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'We had the most wonderful times': seaside nostalgia at a British resort.

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Morecambe is a traditional British seaside resort that experienced a dynamic ebb and flow of visitors. It still attracts visitors, many of whom are from the North of England and in the second half of their lives. The experiences of such traditional seaside markets have not been examined as carefully by academics in recent years as one might assume. All too often this subject falls between the gap between serious academic study and popular culture, which supports narratives focussing on the apparent decline of an idealised seaside (Walton, 2014). Instead this paper attempts to gain an understanding of this seaside experience, and is based around ten semi-structured interviews with 55-74 year old repeat North of England visitors to Morecambe. It considers their nostalgic connection and reaction to the resort, which emerged as a significant element of visitor experience. The seaside is considered timeless by these visitors and facilitates a reverie through which one can temporarily revisit a past which is populated by childhood memories of family members. The resort allows visitors to fleetingly transcend time, through immersion in the unchanging resort with its timeless seacape. This reconnection with the past highlights a dissatisfaction with the present which hinges on the loss of childhood. Yet nostalgia also allowed for a positive re-telling of the past which underpinned family narratives and contributed to the cross-generational appeal of the beach.

Key words: Seaside, nostalgia, Morecambe, timelessness, childhood, play, beach.

Introduction

Nostalgia within tourism can take many forms across different cultures, for example it has been identified as an important element of the Disneyland experience (Cross & Walton, 2005). However this research concerns itself with traditional British seaside resorts, which have survived challenges to infrastructure and image, revealing them to be durable destinations – as well as salient representations of British culture. In recent years visitors tend to view them with affectionate nostalgia; whilst the credibility of remaining seaside heritage has strengthened (Walton & Wood, 2009; Walton, 2000). Moreover nostalgia-fuelled heritage tourism offers a valuable life-line for some resorts. As early as 1990 Urry suggested that struggling seaside resorts should not try to resist the trend to nostalgia but should instead embrace it before further deterioration. The subsequent lack of primary research into the demand for seaside nostalgia is surprising. It could perhaps indicate a resistance to seaside nostalgia - or that the nature of this potentially significant element of the visit experience was largely assumed or ignored. Tunstall and Penning-Rowsell (1998) however, do refer to the importance of childhood, families and nostalgia at the seaside by proposing that in the future,

> Qualitative research with in-depth interviews or discussion groups would deepen our understanding of individuals' lifelong experiences of coasts, and the meanings they attach to them (p. 331).

Consequently it is the intention of this paper (particularly focussing on nostalgia) to explore the experiences of seaside visitors today. First, however, it is necessary to introduce the setting chosen for this research and by so doing illustrate the nature of the resort; with particular reference to its rise, fall and partial recovery.

Morecambe, Lancashire, is a traditional medium sized seaside resort with a population of 36,500 (Office of National Statistics, 2013). The resort developed in the nineteenth century: early in the century it was a watering hole for the elite and middle classes but by the end of the century it became a more popular with a wider section of society. It became known as 'Bradford by the Sea' as The Midland railway connected it industrial area of West Riding, Yorkshire, from 1848 (Bingham 1990). Accurate historic visitor numbers for Morecambe that would allow meaningful comparison between decades do not exist, however it is clear to see that tourism infrastructure developed extensively in the late nineteenth as the resort gained the Alhambra, Winter Gardens, Summer Gardens, two piers and a revolving tower to name but a few attractions aimed at a growing market. Even gauging the extent of accommodation provision is difficult, but according to Grass (1972: 26),

various observers had counted the number of lodging houses at 150 in 1881, 513 in 1899 and 344 by 1913. This trend of expansion continued; Walton (1997) points out that English resorts, which like Morecambe were both medium sized and working class, expanded rapidly in the early twentieth century. He points to census information which indicates that, between 1911 and 1951, Morecambe grew by an impressive 205% to a population of 37,006. At this time of expansion the resort started to become demographically distinct as a retirement centre (Walton 1997).

The 1940s and 1950s saw the continuation of Morecambe's prosperity. Bingham (1990) marks Morecambe's height of popularity as the 'switch on' nights of 1949 and 1950 which attracted well over 100,000 visitors (more than the first day of the 1951 Festival of Britain in 1951) but these numbers were never to be repeated. Morecambe's other important event from this period was the popular Miss Great Britain competition which was held at the impressive open air swimming baths. Morecambe attracted high numbers of visitors in the 1950s through to the 1970s. However as the 1950s came to a close, a period of stagnation set in. Morecambe's theatres closed for the winter season for the first time and the first would close permanently in the early 1960s. By the late 1960s vacancies signs outside guesthouses became commonplace in the height of the season for the first time (Bingham 1990). By the mid-1970s the resort was clearly in decline, significant investment was scarce and visitor entertainment in Morecambe consisted mostly of bingo or amusement arcades. The Alhambra, The West End Pier and the Outdoor Swimming Stadium closed although Morecambe Pleasure Land theme park (later Frontier Land) continued to operate. The decline continued through the 1980s and the resort's tourism economy was decimated:

> Morecambe suffered a calamitous fall in visitor spending from £46.6 million in 1973
> to £6.5 million in 1990, expressed in constant values. Few resorts have suffered
> such a collapse. (Hassan, 2003, p. 254)

The 1980s was, perhaps, the worst decade for tourism (Bingham, 1990). Morecambe hosted the last Miss Great Britain competition and the one remaining pier closed its doors in 1986 (National Pier Society nd.). Not only had Morecambe lost all but one of its major attractions (Frontier Land eventually closed in 2000) but it could not even support a cinema. The number of boarding houses dropped from 772 in 1980 to just 123 in 1990 (Bingham 1990). The Modernist Midland Hotel did survive but was not operating as a good quality hotel as it once did (Bingham 1990). In the following decades, the resort did retain two fully functioning large hotels. These were to increasingly rely increasingly upon an older market supplied largely through coach tour operators such as Wallace

Arnold, who now own one of these hotels. The 2007-8 North West Staying Visitor Survey (Gibson, Crawford and Geddes 2008) identified some very clear trends. Only 4% of visitors to Morecambe were 16-24 year olds but a startling 41% were over 65 years of age - the average across all other destinations in the North West for this age bracket is 17%. Daily spend was approximately a quarter less and accommodation was approximately a fifth less than the regional average for coastal areas (£12.57 and £16.90 per person per day respectively).

The reasons for Morecambe's decline are open to speculation but they include socio-cultural shifts and changing tastes, increased competition both domestically and internationally, a lack of investment compared to larger resorts like Blackpool, relative geographical isolation in the age of the car and environmental pollution problems (for more on these issues see Urry, 1997; Walton, 2000 and Hassan 2003). The impact of such these issues cannot be easily quantified but were likely to contribute to a period of sustained decline sometimes associated with Tourism Area Life Cycle (Butler, 1980).

The decline of tourism to Morecambe was inextricably linked town to a number of socio-economic problems as a spiral of economic decline set in. An over-supply of cheap accommodation meant that the urban North no longer sent its holidaymakers but its long-term unemployed to the 'Costa del Dole.' Unemployment levels in some Morecambe wards were approaching 50% in the 1980s, one of the highest rates in the country (Bingham 1990). The scenario at struggling seaside resorts is not so different today as demonstrated by a recent report, which observes that some resorts have turned into 'dumping grounds' for addicts, ex-offenders and those with mental health issues - for whom placing authorities can find cheap accommodation (The Centre for Social Justice, 2013:6). The Office for National Statistics (2013, p. 21) considers Morecambe more deprived than the average town and the 6th most deprived medium sized resort in the UK.

Various demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges facing Morecambe took their toll on its reputation as a holiday destination (Bingham, 1990; Jordison, 2012). Yet, despite long standing challenges, the 1990s saw the start of a modest recovery of tourism, as parts of the resort and especially the promenade saw regeneration. The Tern Project offered artwork and a wildlife theme to the regenerated promenade which was re-built because of storm damage. However

recovery was inconsistent and slow to gather momentum. The Midland Hotel, a nationally recognised part of Britain's seaside heritage, was reopened by Urban Splash in 2008 and became a beacon of hope for the resort. Along with the regenerated promenade it represented a rare investment in the touristic infrastructure, and the re-opening of this destination hotel drew much needed positive media attention to Morecambe (Sharman, 2007). In recent years visitor numbers have increased (Lancaster City Council, 2011). The most up to date published visitor number / spending statistics for the resort are shown on table 1 and relate to the council's 2010 figures and show a marked improvement since 2007 [in the author's opinion these figures should be treated with caution]. Since the publication of this report no further reports have been made publicly available.

Table 1: A summary of key tourism statistics for Morecambe in 2010 and 2007.

	2010	2007
Economic Impact (£'s millions)	170.28	131.77
Tourist Days (thousands)	4,554.51	3,378.33
Tourist Numbers (thousands)	3,638.94	2,407,62
Tourism related employment (# of jobs)	2,657	2,257

Source: Lancaster City Council (2008 and 2011)

The resort has been a victim of socio-cultural and economic shifts but has managed to survive and still attracts visitors, some of whom constitute the primary research of this paper. Interviews with these respondents clearly indicate the relevance and importance of nostalgia to their visits.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia can be considered an idealised and selective representation of the past. It also reflects dissatisfaction with the present and acts as a counter-point to the space-time compression of post-modernity (Harvey, 2000). The refuge offered by nostalgia is in stark contrast to contemporary experiences of globalization, fast-paced technological innovation and a world which appears to have sped up. However, the practice of nostalgia does not just stem from a sense of discontent with

present, for it can also be a reaction to an uncertain or perhaps limited future (Dann, 1994; Davis, 1979). This is little doubt that, for many, the realization that there are more years behind than there are ahead draws us back to an unchanging past that offers both solace and safety.

Goulding (1999) distinguishes between nostalgia for real personal memories and stimulated nostalgia, that is, vicarious nostalgia evoked from narratives, images and objects. She also points out that there is a typology of nostalgia with recreational nostalgics having a reasonably well balanced view of the present on one side and existential nostalgics on the other. This group very much see the past through rose tinted glasses and transpose their own personally-held beliefs to a time in the past - nostalgia offering the opportunity for escape from a generally unsatisfactory present. At this point, it is important to consider that nostalgia is quite different from reminiscence. Nostalgia focuses on the fact that the past cannot return, and so as a consequence emphasizes feelings of loss. There is also a need within a nostalgic to focus on and idealize the past at the expense of the present or future. On the other hand reminiscence is a more positive form of recollection as it does not focus on loss or on perceived shortcomings of the present. Based upon these definitions, the primary research referred to in this paper is primarily nostalgic.

Nostalgia is often dismissed as pessimistic, looked down upon as a misrepresentation, considered as a loss of faith or described in terms of a disease. Such perspectives are mirrored within tourism and heritage studies, with tourists searching for meaning in developing countries, rural areas and towards the past which also represents a foreign country (Lowenthal, 2011). However, there is still some argument as to whether nostalgia is a positive, negative or bitter-sweet emotion. Nostalgia can be considered in more balanced terms as an emotional state that allows for ambivalences within it and tolerates the existence of different human realities. It is a melancholic delight, in which people to not want to be cured of their past (Bishop, 1995). Furthermore Boym (2001, p. xiv) defines nostalgia as,

> ...a yearning for a different time - the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress.

Here Boym refers to the complexity of time, which she believes must be understood to fully grasp the concept of nostalgia. Modernity, it is argued, can be defined as the opposition between two kinds of time, on one side the objectified time of capitalist civilization and on the other a private,

subjective idea of time linked to our imagination (Bishop, 1995). Nostalgia is an attempt to connect these two opposing ways of both thinking about and experiencing time.

Perceptions regarding time are not only relevant to issues of nostalgia but also to tourism places in general (see Ryan, 2010a). Rojek and Urry (1997) observe that some places, including many English seaside resorts, appear empty of time or slowed down. Differences in time perception can be attractive; some places draw visitors because they are almost timeless, they have not seemingly been ravaged by time. They represent what has been termed glacial time i.e. a time horizon which is not perceptible to the individual (Rojek & Urry, 1997).

Whilst nostalgia is not restricted to any particular life stage or part of the past, childhood is a common theme within nostalgic recollections. Bachelard (1971) examines the relationship between childhood and reverie, a type of fanciful musing which potentially includes nostalgia or reminiscence. He argues that reverie can be so deep that it transcends time and personal history, taking us back into ourselves and allowing communication with our inner child. Both childhood and reverie are associated with freedom and a poetic beauty. By dreaming of childhood, we enter the lair of reveries which returns us to the beauty of the first images. Nostalgia allows this but brings about an obvious comparison with the present as essentially the adult is looking through the eyes of a child but is nevertheless still an adult.

Identity and continuity lie at the heart of nostalgia which operates on a national, local or individual level and can be described as the relationship between personal and collective memory (Boym, 2001; Bishop, 1995). Not only can it solidify identity but also sustain a sense of meaning and invigorate social connectedness (Routledge et al., 2011). As a self-focused emotional process, it gives the opportunity to form a meaningful narrative from memories. This is significant because for many of us, our past lies at the centre of our sense of identity. Lowenthal (2011) stresses the importance to well-being of identification with the earlier stages of one's own life. For many, this identification with the past is achieved through attachment to certain places which hold memories or meaning. The fact that nostalgia is often shared is significant; it strengthens feelings of attachment security, perceptions of social support and empathy with others. Fond and selective recollections of past vacations, when people came together, can ward off negative feelings towards the

present and future (Fairley & Gammon, 2005).

Nostalgia and the seaside experience

A key component of the nostalgic recollections emerging from this research was play which was often associated with childhood. The beach is an authorised site of performative play for adults as well as children, where one can create by manipulating the environment (Baerenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen & Urry 2004; Obrador-Pons, 2009). Ryan (2010b) observes that beaches are one of the few places where adults can have childlike fun as opposed to leisure and the beach is perhaps the most important stage on which adults can safely re-enact their childhood; when children are present, childish acts of play can become expectations. Indeed play and playfulness have been highlighted as key features of many tourist experiences as they offer opportunities to regress, and so to embrace the child we once were (Cohen, 1985; Dann, 1996). Futhermore it has been suggested that the sense of liberation that such childlike practices brings can make the tourist more sensitive to the more positive features that many environments exude:

> By becoming childlike and be being born again, tourists can once more experience primitive and pastoral delights currently denied them in the name of progress and urban renewal. (Dann, 1996:p.111)

There is little doubt that many seaside resorts offer and promote visitors to tap into their childhood memories which are made all the more achievable through the dynamic and memorable environment that coastal destinations offer.

The senses are an essential part of play; both were linked to the seaside experience in this research. Urry (1990) famously considered the importance of the visual in tourism; the seaside view has been consumed as a 'Romantic Gaze' in post-renaissance times and this is reflected in art (Corbin, 1994). Indeed, the visual image has come to dominate modern culture more generally (Rojek & Urry, 1997). However, the visitor experience is not entirely superficially ocular-centric; it is rich, varied and potentially body-centric. Obrador-Pons (2009) stresses the importance of touch in experiencing the beach, whilst Dann and Jacobsen (2003) argue that the significance of tourism smell-scapes deserve more attention. Despite ocular-centricity, the significance of these other senses is clear, especially smell and taste which are so closely linked to memory (Bachelard, 1971). Memory is allegiant to the aromas and tastes of our past experiences these senses can therefore evoke

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powerfully felt Proustian-like experiences (Castelnuovo-Tedesco, 1998). This seaside may well facilitate a remembrance of things past because the way in which we experience this distinct sensory environment seems little changed as we, by contrast, age. This seemingly fixed backdrop potentially lends itself to a contemplative comparison of our former-selves and nostalgia (Jarratt, 2015).

Method

The overall aim of this research was to explore sense of place as experienced by visitors to Morecambe; it considers the emotional reaction to place. This research was completed in 2013 and consists of ten semi-structured interviews each lasting around an hour or longer. It employs an approach to qualitative inquiry called Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis or IPA which is established within the discipline of psychology. It is an approach that remains under-utilized within the qualitative domain of tourism, with a small number of exceptions such as Malone, McCabe and Smith (2014). It is a form of data analysis that lends itself to particular forms of data collection and approaches to sampling (Shaw, 2010; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA attempts to reveal the texture of an experience by gaining the insider's perspective as much as possible (it is phenomenological), whilst accepting that this is never fully achievable as it relies on the researcher (it is interpretative). For more on IPA see Smith et al. (2009).

A small number of relatively homogeneous cases were purposively selected, this is in line with IPA which is idiographic and aims to understand a particular phenomenon rather than making group claims (Smith et al, 2009). With regard to sample size Smith et al (2009, p. 51) note that, 'In effect, it is more problematic to try to meet IPA's commitments with a sample which is too large, than with one that is too small'. The same authors go on to identify a typical an IPA sample size of between four and ten. The purposive sampling found here reflects the inductive approach that lies behind IPA and echoes the logic used in ethnographic research methods. It means that findings cannot be empirically generalized but theoretical transferability maybe possible. The following section outlines the research procedure.

The ten interviewees were initially identified and selected through information from a self-completed questionnaires distributed in Morecambe. This questionnaire was completed by 201 visitors but does not inform this paper outside of the selection of interviewees. It collected demographic information, asked for contact details and if the respondent would be willing to take part

in further research. From this information thirteen potential interview candidates were identified and eleven responded positively when contacted, leading to the completion of ten interviews. Clear criteria are needed to enable the intended purposive screening and the selection of appropriate cases (Gratton & Jones, 2004). A series of screens were used to identify potential candidates, the visitors in the sample had to be aged 55 to 74 years, reside in the North of England and be repeat visitors to the resort (for details see table 2). These screens reflect the typical visiting habits and demographics of visitors to the resort, as identified in an earlier consultancy report (Gibson, Crawford & Geddes, 2008).

The interviewer went to great lengths to put interviewees at ease and to build their confidence before the interview. For example the location of the interview was decided by the interviewee. The interview tended to be conducted at their home or an apparently neutral setting such as a café. During the course of the interview the respondents were asked about their experiences of visiting Morecambe. No topic was discussed more often or with more passion than seaside holidays of the past, usually involving childhood and nostalgia. All interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed verbatim.

The analysis followed the approach of IPA and Smith et al. (2009), employing a document with three columns: one contained the original transcript, another for initial exploratory comments and the other for emergent themes. Analysis was conducted manually to allow familiarity with the transcriptions and to avoid the mechanistic approach which is sometimes attributed to computer analysis (Gratton & Jones, 2004). The result was a cross-case table of themes. In this paper the themes that make up the sub-headings of the findings section are always supported by the words of the interviewees themselves, these are in *italics* for the sake of clarity. The link between the emergent themes across cases and the spoken word is not broken. The initials of the interviewee's pseudonym precede each quote and correlate with interviewee details in table 2.

Findings

Nostalgia as part of a seaside visit

T.M.: *...your childhood memories always bring you back.*

The interviews indicate that nostalgia is a significant reaction to Morecambe and, furthermore, that it is a reason to visit. All but one of the interviewees stated nostalgia was one of the primary

reasons to visit; nostalgia for childhood was especially significant.

> G.D.: *…it's a trip down memory lane really when we go to Morecambe. And I, I certainly enjoy it myself. It's not too far, and essentially that's why we go.*

Interviewees pointed out that nostalgia was very often articulated, shared, social and pleasurable.

> P.S.: *...I mean your whole life when you get older is your memories and, you know, you become boring because you're repeating them, you know, 'Oh do you remember when…' you do and often with affection.*

For one respondent visiting the resort, with its old railway station (now a tourist information centre) brought back specific childhood memories involving her father:

> P.P.: *…that evokes memories of the steam trains and, you know, putting the windows down and putting my head out of the window and getting into trouble [laughs]...... with my Dad. You know, putting my head out of the window on a moving train, and things like that. You know, it's... yes, it brings back lots of happy memories....*

Traditional cafes were often referred to sites of nostalgia. One respondent remembers time spent in a café with his (now adult) daughter:

> T.M.: *And we used to go in a little place on the front and my daughter always used to love the prawn sandwiches, always beautiful, nicely laid out. And even when she was a young, 3 and 4, she used to love the prawn sandwiches. Always asked for them.*

The specific seaside scenes associated with nostalgia ranged from amusement arcades to the Midland Hotel. In each case the setting was traditional and can still be visited today. Surviving built heritage allows a connection with selected elements of the past. These nostalgic scenes were all positive re-telling of a seaside narrative, usually a family narrative. Yet more often nostalgia was associated with the open spaces along the coast, the promenade and especially the beach.

Nostalgia is very much seasoned by the nature of the seaside (Walton, 2000). The unchanging nature of the resort engendered nostalgia; especially the shoreline and seascape which were considered timeless in relation to our life spans.

> P.S.: *...when we're not here they'll still be…the tide will ebb and it'll flow.*

> P.P.: *It's... I think the bay is just spectacular, it's just beautiful. And I always feel... I always feel very nostalgic when I go to Morecambe.*

Family members are often mentioned in the context of nostalgic childhood recollections, which in turn are linked to experiences set in the seaside environment. It is also noteworthy that the mention

of (late) parents is bound up with an overarching sense of loss.

> D.B.: *I think it* [looking at the views] *does take me back to, you know, to years gone by when I used to go for a walk along the prom with, with Mum and Dad...*

One interviewee still associates Morecambe with the wind that she experienced on her first visit to the resort as a child; this is clearly linked to memories of her late father. The place and its weather have become bound to part of her memories of family.

> P.K.: *Well, when I came to Morecambe with me Dad, it was a very windy day, and he said he hates the wind, he was on a ship during the war and they went up and down and so forth.*

Apparently *natural* elements, the views, the weather and the beach, are relatively unchanging and timeless and therefore lend themselves to nostalgia. Many of the sensory experiences associated with the seaside can act as mnemonic triggers. The seaside forms a seemingly primal landscape that carries a resonance througout later life. A primal landscape is of our childhoods - where we played, explored and learnt (Measham, 2006). This primal landscape was associated with a nostlagic sense of yearning for that which is lost. The element of the seaside that best fits this description of a primal landscape is the beach.

Playing on the beach as children

> B.J.: *I think particularly, yes the beach, sitting on the beach links it to childhood memories.*

No environment was considered in more nostalgic terms or as frequently as the beach. All of the interviewees considered the beach as a place to play and associated it with childhood. They did not always refer specifically to Morecambe but more generally to traditional or common forms of beach play. Interviewees observed that all children, especially younger children, loved to play on beaches.

> W.H.: *I think it's just a natural thing to do, isn't it? I know that I enjoyed playing on the sand when I was a kid.*

Four interviewees spoke of ball games such as cricket but all referred to playing with the sand and water. Play and associated paraphernalia were central to the seaside experience as remembered

by these interviewees.

> P.S. *...all these sort of things when we were little the beach was part of, you know, you had your new bucket and spade, your kite if you were lucky and swimsuits, you know, all the things that bring to like and you don't remember the rainy days.*

One interviewee gives a specific example of seaside play, making a sand car, which has been passed down through the generations. Here, the cross generational appeal of the beach as well as the central role of the adult in this play is clear. More generally, we see again how the seaside experience makes up a part of family narratives.

> W.S.: *Well, I think one of the main ones and it even carried on with my grandchildren, is making model cars. You know, making a front and a seat for them to sit in. And the spade stuck in for the steering wheel and the usual sand castle and that.*

Interviewees described what made the beach a perfect environment in which to play. The role of the elements, especially sand and water, was absolutely central to this and there was also an associated sense of freedom.

> G.D.: *The key word for me there is freedom. I think the kids can run and they can shout and they can do all the kinds of things that we tell them not to do.*

The experience is unique and liberating for those involved. The water and sand clearly attract the visitors, especially the younger ones. This play was seen as positive, pure, instinctive, healthy and developmental:

> B.J.: *I think it's a very good experience for them; there's something basic about sand and water that children can play with in all sorts of ways. It develops their imagination, and they can become completely absorbed in that sort of play.*

The seemingly open and unconstrained natural environment offers the raw materials needed to play, experiment and exercise the imagination. The act of childish play at the seaside offers a sense of freedom and even escape for the participants. The beach is one of the few areas where adults can play with the kids on equal terms; where they can play as they did when they were children.

Furthermore, interviewees saw time spent on the beach, relaxing and playing, as a timeless experience which can be understood and shared by every generation. The beach offers an opportunity to bond through a unique interaction – playing together. The adults, especially the paternal figures, join in with the kids in a unique form of coming together.

G.D.: *And it* [beach play] *gives an opportunity for parents to interact with kids, with children and grandchildren, in a very free way, you know: to play games, to splash each other and just generally bond, I suppose...*

Changes in childhood

Interviewees saw their childhoods, or at least their childhood holidays to the seaside, as relatively modest, simple, but very happy. The modesty of their backgrounds appears to be something that is valued and viewed with pride. This focus on simple, modest but happy times is quintessentially nostalgic. The visitors' comments on this theme were also remarkably consistent.

B.J.: *Well, there wasn't a lot of money... we had the most wonderful times.*

T.M.: *...we never had much money, we used to make our own fun.*

G.D.: *…we certainly had very little money… but we did go to the beach and we thoroughly enjoyed it.*

P.P.: *...looking back now it was very simple.*

Interviewees expressed nostalgia for a simpler childhood, a time when children were apparently less sophisticated than today but when life was uncomplicated. Typically, as children, the interviewees *made do*, made their own entertainment independently and had freedoms not experienced by *mollycoddled* later generations who suffer the threat of *stranger danger.* The quotes from most these interviewees, concerning this theme, were very similar to each other and focus on the beach and play:

T.M.: *Because we, we were brought up like ... we use to have to get some pieces of stick and then cut a bat out of a piece of wood and play a game of cricket. They don't have that ability these days, the children, do they, they've got to ... so you've got to put something for them to do.*

P.S.: *Oh we could play on the beach and nobody would be worried about you. It was safe, you know, you could run off and go into the sea and nobody would be with you and now, you know, every child's hand is held in case somebody's going to kidnap them or do something awful to them.*

The nostalgia here is not for the beach or seaside, which still exist, but rather for a childhood which has changed a great deal or is now considered lost. Childhood today was consistently considered more complicated with children having increasingly high expectations. Some interviewees

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saw changes in beach play as indicative of wider social change. For others, beach play was considered timeless and therefore highlighted how other aspects of childhood have changed around it. One respondent stated how childhood had changed before stating,

> G.D.: *But once you get onto a beach you look at kids on a beach, and when I think back to when I was a kid, the behaviour is exactly the same.*

In either case, whether they saw beach play as changing or unchanging in contrast to the wider world, it was seen as a barometer of change. In all but one of the cases, perceived change was for the worse and clearly indicates a nostalgic viewpoint.

Revisiting childhood & cross generational appeal

In most cases, interviewees were nostalgic about their seaside experiences of the past and when they visited the seaside today, interviewees re-live their childhood to some degree. The beach could be enjoyed by all and was considered to have cross generational appeal. One respondent pointed out that unlike modern electronic toys, the beach had a certain timeless appeal that everybody in the family unit could appreciate. Interviewees suggested that their childhood holiday memories encourage, or would encourage, them to take children or grandchildren to visit the seaside. Their background and family history influenced their present day selection of destination. They wanted their family to share in the pleasurable experiences from their past; they wanted to share these places.

> P.S.: *I think there's something very special about it so I wanted, I suppose unconsciously, you know, I took my children where I'd had happy times and they loved it too.*

One respondent took this further and carefully reflected on the role of paternal figures at the seaside. The most important element of this was beach play, which is not merely a reflection of his childhood but of an idealised seaside holiday. He imagines how his father would have interacted with grandchildren, if he had lived long enough to see them, and then similarly goes on to imagine how he would play with grandchildren, if or when they are born:

> D.B.: *But I think it is something that I would want to do and take them, take them on the beach, build them some sandcastles, buy them an ice-cream, you know, paddle in the sea with them, roll my trouser legs up, you know, look stupid. It's, it's probably*

something I would, I would want to do, again, because it's something that I did when I was little and I think to myself well they should enjoy it as well and they're darn well gonna enjoy it! You know what I mean? [Smiling]*.*

This provides an example of nostalgia not only as the pursuit of the past, but as the pursuit of what never was. The last sentences in the above excerpt sum up the main point here well. The adults are adopting their happy childhood memories, or idealised versions of these memories, as a model for family days out; they are hoping to continue the seaside tradition. Three interviewees took this further, by suggesting that they re-enact their own childhood holidays when they visit the seaside as adults. This suggests that the seaside makes them feel the same now as it did when they were children, as far as that is possible.

P.S:*.. I think wherever you would go to the seaside you're re-enacting your own childhood as well.*

One interviewee, an older father, re-lives his childhood seaside experiences vicariously through watching and playing with his children when they visit Morecambe.

W.H.: *Them enjoying what you've enjoyed, and you can see them enjoying that and it takes you back to the feelings you had. Maybe buried in your subconscious, but you know, to see them enjoying it, and just having an ice cream in the sunshine and looking out and seeing the view, etcetera, you know?*

These seaside experiences and reverie brought back a version of childhood, encouraging a liberty of permissive playfulness.

Discussion

This study reveals that, nostalgia is a significant part of the seaside experience for these respondents and that this seaside nostalgia was often strongly felt. This was because of the association of the seaside with the loss of loved ones – especially parents, the loss of childhood and an awareness of the passage of time in relation to one's own life. Nostalgia is bitter-sweet and very much tied to the identity of the visitors. Respondents became emotional when recounting memories of family holidays that clearly meant a great deal to them now. In most cases, the seaside holiday was one of the few times of the year when children would be likely to spend an extended period with their

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parents, especially fathers. This was reflected very clearly in the interviews where within moments of recounting seaside visits (late) family members featured predominantly in the narrative. However, this loss was tempered by a feeling of continuity; interviewees took comfort in the fact that they now played the role of parent or grandparent in trips to the beach. Nostalgia complemented a linear view of their past but it also informed the present. The family narrative was also circular, as traditions were passed down the generations; one day the interviewees' offspring might remember seaside days with them, as they remembered their parents and grandparents. One of seaside nostalgia's functions is to support these narratives that dwell on the past but influence the present and will live into the future.

For the respondents in this research this *timeless* environment offers an escape from the modern day which is often nostalgic in nature. A place outside time is an obvious place to visit, if one is dissatisfied with the present or wants something more than *now* (Lowenthal, 2011). It would be a mistake to think that these visitors are necessarily on some sort of quest for meaning through their visits but, nevertheless, they enjoy and value this connection with something meaningful that sits outside their everyday experiences. Seaside nostalgia potentially offers meaning, comfort and stability through the ability to escape our everyday perception of time and re-connect to the past or a different sense of time that borrows more from the perception of natural rythms than it does from modern society and culture. For the respondents this re-connection was most often to childhood and the setting for this was most often the beach – a place of play.

The respondents place childhood and corresponding changes to childhood firmly at the centre of seaside nostalgia; this was consistently demonstrated through reference to play on the beach. Either beach play was unchanging but other aspects of childhood had changed around it, or it had changed thereby indicating wider changes. In either case, modern childhood was seen as different from theirs; the restrictions and complexity of modern childhood opposed the simple, modest and happier childhood of the past. The loss felt here is for their own childhood and for that type of childhood more generally. Despite dissatisfaction with contemporary childhood, the beach was considered positively as a relatively free place. Some saw children playing on a beach as timeless and unchanging in itself. The fact that the beach was the perfect environment for free play underpinned virtually all recollections and views on it.

The visitors pointed towards the natural abundance of water and especially sand to form an

ideal setting for play, for both adults and children alike. Others referred to the feeling of openness and space, with no corners to hide behind. The beach was seen as a relatively unrestrained natural playground and associated with a feeling of freedom. This association of spaciousness with freedom is commonplace in the West more generally (Tuan, 2011). Potentially this helps to explain the link between the seaside and the nostalgia for the percieved freedoms of the past.

The seaside experience appears to be laden with various mnemonic triggers. The timeless nature of the sea in particular seemed to have profound impact on interviewees by facilitating or seasoning seaside nostalgia. The beach and shoreline in particular allow an escape from the modern day and operates on a very different notion or version of time. This very much appeals to the visitors; Tuan (2011) offers insights into this visitor appeal. He views modern day society as encouraging us to see and treat time and space/place as separate dimensions. He describes our lust for the borderland between them, for the timeless paradise which offers a sense of freedom and possibilities. Furthermore, he links this experience to exposure to open spaces,

> When we stand before a prospect, our mind is free to roam. As we move mentally
> out of space, we also move either backward or forward in time (p. 125).

One attraction of the seashore is that it appears permanent in contrast to our lifespans and so puts them into perspective. Consider the words of one interviewees again, who has now sadly passed away following a long standing illness:

> P.S.: ...*when we're not here they'll still be…the tide will ebb and it'll flow.*

Indeed these interviews regarding the seaside frequently revealed a melanchonic yet philosphical reflection on the human lifecycle and our place in the world. Arguably nostalgia can be a symptom of a deeper need for memories and beliefs which help us put our lives in context, illuminate the future and even deal with death.

Conclusion

This study of seaside nostalgia offers insights into how this place is experienced, valued and consumed by a group of older visitors from the North of England, who are part of the resorts most

significant and long-standing market. This purposely homogenous and small sample does mean that findings cannot be empirically generalized and represents a limitation of this study. However this focussed qualitative approach clearly identified a distinct and purposeful seaside nostalgia in these cases.

Seaside nostalgia revolves around the multi-layered issues of identity discussed in this paper and serves a purpose for these visitors, which is summarised in the following three points. First, to reconnect with ones past, childhood memories and more specifically as a nostalgic rememberence of family members who have passed on. A pre-exisiting sense of loss is very much bound up with this, including the loss of childhood itself both on a personal and collective level. Second, to support narratives, especially family narratives, that dwell on the past but influence the present through family and family visits. Finally, to find meaning, stability and reassurance through the ability to escape our everyday perception of time and to re-connect to the past or a different perception of time.

The three points above are very much linked to and facilitated by the nature of the seaside environment itself. These nostalgic seaside memories are triggered when one re-visits the traditional seaside resort, with its heritage and timeless views across the horizon. Bachelard (1971) connects the void of the sea to the void within; like him, the interviewees re-connected with their inner child. This association with childhood was especially strong where the beach was concerned, it was considered a place of play and relative freedom. Seaside play is connected with very specific visions of the past. They partially return to their childhood through re-visiting this primal landscape in adulthood, often with children or grandchildren, thereby completing a circle. However the beach also acted as a barometer of social change; the *poor but happy* past was contrasted against a more complicated present marked by higher expectations and less freedom for children. Traditional seaside visits and activities contribute to family narratives, confirm identities and offer a source of comfort as time marches on.

The seaside experience endures, and seaside nostalgia can be considered cyclical in nature. One can still observe or join in with the un-self-conscious play of a child on the beach; parents and grandparents brought children to the beach to play as they once did. Seaside visits were part of family narratives and traditions stretching back many decades but potentially stretching across the time horizon into the future. Seaside nostalgia allows both a connection to other generations and to the

child within.

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Table 2

Interviewee details

Initials	Gender	Age Bracket	Area of residence	(Former) Occupation	Employment status	How often they visit Morecambe	How long they have been visiting
D.B.	M	55-64	Chorley, Lancashire	Education (training)	Employed (p/t)	Once a month	60 years
P.K.	F	65-74	Grange, Cumbria	Finance Officer	Retired	Rarely	Unknown
W.H.	M	55-64	Bilsborrow, Lancashire	Kitchen Porter	Employed	Once a month	45 years
G.D.	M	65-74	Clitheroe, Lancashire	Teacher	Retired	Several times p.a.	10 years
T.M.	M	55-64	Garstang, Lancashire	Chef	Retired	Once a month	35 years
A.D.	F	65-74	Barnsley, S. Yorks.	Nursery Nurse	Retired	Rarely	12 years
W.S.	M	65-74	Northwich, Cheshire	Engineer	Retired	Rarely	Since childhood
P.P.	F	65-74	Penwortham, Lancashire	Council employee	Retired	Rarely	Since Childhood
P.S.	F	65-74	Preston, Lancashire	House wife	Retired	Once a year or so	45 years
B.J.	F	65-74	Allithwaite, Cumbria	Primary Teacher	Retired	Several times p.a.	30 years