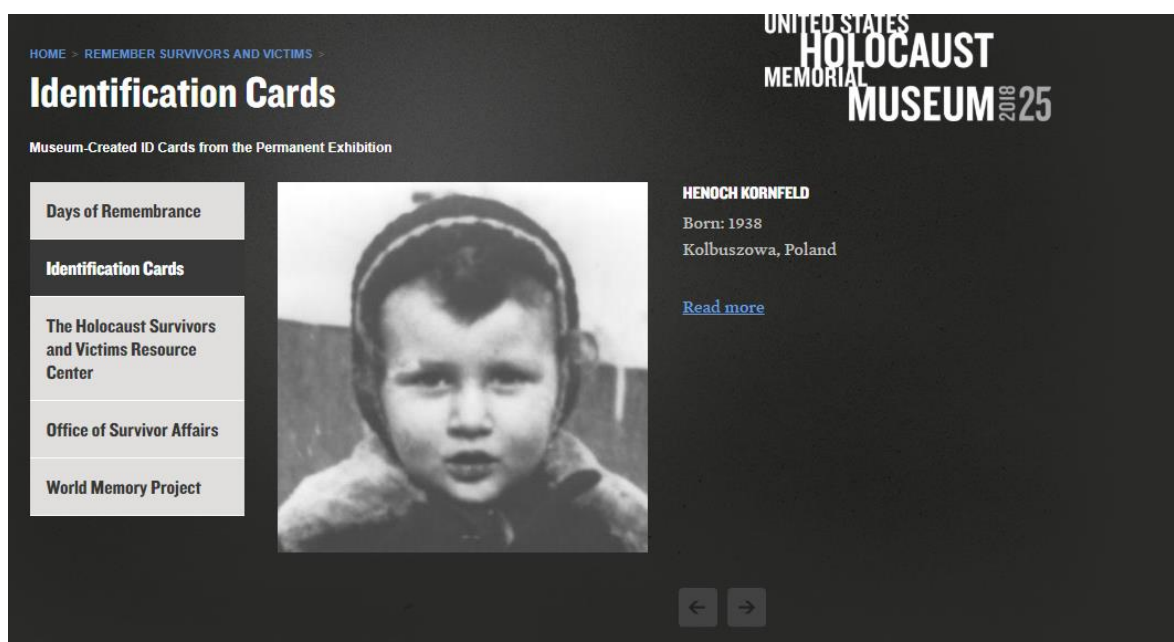


Fig 3. Screenshot of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum Website which provides information about the ID cards used in the Museum (US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018).

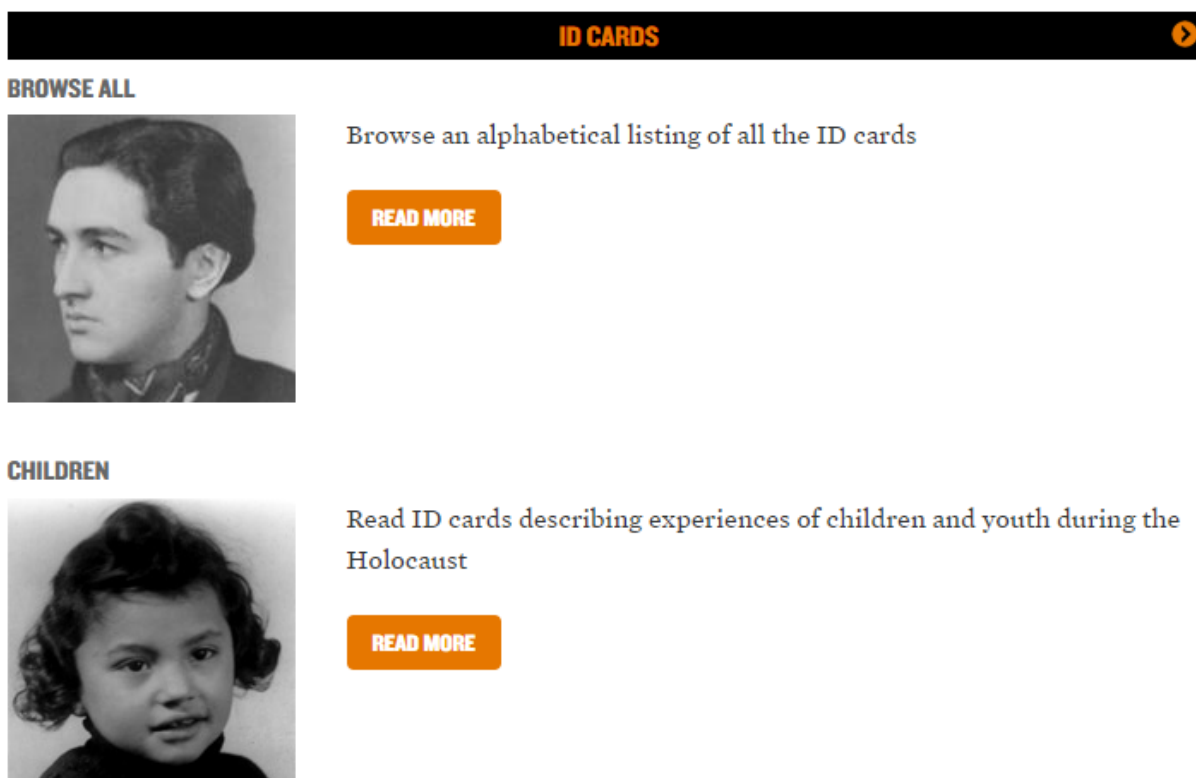


Fig 4. Links on the US Holocaust Memorial Museum website to the ID cards used in the Museum. (US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018).

There are a variety of differences between the importance placed on the concepts of authenticity when comparing the museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. The authenticity of the location of the sites is the first example of the differences between the two sites that will be examined. As has been discussed, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum is located at a site which has little or no connection with the events of the mid-20th Century in Europe (Lennon, Foley 1999: 47). In contrast, the museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau is located on the site where all of the atrocities occurred. The genuine authenticity which is sought after by both examples, in terms of the locations, can only be achieved by the one. However, what is most interesting is that both sites lean more towards MacCannell's (1974: 589) idea of "staged authenticity". Both locations create displays and exhibitions to also convey messages to visitors; regardless of claims of the sites being genuinely authentic (Auschwitz-Birkenau 2018, Weinberg 1993). It would be almost impossible to state that either heritage site that has been examined could be labelled as authentic when using the most literal sense of the word. Both sites have been altered and modelled to what the individuals in authority desire. Crew and Sims' (1991) idea of authenticity being a result of authority is evident in both sites. However, what should be drawn on, is that the idea of an authentic experience is what draws visitors to the sites (Bryce et al 2015). Therefore, if it is, as Crew and Sims (1991) suggests, that authority is what creates authenticity, it does not retract from the importance of the concept of authenticity. Instead it provides a reasoning behind the concept of it. When comparing the sites to consider how important authenticity is in the presentation of heritage, both sites demonstrate that authenticity, regardless of which definition it is being given, or which form of authenticity is being used to examine the presentation of heritage, it is an important concept.

This essay has attempted to discuss the different definitions and concepts of authenticity and come to a reasoned judgement over whether authenticity is important in the presentation of heritage through the examination of two Holocaust Memorial sites. Through the course of the essay, it has been suggested that authenticity, and its many definitions, is of significant importance when presenting heritage as it provides a mechanism to encourage visitors to make the trips to sites of, as in this case, dark tourism. In conclusion, through the examination of the two heritage sites, it is clear that the concept of authenticity is important in the presentation of heritage.

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