

PRESENTING AN AUTHENTIC REFLECTION OF THE PAST THROUGH STORYTELLING AND LIVING HISTORY IN 1940S EVENTS

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Live events that replicate the 1940s era celebrate the heritage of a defining moment in history. This research presents the results of a study examining authenticity, storytelling, and living history in the context of 1940s events in the UK. The research demonstrates how storytelling and living history intensifies the authentic nature of the event, depicting a true reflection of the past and facilitating a collective memory of the era. Through online semistructured interviews with event organizers and attendees of 1940s events, the findings confirm that organizers feel a sense of cultural duty to tell an accurate story to the best of their abilities. This is supported through living history as presented by reenactment groups. They provide elements of the three concepts of authenticity: objectivism, constructivism, and existentialism. Reenactors provide historically accurate detail and speak with authority, generating what is perceived to be an authentic level of engagement.

Key words: Authenticity; Storytelling; Living history; Collective memory; 1940s events

Introduction

World War II overwhelmed the early part of the 1940s and played a significant role in the development of UK life and living conditions during the latter part of the decade (Hodge, 2012). Cities were devastated, families separated, and futures remained uncertain for many years with continued rationing, unemployment, poverty, and low morale (Hodge, 2012). However, these memories of the wartime era aid people to create a “sense of

nation” (Hill, 1999, p. 323). Films, books, photos, and other surviving cultural materials function as constant reminders of the sacrifices made and the conditions inflicted upon many. This is contrasted with patriotic stories of strength, and a notion to “make do and mend” (Ministry of Information 1943, as cited in Hodge, 2012, p. 87), where the nation pulled together to secure peace (Hayes, 1999, p. 4) and victory. Naturally, the number of people who experienced living through the 1940s, and can share their life stories, declines with each

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passing year, taking with them stories of their lived experience. As present-day heritage efforts seek to preserve these stories for generations to come, the memoirs are often exposed to inaccurate representation (Noakes & Pattinson, 2014).

Through a simulation of the past, 1940s events in the UK celebrate the heritage of this decade. Events combine interactive living history in the form of reenactments and 1940s staged designs, encapsulating the story of the era, underpinned with respect and remembrance.

This research seeks to demonstrate if 1940s events depict a true reflection of the past. A qualitative research approach was undertaken, in the form of online interviews with 1940s event attendees and event organizers. The research is guided by a series of questions. Can living history and reenactment enhance authenticity in 1940s events? Does storytelling implemented in 1940s events strengthen authenticity? Can authenticity in 1940s events contribute to collective memory and cultural connections to the past, and do 1940s events offer a true and authentic reflection of the past? The research highlights the importance of implementing historically accurate storytelling and living history in the form of reenactment and staged 1940 design. Importantly, this research reveals that there are elements of the period that simply cannot be replicated, and therefore it is not conceivable to fully re-create the era through a live event. However, organizers endeavor to create an authentic experience as far as possible, while simultaneously ensuring that the events remain relevant to the modern audience in an entertaining way. The events can contribute to a collective cultural memory and preserve the heritage of the era for generations to come.

Literature Review

The Role of Living History and Reenactment in Heritage Events

Heritage offers an opportunity to learn and be inspired for the future (UNESCO, 2021). As defined by Timothy (2018), heritage is “that which we inherit from the past, use today, and pass on to future generations” (p. 178). Heritage allows individuals to consume the past (Chhabra et al., 2003), quenching their thirst for knowledge (Gao et al.,

2020). The desire to connect with the past can be facilitated through heritage sites, museums, living history, commemorative activities, or events, to experience and consume artefacts and cultural landscapes (Chhabra et al., 2003).

Events are a special occurrence at a given place and time, providing a unique experience for attendees (Getz, 2007). Events are often utilized to increase footfall and revenue and raise awareness of a brand or a particular message. Within the “events” landscape, heritage events endeavor to raise historic awareness and interest in the past (Gapps, 2009; Sumartojo, 2016). They are staged events often themed around a specific time. They are designed to honor the memory and showcase the traditions, customs, and history of a particular group of people or place.

Heritage events offer an opportunity for people to learn about and appreciate the cultural diversity of their community (Historic England, 2023; The Heritage Council, 2023). They connect the past with the present and local communities with stories disseminated through generations, all of which provide an interactive and immersive experience (Soutar, 2017). Heritage events hosted within a heritage site—for example, Dover Castle (with centuries of history to disseminate, the castle in modern history was on the front line during the First and Second World War and is home to the secret Churchill tunnels where the Dunkirk evacuation was planned and the D-Day landings were masterminded) and Chatham Historic Dockyards (over 400 years of shipbuilding to discover) that are rich in cultural and historic value—introduce events to link intangible historic local stories to their tangible historic assets (buildings and original objects). These heritage events are mutually beneficial for the host site and attendees alike. The site can showcase the culture and stories of the past, educate attendees, increase historic awareness, and preserve the heritage for future generations, while enjoying increased visitor numbers and revenue. Attendees are exposed to a glimpse of life in the past, presented in an entertaining or immersive way to provide value, meaning, and cultural connection.

Attendees experience differing levels of emotional connection (Prayag & Del Chiappa, 2023) through authenticity and storytelling, transporting them to another time and place (Handler & Saxton, 1988)

and evoking a perception of the event's authentic nature. One element of immersive history within heritage events is provided in the form of living history. Living history provides a simulation of a time or place in the past, a showcase of what it was like to live in a certain period (Handler & Saxton, 1988), introducing the opportunity to be fully immersed through a series of events, offering an authentic multisensory experience through reenactment (Handler & Saxton, 1988). Authentic living history may be considered a reflection of how "real" the historical representation is, indicating the amount of research, knowledge, and detail the reenactor has contributed, they are fully immersed in a representation of the past (Gapps, 2009; Knowles, 2016).

DeGroot (2016) contended that the purpose of living history is to educate and to preserve heritage; opposing research by Hunt (2004) found that the education of spectators is of minimal interest, citing instead comradeship and personal interest as the main motivators to participate. However, it may be argued that the holistic encounter of human interaction strengthens the authentic nature of the educational experience (Knowles, 2016). Living history may be presented in the form of reenactment, performed by special interest societies and groups, aiming to reaffirm aspects of a culture's history (Carnegie & McCabe, 2008). Coles and Armstrong (2008) discussed whether "doing history" in the form of reenactment is an accurate way to learn about the past and if there is a difference in the learning experience for those involved in the reenactment and the spectators. Living history provides an opportunity to experience a time or a specific event that our ancestors experienced in the past (Handler & Saxton, 1988), thus reducing the gap of disparity and misconception between the past and the present day (Coles & Armstrong, 2008).

Both reenactment and living history allow event attendees to experience a performance of the past; however, they incite questions about the level of authenticity presented (DeGroot, 2016). Handler and Saxton (1988) postulated that authentic living history exactly simulates a particular time or place in the past. However, as modern life is so far removed from the past, with changes in behavior, visual appearance, health, and the way in which items are made or the types of fabrics used for clothing, it is possible that true authenticity through

reenactment is limited. Furthermore, while reenactors themselves will endeavor to research the part they play and present this information as accurately as possible, they are reliant on the knowledge of those who lived through the time, and historians to substantiate the level of authenticity produced.

Authenticity

Scholars have examined the ideologies of authenticity in relation to heritage sites; for example, Chhabra et al. (2003) analyzed heritage sites and the role that perceived authenticity plays in product quality and visitor satisfaction, finding that perceived authenticity is still possible even within a staged environment. Ray et al. (2006) considered authenticity within the context of historical reenactment, concluding that visitors accept objects or performances that accurately represent the real thing as an "iconic" authenticity; Park et al. (2019) investigated the impact of authenticity on visitor satisfaction at heritage sites, finding that existential authenticity provides the greatest level of satisfaction for visitors. García-Almeida (2019) considered the challenges heritage sites face in knowledge transfer through a narrative over and above tangible authenticity and the potential distortion or loss of authenticity, and the impact this may have on levels of visitor satisfaction. Authenticity within a heritage site defines its cultural value and its credibility as a source of authority for informing and educating (Y. Wang et al., 2015). Brida et al. (2014) highlighted those individuals seeking an authentic historical experience are more likely to achieve this by visiting an authentic historical site. Convincing replicas of a historical time produce a "Historical Verisimilitude" (Taylor & Johnson, 1993, as cited by Bruner, 1994, p. 399), whereby a reproduction is deemed to be accurate or genuine and therefore an authentic reproduction of the past (Bruner, 1994). A perceived authenticity can be staged (Chhabra et al., 2003) to re-create a time or place in the past, with adaptations to enhance visitors' experience (Gao et al., 2020).

Authenticity is defined as genuine, historically accurate or original (N. Wang, 1999). Rickly and Vidon (2018) discussed individuals escaping the lesser authenticities of modern day. This may reflect a desire to find one's true self and a quest to find authenticity in another time or place (MacCannell,

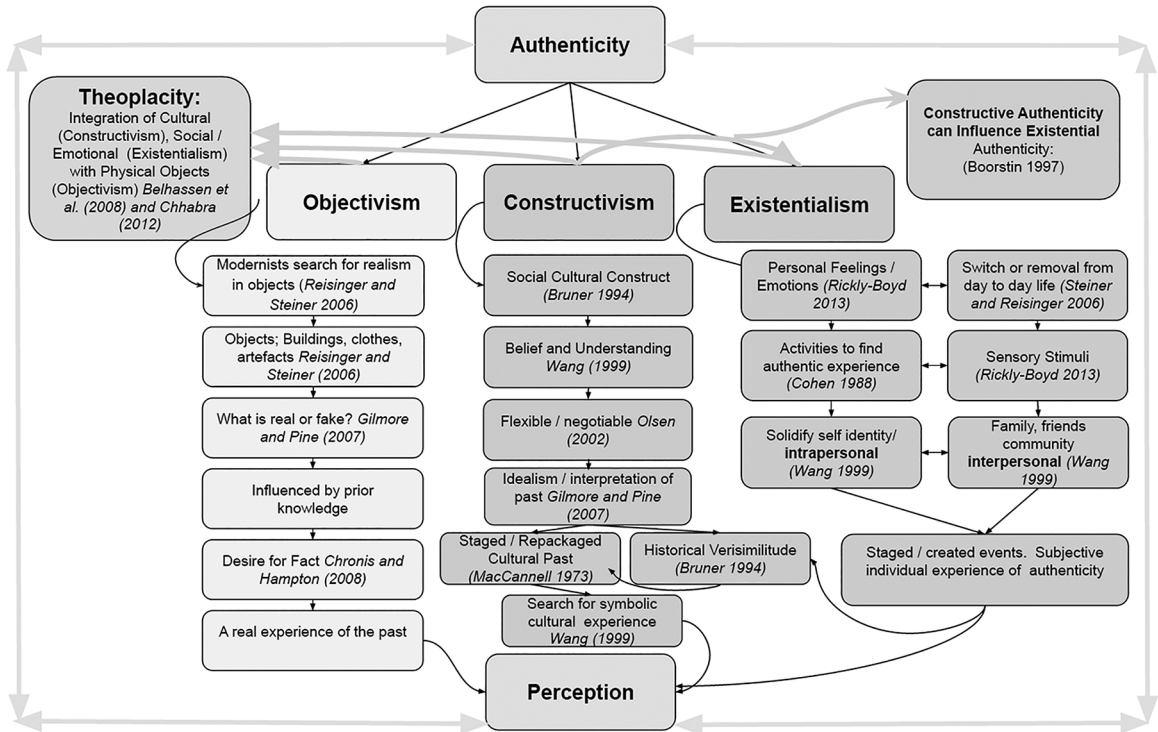


Figure 1. Authenticity: An overview of ideologies and concepts. Source: Authors, adapted from N. Wang (1999).

1973) and prompts tourist destinations to create cultural events to support these expectations. The level of authenticity one may experience is associated with individual perception. This is illustrated in Figure 1, highlighting the three main concepts presented by N. Wang (1999)—objectivism, constructivism, and existentialism—along with a fourth concept discussed by Belhassen et al. (2008) of theoplacity. Each has individual but influencing elements, moving through authenticity to perception, and linking back to the overall authentic experience. These concepts aid discussions on authenticity (Belhassen & Caton, 2006).

Objectivism, Constructive, Existentialism, and Theoplacity

Objectivism is concerned with physical items (e.g., clothes, buildings, and artefacts) (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Scholars have argued that there is little between what is real and manufactured (Chhabra, 2005, 2012; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; N. Wang, 1999). Historical knowledge or experience

will sway one's perception of how genuine (real) or fake objects are (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). In the case of heritage events and heritage locations, it is a combination of objects, original items, clothes, and memorabilia that leads to a feeling of being transported to a realism of the past (Belhassen & Caton, 2006). Heritage railways, for example, can provide a new dimension to commemorative events with the use of original steam engines, providing exposure to sights, sounds, and smells (Wichard, 2022) that are unique to the railways of the past. Objectivists have a desire for facts, presenting them with an authentic experience of the past (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Historical knowledge or experience will sway one's perception of how genuine and real objects are. As a result, Bruner (1994) argued that objects may not be fundamental to an authentic encounter; however, Belhassen and Caton (2006) presented an opposing view, postulating that while people still travel to specific locations to obtain a first-hand genuine experience to connect with the past (e.g., visiting the "actual" battlefields

of WW2), then object authenticity is still a relative concept and must be considered in the research.

N. Wang's (1999) concept of constructivism focused on an authentic appearance built on a social-cultural belief and understanding. It is a socially constructed interpretation of a time in history (Bruner, 1994) and its authentic appeal (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1973). Constructivism can be reinvented through time as it is processed through evolving societies (Olsen, 2002), making it flexible and allowing one to create an ideal interpretation of the past. Venues create staged or repackaged versions of the cultural past, whereby a reproduction is deemed to be accurate or genuine and, therefore, a believable authentic reproduction, which satisfies the constructivist with their search for a symbolic cultural experience. This utilizes a form of cultural staging for public consumption to generate socially engaged responses from visitors (MacCannell, 1973; Rickly & Vidon, 2018). However, Garcia-Almeida (2019) contended that staged authenticity is too far removed from reality to be genuine and may result in a public rejection of authenticity within the event.

The staged environment communicates the past through stories, activities, objects, and historical sites (Novello & Fernandez, 2016). Within heritage events, living historians or reenactors strive to continue the legacy of those who have gone before, and endeavor to re-create an "impression" of the past that is as accurate and possible (Wichard, 2022). Visitors in search of a symbolic experience can contribute to the authentic atmosphere; they want to believe the experience to be genuine, even if specific elements or objects used are not inherently authentic themselves (N. Wang, 1999). In this instance, Chhabra et al. (2003) concluded that visitors are witnessing a reproduction of cultural traditions or the staging of a cultural past. Knowledge may be generated through news, books, museums, documentaries, and films, creating expectations in the cultural understanding (Rickly & Vidon, 2018); however, these types of media may misrepresent the time, often only showcasing the more positive elements of the era. This builds a preconception of the time and influences what one believes to be an "authentic" experience of the past.

Existential authenticity focuses on personal feelings stimulated through activities, searching for removal from routine in pursuit of authenticity (Cohen, 1988; Rickly-Boyd, 2013; Steiner &

Reisinger, 2006). In this concept, a place becomes more authentically significant to the visitor through the sensory experience it simulates (Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Heritage tourism sites and heritage events present an existential offering to transport individuals to another time or place (Chronis & Hampton, 2008), providing a sense of living in the past; these staged events remove people from their everyday lives. This allows the individual to draw upon unique perceptions and emotions (Novello & Fernandez, 2016). However, Boorstin (1997) argued that the very act of hosting an event to attract people looking for an authentic experience is the exact element that instantly removes any aspect of authenticity. This is challenged by MacCannell (1973), who contended that it is not a case of an event being authentic or inauthentic, but instead the various levels of authenticity one may experience.

It could be surmised that attendees to heritage events wish to sample the life experiences of the past to solidify their own identity and provide meaning to their lives (Braedder et al., 2017); N. Wang (1999) refers to this as an Intrapersonal Authentic Experience. A second component, known as Interpersonal Authenticity (N. Wang, 1999) refers to experiences associated with family and friendships, where the community draws upon its collective memory (Noakes & Pattinson, 2014) and comes together to relive a time gone by (Belhassen & Caton, 2006), disseminating the social knowledge through family stories (Howells, 2016) to future generations.

The concept of "theoplicity" discussed by Belhassen et al. (2008) and Chhabra (2012) entwines the elements of place (*objectivism*), action, belief, and self (*existentialism*), and social-cultural (*constructivism*). Park et al. (2019) confirmed that elements of constructive and objective authenticity have a positive influence on the association of an emotional authentic experience. However, the merging of concepts could also shatter the perception of authenticity. If one element, object, location, atmosphere, or staging is deemed to be insincere, the overall authentic experience may be damaged (Gnoth & Wang, 2015).

Collective Memory and the Significance of Storytelling

Collective memory refers to a shared pool of memories, knowledge and information of a

particular time, place, or activity and can be influenced by individuals and their ability to selectively remember, forget or reinvent a particular memory (Olick et al., 2011). Recollection of the past can become blurred by memories generated through films and TV, public and private remembrance (Summerfield, 2014), and stories passed down through generations. Figure 2, presents a visual representation of the circular effect of composing collective memories, based on knowledge from primary sources such as diaries, film footage and personal recollection; driving a perception of authenticity and influencing one's visualisation of the past (Howells, 2016). In the case of heritage events, they become a commodity of collective memory, helping to visualise the time and shape memories and perceptions, by using original buildings and artefacts combined with the staging of a historical event.

Storytelling has been around for thousands of years as a means for exchanging, informing and generating understanding. Used to share knowledge, wisdom and values (Malita & Martin, 2010), stories of the past are relied upon within families and communities as an incredibly powerful tool, to link the present to the past (Soutar, 2017). Experiences and stories interconnect as experiences are co-constructed stories about events, places and people (Bendix, 2002). Social-cultural family and community stories can also spark elements of nostalgia, strengthening the connectedness to the past.

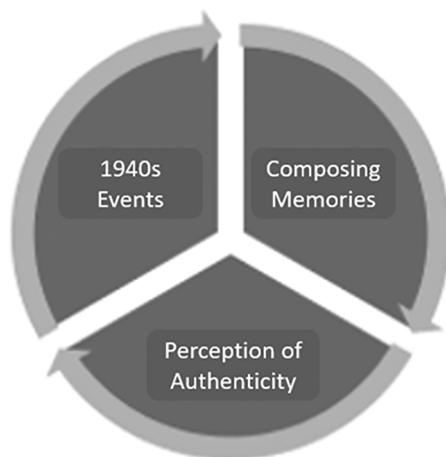


Figure 2. Circular effect: Event impact on collective memories. Source: Authors.

This generates an understanding of ancestry life and facilitates a movement through time (Jones, 2017). Individuals often look to the past as a means of self-identification (Huber et al., 2013). This is corroborated by Gilmore and Pine (2007) who advocate that the past is often where one looks to quench a thirst for authenticity. Huber et al. (2013) extend the idea that it is also the place to create an understanding of the world around us, supported by Collins (2020) who considers that one can learn from past mistakes.

Hodge (2012) detailed how the collective memory of the past is generated through a variety of platforms. Each platform offers a differing perspective of past experience, and the collective memory is a culmination of them all. Sir Andrew Gregory, chief executive of Soldiers,' Sailors' & Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA) in an interview published online by Britton (2019), commented that, "It is our duty to keep the events of the past alive in collective memory"; there is a cultural duty to share the collective memories of the past, to remember, show respect, inform, and educate. Heritage events as a collective memory platform can place themselves at the forefront of telling the story, the significance of which is keeping history alive through the collective memory, while maintaining relevance to a modern audience, without sanitizing the story to such an extent it may be rendered inauthentic.

Methodology

Data Collection Technique

When examining living history research methodology, both quantitative data collection (Brida et al., 2014; Chhabra et al., 2003; Hunt, 2004; Novello & Fernandez, 2016; Park et al., 2019) and qualitative data collection (Carnegie & McCabe, 2008; Coles & Armstrong, 2008; Howells, 2016) can be identified. The most popular qualitative data collection methodology is the case study/observation approach. Researchers using this method observe actions, activities, and atmosphere of a particular living history event; additionally, interviews can be used for data capture. However, the researchers have chosen online semistructured interviews to collect qualitative data. This form of investigation was selected to provide an opportunity for participants to recount a narrative of their

experience to provide meaning. There is a parallel link between interviewing as a technique and the storytelling element of this research, with interviews primarily concerned with the participant's story of the lived experience (Seidman, 2013). A qualitative method provides soft data (Hoyle, 2002) and usually requires a smaller sample size, offering a more detailed set of data (Veal & Burton, 2014). It is defined by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) as "Research that involves analysing and interpreting texts and interviews to discover meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon" (p. 13). It relies on words to enable an in-depth study and understanding of how individuals interpret their experiences and their meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researchers collated qualitative data to interpret the views, opinions, and thought processes of event organizers and attendees of 1940s events, using knowledge from the theory of authenticity, storytelling, and living history, outlined in the literature review.

The overall aim of this research is to ascertain if 1940s events depict a true authentic reflection of the past, through the implementation of storytelling and living history, preserving the storytelling of the era, contributing to cultural memory, while upholding relevance to a modern audience.

This research was guided by the research questions:

1. Can living history and reenactment enhance authenticity in 1940s events?
2. Does storytelling implemented in 1940s events strengthen authenticity?
3. Can authenticity in 1940s events contribute to a collective memory and cultural connections to the past?
4. Do 1940s events offer a true and authentic reflection of the past?

Research Instrument

At the time of the data collection, online Zoom interviews took place due to COVID-19 restrictions. The interview questions were derived from the literature review. Thirty open-ended questions were designed and link to the main discussions on authenticity, storytelling, and living history. The semistructured interview method offered

the flexibility for additional questions where the opportunity arose. These questions assisted the researchers in identifying if 1940s events depict a true authentic reflection of the past, through the implementation of storytelling and living history, preserving the storytelling of the era and contributing to cultural memory. Prior to conducting the research, the authors completed an on-line ethics checklist, to comply with the University's policies on the conduct of ethical research.

Research Sample

The researchers conducted an online search to identify all 1940s events throughout the country. There are over 200 1940s events taking place annually throughout the UK, ranging in size and location, including smaller community events, larger regional events, and heritage site events, attracting between 150 and 17,000 visitors (Love of the 40s, 2021). The researchers joined the Facebook group "The Love of the 40s" where an event calendar of all 1940s events across the UK is listed. This was the first point of contact for event organizers to formulate a list of events across the UK. The list was cross-checked by conducting other searches on other Facebook groups and LinkedIn.

The research sample consists of attendees and organizers of 1940s events within the UK. The researchers undertook two promotional activities to generate participants via LinkedIn and Facebook, including social media group "Love of the 40s" and "Events and Socials" Facebook pages. This promotional activity generated 10 attendee participants who were willing to partake in the research. Direct messages were sent to 13 event organizers via Facebook Messenger and emails were sent to a further 21 event organizers, inviting a total of 34 UK-based 1940s event organizers to participate. This generated 13 event organizers who agreed to take part in this research. The interviews covered a cross-section of 1940s UK events. Interviews took place between May 4 and 25, 2021; interview durations ranged between 1 hr and 2 hr 50 min. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to evidence the research findings. To preserve anonymity, attendee participants are referred to as "A" and organizers as "O" followed by their participant number.

Analysis and Interpretation

The researchers analyzed the data, drawing attention to emergent themes, meaningful descriptive patterns, and relationships within the reviewed theory and concepts of authenticity and storytelling. Using semistructured interviews allowed an element of flexibility for new questions/themes to emerge. Qualitative data can be analyzed using coding and thematic analysis. Through transcription of the interviews, the researchers became familiar with the data, enabling the identification of themes. The coding strategy included predetermined themes based on the literature review of *authenticity*, *storytelling*, and *living history*. Coding was generated from the raw data using words or phrases; the author searched for similarities and differences (themes) to provide meaning and connection to the theories identified in the literature review. Themes have also been identified through the visual use of word clouds to describe storytelling. Words mentioned more frequently are illustrated in a larger font to find common emergent themes.

Findings

This research provides a critical review of the collated data, responding to the research questions. Authenticity is fundamentally measured by individual perception, knowledge, collective memory, desire, understanding, and experience, confirming its subjective nature. The research identifies that authenticity can be enhanced through living history and reenactment; however, the level of authenticity varies and there are some areas of contradiction between the requirements for telling the story in an entertaining way and authenticity. The findings also highlight how 1940s events contribute to a collective memory and aid a connection with the past.

Enhancing Authenticity Through Living History and Reenactment

The research confirms that 1940s events are brought to life by living history through reenactment. Reenactors provide a glimpse of life in the past to those with a thirst for knowledge, as participant O20 confirms they “take it very seriously and have a great deal of pride and respect to make

sure they get it right.” Gapps (2009) stated that reenactors research their contribution, influencing authenticity and securing their place as an authority to educate on the past. This research finds that well-researched and informed reenactment groups “will spend thousands of pounds (*on their personal collections*) it is not a trivial matter” (O20); reenactors want to share their personal collections and knowledge with others to facilitate an immersive and authentic experience for visitors. Event organizers are particular about the reenactment groups they invite to bring the history alive. The groups and individuals they use (*reenactors*), confirmed by O8 “are very good at what they do, so we know they are going to be authentic.” Reenactors are constantly learning from others and are open to knowledge exchange, receiving family stories from visitors. Learning through interaction and a living history experience provides a combination of immersive multisensory participation (Gapps, 2009), learning in a more holistic way. Immersive events are “more of a fun way to learn about history . . . history comes alive” (A19). This confirms DeGroot’s (2016) findings that the “human” component of immersive living history offers a far superior experience to the more technical virtual realities in museums; participant O15 agrees “it’s just that link to history that you can’t get anywhere else.” Organizers ensure that the reenactors they welcome can speak with authority, research their subject well while providing authentic and historically accurate detail. The environment they create is as immersive as possible, contributing to an authentic event.

Authenticity is based on perception (Handler & Saxton, 1988; Park et al., 2019), which can be influenced by previous knowledge, education, and understanding. The 1940s events endeavor to provide authenticity; however, it is not possible for the events to present a completely true and authentic reflection of the past as confirmed by participant O18: “there are some elements that we do not focus on because it is a fun day out. You are trying to sell a happy family event.” Negative components are often “whitewashed” (O18), with many of the organizers agreeing that it is not acceptable to showcase the dark side of the period or possible to re-create the pressure and the fear of life under threat. “You will never get the full image; you do not see people

starving and struggling” (O7). This coincidentally parallels 1940s government propaganda to maintain high morale (Hodge, 2012), silencing stories of fear and favoring positive recounts of comradery (Noakes, 2014). “You will not see the dark side of the period. You have not got that threat that there was at the time. You can immerse yourself so much, but only to a level” (O7).

Authenticity, in this instance, must be reviewed on differing levels, agreeing with MacCannell (1973) that it is not a case of the whole event being authentic, but instead the various levels of authenticity one may experience. To tell an accurate story one should have German representation, but this does not offer a completely authentic experience; instead, it acts as a simple reminder that there are always two sides to the story, giving an indication of what it was like. However, it is clear that “even the reenactors do not have the pressure of being shot at, the realism is not real, it is a relaxed entertaining environment” (O22). Authenticity is attributed to the reenactment groups, providing the immersive aspect, with displays and promenaders (people dressed in period costumes and strolling around the event to create that immersive feeling). “They (*the reenactment groups*) are extremely passionate about the minute detail that they include in their displays and their storytelling element” (O9). There is a desire for an authentic experience to be based on fact, genuine and real. This confirms MacCannell’s (1973) discussion on staged authenticity. Reenactors create constructive and objective foundations of authenticity, illustrated in Figure 1, with staged aspects of the 1940s to engage visitors in an authentic cultural encounter (Rickly & Vidon, 2018). While García-Almeida (2019) asserted that staged authenticity is too far removed from reality to be authentic, reenactors respond to this by ensuring the realness of objects used to create their staging is as authentic as can be. This combination of Olsen’s (2002) flexible constructivism and Reisinger and Steiner’s (2006) physical realness of objects brings two views together to create an authentic encounter for the visitor; this is corroborated in the statements: “I will only try to use original things or the highest quality reproduction” (O7) and “Everything has got to be as authentic as possible, uniforms, vehicles, cooking, it’s got to be as near to reality as possible” (O14). This passion, level of detail, and research

secures both their own and the event’s place as an authority to educate on the past.

The research confirms that all three concepts of authenticity presented by N. Wang (1999) are present in 1940s events, confirming that the concepts are interlinked and can influence each other; 1940s events also display “theoplicity,” discussed by Belhassen et al. (2008) and Chhabra (2012) as the integration of objectivism, constructivism, and existentialism. Nevertheless, while organizers endeavor to provide a staged authentic experience, its success is influenced by the perception of the attendee, their prior knowledge, understanding, and expectations.

Conversely, there is a different take on authenticity when the event is associated with a museum or heritage site. Locations that already have a natural connection with the 1940s may be “expected” to provide such an experience. These events are created to support a cultural expectation, relying on the visitors’ preconceptions and expectations that the location will generate authenticity within the event (N. Wang, 1999). The evidence from the interviews states, “A venue does need to bring out its story, because the stories are the thing that give the event its uniqueness” (A21). The location can communicate cultural stories with an element of authority; this corroborates with Park et al. (2019) who postulated that the expected historical accuracy at heritage sites has a positive impact on the authentic experience. However, the evidence from the research findings shows that some event organizers rest on their laurels; they are satisfied with the pre-conceived authenticity of their historical venue and make limited effort to focus on additional authentic inclusions. For example, there is more focus on “entertainment” and a “fun day out,” with limited attention to detail and the authentic nature of those elements of the event. This is supported by the following organizer quotes:

We wouldn’t check that the dancers were doing exact 1940s steps, I think it’s the bits that we do from the museum, our objects are real and genuine from the time, if its museum based, we stick to the facts but if its entertainment, we are a little loose with the authenticity. (O13)

For me rather than authentic I think it would be entertaining that would be more important . . . it

makes it more attractive for people attending. . . . we do not need to add much to it because it's already here (*heritage railway*)". (O11)

In a bid to create an immersive experience and strengthen storytelling, many of the events will invite attendees to dress in period clothing. Those who choose to dress surround other visitors, creating an immersive 1940s experience; participant A19 agrees, "It's like immersive theatre, it wraps around you then you all get into the same mindset . . . it gives a common bond." The audience becomes a part of the story and this "contributes to the overall atmosphere" (A4), transporting visitors back in time for an interactive storytelling experience. This degree of participation makes it difficult to regulate the authentic standards, exposing those with limited knowledge to the inaccurate dress of the time and potentially diminishing that element of authenticity (Gnoth & Wang, 2015). The possibility of inaccuracies did not affect the overall feeling of authenticity. "Seeing someone in jeans didn't snap me back to reality" (A2) and for those with limited knowledge of the era, "it doesn't matter because they don't know that the shoes are wrong" (A16). This accentuates that perception will determine one's acceptance of authenticity. To the reenactor every detail must be accurate to maintain the authentic appeal; to the visitor, "close enough is good enough" (A16) to maintain that feeling of authenticity. This research demonstrates that while authenticity is a prime consideration in the planning and execution of 1940s events, it is not possible to completely create a true authentic reflection of the past.

Storytelling Is Intentionally Implemented in 1940s Events

Communities rely on stories about the past to facilitate a feeling of unity (Huber et al., 2013). They function as a reminder of the courage of those who have gone before (Irving et al., 2020). The interview findings show from participant A3 stating, "it's (*storytelling*) the method that's as old as time, about sharing stories and learning from your elders." This is substantiated from the organizers' point of view:

One of the displays that we have, we dress as bombed out victims, we have ripped clothes, bruises, our only salvaged possessions, and people

love that because that is what did happen, that is true living history. People relate to us, how thought-provoking it is, it brings home what ordinary people went through. (O20)

This research compliments Huber et al. (2013), who advocated that individuals often look to the past as a means of self-identification and stories enable one to learn from the past (Collins, 2020). Figure 3 illustrates attendee responses in a word cloud, demonstrating that attendees are looking to be educated through storytelling, strengthening their connection with the cultural past. Attendees also place importance on "accuracy," linking to Chronis and Hampton's (2008) authenticity in the form of "historical accuracy," "reality," which relates to authenticity in living history as a holistic, multisensory experience that can be expressed as "what it felt like to live back then" (Handler & Saxton, 1988, p. 245), and "sharing" "living, telling, retelling and reliving stories of experience" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 213), all of which are imperative if the story is to be of educational benefit.

Figure 4 identifies that organizers insist they have got to be engaged with their audience. The execution of storytelling in 1940s events is dependent on an interactive component and engagement (Jones, 2017), relying on reenactors to provide the storytelling element, understanding the importance of accuracy, and connecting with attendees through storytelling. Organizers also emphasize that storytelling is a form of "entertainment," in agreement with Gapps (2009) whereby entertainment can raise interest and awareness of historic events, and



Figure 3. Word cloud on storytelling attendees.



Figure 4. Word cloud on storytelling organizers.

aid education for the modern audience. Organizers aspire to accurately tell the story; making it factual, they are staging the historical past and introducing “Historical Verisimilitude” (Taylor & Johnson, 1993, as cited in Bruner, 1994), satisfying those in search of a symbolic cultural experience of the past.

The interviews with attendee participants reinforce that storytelling is recognized and desired, “it puts context around it (*the subject*) so that you can relate to a situation more” (A2). Storytelling is “an oral history being passed down from people who were there . . . who have that connection” (A19), as well as “passion and reflection . . . and it’s felt inside and that enthusiasm for the story entices others” (A10). These attendees’ quotes confirm that storytelling is intentionally implemented and received during 1940s events and is a powerful connection of the present and the past. It is imperative that it is factually accurate and therefore authentic, to be of educational benefit (Coles & Armstrong, 2008), aiding self-identification and an understanding of the past, which in turn can develop an understanding of future (Huber et al., 2013).

1940s Events, Collective Memory, and Connecting With the Past

Social knowledge of a time is disseminated from generation to generation through a variety of mediums, such as family stories. Participant A3 revealed,

“that is how we understand how we live now, by understanding how they lived in the past.” Jones (2017) asserted that communities can strengthen connectedness to the past through storytelling, “it makes people go home and ask about their own family, . . . if we lose our roots, we lose our whole culture” (A21). This connectedness generates an understanding of ancestry life and facilitates a movement through time. These quotes support and evidence the interpersonal emotional connection presented by N. Wang (1999) and the generational links to the past identified by Noakes and Pattinson (2014). The social knowledge of the time has been passed from generation to generation through family stories, “that relationship that is one or two generations away . . . it is still relevant and exciting” (O22). The research finds that 1940s events can strengthen the cultural connection, “WW2 is the easiest comparison because there are still a few people around who remember it first-hand” (O12).

The results show that participants agree with Belhassen and Caton (2006), who proposed that communities draw upon their collective memories and come together during events to relive a time gone by. This is supported in the participant quotes below; they create generational links to the past to form a personal remembrance:

They absolutely love relating their family experiences to what they are seeing . . . even for the people who have not lived through that era, they evoke a sense of the times that their parents or grandparents had. (O20)

This man remembered it was late 1944 and all the Americans would come down from the airbase not far away and they would be throwing their chocolate over the side of the truck to all the kids. Him relaying that sparked someone on the next table to tell them about what they remembered, and I think the whole event does bring people together . . . that collective memory, even for the people that were not there. (O15)

Snippets of information disseminated through generations compose memories, allowing one to create an authentic perception of what it was like (Handler & Saxton, 1988). This drives a motivation to attend the event as related by participants A5 and A10: “it’s an education . . . a snapshot of what was happening back then” (A5), “to dress in the 40s

style with the 40s music . . . afternoon tea, clothes, hair, it's almost like you are just taken back" (A10). One is exposed to a culmination of storytelling, living history, historical knowledge, commemoration, connecting to the past, respect, remembrance, and a victorious celebration, shaping the composing of memories and an understanding of the past or a perception of what is authentic, creating the circular effect previously presented in Figure 2.

Nevertheless, the findings show that while the events featured in this research endeavor to find local connections to develop a more personal encounter for visitors and an interpersonal emotional connection, it is not always apparent to the attendee, as stated by participant A10, "the event location is where the Americans were stationed during the war," as stated by participant "you could get American money, music, and food; this went on until the 60s." However, the attendee confirmed that this authentic cultural connection to the 1940s "is not educated through the event" (A10) to their knowledge.

Commemoration allows communities to connect with their cultural heritage (Frost & Laing, 2013) through remembrance, grief, or celebration of the people (Sumartojo, 2016). 1940s events introduce memorials, whereby the emotions, respect, gratitude, and grief are combined with fun and a celebration of a victorious time. For the event organizers, remembering the war effort, veterans, civilian bravery, and comradeship is extremely important in promoting "awareness of the second world war to younger generations" (O18), asserting that the events can build on the cultural collective memory (Noakes & Pattinson, 2014) through commemoration and remembrance. Event organizers feel the importance of keeping that history alive, "especially now that many of the generation that lived through the war, are no longer with us" (O18).

Sir Andrew Gregory (SSAFA) in an interview by Britton (2019), asserted that there is a duty to share the collective memories of the past, to remember, show respect, inform, and educate. This is identified through the interviews with the organizers, who confirm that they "take this responsibility to make sure they are as accurate as possible very seriously" (O20); the story must be "rounded and balanced" (A3), "accurate and respectful" (O9). There is debate as to whether the Axis Powers

(*a coalition between Germany, Japan, and Italy*) should be present during 1940s events in the UK, as it may cause offense or raise traumatic memories. The presence of Axis Powers may shock attendees and challenges Noakes and Pattinson's (2014) theory of excluding the unsavory elements of a cultural memory. Only four organizers of those interviewed actively embody the war years, portraying both sides of the story within their event. They are careful to forewarn visitors of the German representation to allow those who may find the encounter unpleasant, the opportunity to opt out. The interviews with the organizers confirmed that to be authentic, both sides of the story should be represented:

A lot of these events will only show Britain at war, to me, you are deleting half of the story, there wouldn't have been a war without Germany, so therefore you have got to include them. (O18)

You cannot hide what happened, people need to know there was another side to the war, especially the children, we openly have Germans participating, they are just at one station. We want people to remember that the Germans were there, if you hide it, you are not portraying an accurate story. (O8)

These quotes assert that organizers feel the cultural duty to tell the story as accurately as possible, with strong educational benefits, "we want to educate the public on the difference between the Nazis and the Germans" (A5). Looking at the past in a hope to preserve or rejuvenate positive elements (Chhabra et al., 2003) may present a romantic, glorified reflection of the past (Hodge, 2012). However, the interviews identified that participants of the interviews believe it is acceptable to glorify a victorious and defining cultural moment, with a nuance of respect, remembrance, and pride. However, at no point does anyone ever imply that there is a glorification of war:

It glorifies but it's not a fault of them (*the events*), if you are telling the truth it doesn't glorify, it enlightens. (A21)

I don't think they set out to do that, but sometimes just by the re-enactment, they do because it is only the positives, they are not glorifying war as such, but they are glorifying the period. (A16)

This research supports the findings of Noakes and Pattinson (2014) and has identified that 1940s events can aid a cultural and personal connection to the past, as well as contributing to a cultural collective memory, through a culmination of family and community stories remembered and shared during the event. There is evidence of N. Wang's (1999) interpersonal emotional connection (existential authenticity), in the desire of attendees to connect with the past. Organizers do feel they have a cultural duty to present an accurate story to the best of their abilities, and are mindful of the potential impact on attendees; the events are managed with respect and balanced with desirable aspects of the decade that communities wish to preserve (Chhabra et al., 2003).

Recommendations and Future Proofing 1940s Events

Attendees and organizers were questioned on their recommendations to the events industry to improve the overall experience of 1940s events. This knowledge will allow the future development of 1940s events to secure their popularity and generate a demand that the events industry may take full advantage of. The interviews identified that it would be recommended for the event organizers to create a planning "committee with various experiences" (O9) and specialties that will ensure the event offers something for everyone. It is imperative that the committee includes those who have a "passion for the era" (O18) and "historical knowledge" (O15), who will research and inform. The planning committee will aid the blending of practical limitations by providing the most accurate and authentic experience possible.

Event organizers can strive to strengthen the reputation of 1940s events as immersive, educational, cultural experiences to secure the longevity of these events. To achieve this, it is recommended that the organizer obtains an understanding on the theory of authenticity, to gain direction on the staging of an authentic event. This research provides the foundations of understanding authenticity within 1940s events, the impact of which will enable event organizers to question and readjust authentic inclusions in their own event production. For example, participant O7 stated, "Invite re-enactment groups to

create a good quality core basis to help develop the event to a high standard from the start." Organizers cannot rely solely on authenticity coming from a historical location, buildings, or museums that may have authentic objects and original stories. Organizers still have a responsibility to check that all elements of the event, including entertainment, reenactment, and food, are as authentic as possible to create a holistic authentic experience.

It is recommended that event organizers research the subject and remain informed on the facts and realities of the time to facilitate the impactful execution of an authentic event. It is imperative that the industry communicates with the experts on the subject—for example, as suggested by participant O6, "speak to veterans and get it spot on." Event organizers who research the 1940s era and draw upon the knowledge of veterans and their families to ensure they can provide an authentic experience that can be delivered with authority. As stated by participant O7, individuals have a connection and they "want to pass on information or even items to display. People give items to the re-enactors, very personal connections, to tell the story." The importance of the collection of authentic stories and artefacts creates the foundations of the event and strengthens the local cultural connection to the past. Reenactment groups are dedicated to their subject; they provide the bulk of the authentic and immersive nature of the event through living history. It is important for event organizers to appreciate their value and contributions, for without them, there is little education, storytelling, or authenticity. As stated by participant A16, "Events need to be a little more open in their approach to reenactors. You need to have the reenactors there to bolster your event, without the re-enactors you haven't got an event."

Most reenactment groups volunteer their time, bring their personal possessions to display and share their knowledge with others. Good practice is to create a backstage set up with facilities and refreshments specifically for the reenactment groups to eliminate any blurring of the immersive concept and reduce unnecessary personal expenditure. The industry will benefit from willing reenactors providing authenticity and knowledge exchange as stated by participant O23, "Treat your re-enactors royally, they will perform and do their

best. Provide separate toilets for the re-enactors and refreshments.” Implementing these recommendations as a form of best practice will strengthen the reputation of heritage events, and encourage the more authentically renowned groups to participate in the living history element of the event.

To cover all aspects of the 1940s, both sides of the war, Britain at war, life after the war, home-front, civilian, and military, may appear insincere and run the risk of diluting authenticity and damaging the event experience. It is a requirement that the events industry manage a delicate balance of targeted authentic aspects of the era, with enough variety to appeal to a modern audience.

Attendees are looking to be informed through storytelling, strengthening their connection with the cultural past. Events are good at telling the story on a wider scale, but it is recommended that event organizers consider more local stories, as stated by participant A1: “engage with the population in the area, see what happened there, what types of activities and replicate that so its local.” Focus on developing a more personal encounter and an interpersonal emotional connection. Draw upon the recommendations for researching the subject and ensuring that there is a good planning committee to establish local stories and connections with the era; this will bring a realness to the event and allow local communities to learn from the past and develop a cultural connection.

An emphasis on inclusivity for all generations in the storytelling of the 1940s is essential. As suggested by participant O15, “Things for children, men, women, older and younger people, all demographics, it’s getting that balance of everything for everyone.” Disseminating the authentic stories to the younger generation will keep the history alive and this can be supported by the older generations who can aid in the storytelling, sharing their knowledge. Those who have had an enjoyable and entertaining experience are more likely to remember, recommend, and benefit from their attendance.

During this research, two organizers confirmed that taking part had given them reason to really think about the event they were running:

What you have asked me . . . has got my mind thinking, I can ask that question, the balance of authenticity and enjoyment. (O22)

You don’t often get the chance to think about what we do, you move from one event to the next, it’s actually really refreshing to talk about it because you forget how good we are at things. (O11)

The research questions prompted the event organizers to reflect on their event content and how attendees receive it. By conducting the interviews, the event organizers were able to reflect on the importance of authenticity, showing this research is already impacting and bridging the gap between academia and industry.

Conclusion

This research concludes that authenticity is fundamentally measured by individual perception and is a subjective matter. Perception may be measured by an extensive list of elements including place, prior knowledge, collective memory, desire, understanding, experience, and atmosphere. This research supports the discussions on authenticity and the bond with storytelling, keeping history alive through the generations. This links to personal and cultural identity, purpose, and collective cultural memory. This research has confirmed that living history and reenactment does enhance the level of authenticity in 1940s events.

The research findings identify that storytelling is intentionally implemented and received during 1940s events. The organizers feel a sense of cultural duty to tell an accurate story to the best of their abilities, while always considering how emotive some aspects may be for visitors and managing this with respect. This reinforces the importance of storytelling in 1940s events to strengthen authenticity. Organizers endeavor to provide authenticity, but they never make claim to provide a full true and authentic experience. Instead, they impart an idea of what life was like then. Reenactment groups provide objective and constructive elements of authenticity that in turn generate emotions through sensory stimuli, often associated with existential authenticity, thus evidencing “theoplicity.” Many of the contributions by the reenactment groups are based on fact, to satisfy both their desire for accuracy and the visitors desire for realism.

To conclude, while it is not conceivable to completely create a true authentic reflection of the past,


event organizers endeavor to provide an authentic experience as far as possible. Many attendees are not consciously looking for an authentic experience, but instead to gain an understanding of what life was like. The organizers strive for the event to be factually accurate and of educational benefit, and when there is engagement between the reenactors and visitors, 1940s events can educate and inform. Reenactors research their subject well, providing historically accurate detail to speak with authority, generating an authentic educational level of engagement. This research confirms that attendees have a desire to connect with the past and 1940s events can aid this cultural and personal connection through an interpersonal experience, contributing to a cultural collective memory.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Future research would access heritage sites to gain a better understanding of authenticity from a location historically associated with the era and any preconceptions associated with this. Observing aspects of authenticity, levels of engagement, modern intrusions, and real-time on-site reactions. This will provide an understanding of considerations to authenticity to determine if it is a larger budget, wider public profile and historical connection, or the reenactment, storytelling, and attention to detail that truly creates an authentic 1940s event.

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