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Chapter 3

VIKING HIKING AND OTHER TIME TRAVEL

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Abstract

A new form of immersive experience has emerged in the intersection between adventure tourism, slow tourism, living history, and live action role-playing. Sprung from the “Viking community” and live action role-playing, with connections to professional archaeology, heritage, and tourism, it is an immersive, slow adventure. Its nature setting, slow experiential ethos, and deep immersion makes it distinct. Through a set of case studies from Norway and Scotland, this chapter investigates how past and present identities are negotiated, and authenticity arises, as the past comes alive in the present imbued with values, meanings, and hopes for a desired future. Here termed *time travel* and analysed in the theoretical contexts of “slow adventure” tourism and Critical Heritage Studies, this type of immersion has proven to be a deeply felt experience for participants.

Introduction

This chapter investigates how past and present identities are negotiated, and authenticity arises, as the past comes alive in Viking-themed immersive experiences which combine slow-nature- and adventure tourism with heritage and elements of drama. It will be shown how such ‘time travel’ contributes to actively imbuing the present with values, meanings, and hopes for a desired future.

This type of immersion relates to nature tourism and slow tourism¹ by prioritising the sensation of being in the landscape and genuinely experiencing an area, and enjoying simplicity without using many resources.² In addition, it brings in *pastness* to root the experience in the cultural heritage of the area, thereby adding a further layer of authenticity

¹ Campbell, 2021.

² In contrast to other types of landscape interaction such as metal detection or geocaching which focus on finds and ticking off locations.

and meaning. In this respect, it resembles re-enactment events which present cultural heritage in an interaction between sites, local communities, tourists, and heritage organisations.³

However, it differs by being less of a spectacle, not involving an audience, and in its slow ethos.

The term *time travel* captures participants' temporary sensation of having entered a time and place in the past.⁴ Viking-themed nature/slow tourism exists within a wider taxonomy of time travel, distributed on a spectrum according to how 'realistic' or 'fantastic' it aims to be⁵ or to which extent it prioritises the object (material culture of the past) or the subject (empathy or sense of sharing an emotional experience with people who lived in the past).⁶

Sitting in the realistic/subject quartile, it includes elements of performance and creative play.⁷

Traditional boundaries between actors and audience blur because participants are both, playing with and weaving in and out of roles and identities.⁸ It is costumed, though participants may have various levels of costuming or may not all be in costume. My focus here will be on experiences that do not rely on built environments to create the illusion of pastness. Instead, locations are purposefully chosen to provide an environment where a feeling of authenticity can be achieved.⁹

A basic premise of this chapter is that heritage is co-produced. Rodney Harrison shows how this realisation can and should lead to a transformation from considering the public a passive audience to engaging with active "emancipated spectators" where "we are all simultaneously producers and consumers of heritage".¹⁰ Immersive, drama-based approaches take Harrison's

³ Carnegie and McCabe, 2008.

⁴ After Gustafsson 2002; Petersson and Holtorf 2017.

⁵ See Nyzell, this volume.

⁶ Bennedahl, Ellis-Nilsson, Ljosland, Nyzell and Winge, forthcoming.

⁷ See also Nyzell, this volume.

⁸ In contrast to for example living history displays which maintain a distinction between performers and audience, where the audience remains in the present, looking in from their spectator position.

⁹ More on authenticity below.

¹⁰ Harrison 2012.

insight as an impetus to go further and assign the visitor an active role. At their best, these immersive engagements with the past in the present offer ways to co-curate and co-create pasts, grapple with individual and collective identities in the present, and seek routes towards possible futures. However, they also have limitations and ethical and practical challenges. Key points under discussion here are inclusion, authenticity, and the role of the participant.

Viking time travel cases in Orkney and Norway

The following section presents three case studies which have informed my thinking, and illustrate points and discussions raised in this chapter. Two are of my own creation and part of my creative practice; therefore, reflecting on them can be termed *practice-led research*, in which creative practice results in new research insights.¹¹ All three invoke the “Viking” past, set in the “homelands” where the figure of the “Viking” is performed in keeping with Judith Jesch’s “current” usage of the word.¹² The role of “Viking” is thus not primarily a pirate, raider, warrior, destroyer, or external enemy, but instead exists on a more peaceful spectrum of occupations, ages, genders and social roles. Domestic activities relating to food preparation, clothing and textiles, crafts, sports, foraging, survival, and storytelling are central. For a period, ranging from hours to days, participants enter and play an active role in a world where mindsets and ways of being and perceiving are fundamentally different to those of the modern Western world.¹³ All three case studies employ a positive outlook on the “Viking” past, but latent problems and ethical issues will be discussed afterwards.

Case 1: Orkney Time Travel

¹¹ Smith and Dean 2009, 2.

¹² Jesch 2015, 4-5.

¹³ Price 2020, 31.

The Orkney archipelago was once part of Norway but has since 1468 belonged to Scotland.¹⁴ The “Viking” identity is strong among its population.¹⁵ In tourism, on the other hand, Norse archaeological sites are overshadowed by Neolithic archaeology and have been pointed to as a latent potential.¹⁶

Orkney Time Travel is a group established and run by accredited tourist guides, including me, who share a strong interest in archaeology, heritage, mythology, and history. The group seeks to reflect archaeological consensus as far as practically possible in costuming, props, and food. Orkney’s landscape is the set for its Viking experiences. Since Orkney is mostly agricultural, events take place on beaches around the main island and on the sparsely inhabited island of Hoy.

Orkney Time Travel’s two main offerings are “Viking Feast on the Beach,” lasting two hours, and the full day “Viking Voyage to Hoy”. The former is less intensive and does not require participants to walk, wear costumes, or prepare. Participants turn up at the designated beach, where they are met by costumed guides who introduce them to Orkney’s Norse history. Through the evening, participants cook over open fire and share a meal. They hear stories from Norse mythology and *Orkneyinga Saga*, try a craft, play a game, and learn a Faeroese style dance set to a Norse heroic song attested in local tradition. Because it is accessible, this event is popular among all ages. It is sold as individual tickets or as a group package, including for cruise ships. Its “Viking” theme does not seem to put off people from non-European backgrounds. Among the more distant places participants have hailed from are

¹⁴ Jesch, 2015, p. 3.

¹⁵ Ljosland, 2014.

¹⁶ Thuesen, 2021, see also forthcoming PhD thesis *The Sustainability of Cultural Tourism and its Effect on Communities: The Case of Orkney*.

Uzbekistan and China. Though originally conceived for tourists, it is also popular with the resident population.

<INSERT ILLUSTRATION 3.1 HERE>

CAPTION: *“Viking Voyage to Hoy” and “Viking Feast on the Beach” with Orkney Time Travel. Photos by Mark Woodsford-Dean and Joanne Bourne.*

“Viking Voyage to Hoy” is a full-day excursion, with a ferry journey, a three-hour hike through roadless unpopulated wilderness, and a Viking camp with open fire on the beach. This is for the more adventurous and is not recommended for young children, nor offered to cruise groups. The route is chosen to give the impression of leaving modernity behind, restricting the view of modern buildings and vehicles. Adhering to the ethos of slow tourism, the guides engender a feeling of immersion by drawing attention to landscape, wildlife, and plants along the way, and stopping to tell stories relating directly to what participants see around them. If they see eagles, they speak of the eagle at the top of the world tree, Yggdrasill. They tell a local legend of how the Hoy hills were made when a troll dropped its baskets, and the Norse story *Hjaðningavíg*, the Everlasting Battle, set on this island. On reaching the far side, the group cooks and eats around the fire while hearing how a nearby whirlpool is caused by two giantesses grinding out salt on a rotary quern on the seabed – based on *Gróttasöngur*. The activities on the beach are otherwise the same as described above, but with additional rune writing and nettle string making. In neither of Orkney Time Travel’s offerings are the participants passive spectators; it is not a performance through a ‘window’ of pastness which spectators ‘look into’. The whole group – guides and participants – time travel *together*.

In designing these experiences, my fellow guides and I made choices regarding the balance between archaeological precedence versus comfort, modern food hygiene and safety standards, and the group's time constraints and fitness level. Initially, we cooked raw ingredients, but this took too long for cruise excursions and for hungry hikers after the Hoy walk. Therefore, we decided to bring parboiled vegetables and precooked meat, to finish off over the fire, while participants pat out and fry bread and make butter from cream – causing some participants delight and amazement at being able to make butter themselves.¹⁷ Food hygiene dictates the use of a cooking thermometer. Eating from wooden bowls, with wooden or horn spoons, instils a feeling of pastness. Since many visitors were not keen to share a drinking horn, we started providing small individual horns in addition to a large communal horn used ceremonially.

Guides wear generic costumes for the period rather than replications of specific archaeological finds. Since the tour is aimed at tourists who have not come to Orkney specifically for this excursion and are travelling with a restricted wardrobe, participants in “Viking Feast on the Beach” are offered a simple apron dress or tunic to don over their own clothes, while “Viking Voyage to Hoy” participants do not wear costumes. This choice allocates the responsibility for keeping warm and dry to the participants.

The biggest adjustment we made was how far participants were expected to walk. Initially, “Viking Feast on the Beach” involved a 45-minute walk. However, this proved unmanageable for some cruise tourists, and put off some families and people with mobility restrictions. Therefore, we modified the cruise version to include a much shorter coastal walk,

¹⁷ Pea bread, recipe based on archaeological find from Birka, using locally produced stone-ground bere barley. Recipe by Steikari association for historical cookery/Sunniva Saksvik.

and no walk at all for the open, family-friendly version, leaving “Viking Voyage to Hoy” unchanged for those who enjoy a longer walk.

A question for us was how much the walk contributes to the feeling of pastness, or a subjective, affective authenticity? What, specifically, about walking is Viking? Reviews on TripAdvisor indicated that the nature setting was an important part of the time travel sensation.¹⁸ Viking Feast on the Beach participants highlighted the “wonderful landscape”, while Viking Voyage to Hoy participants pointed to the “breath-taking” and “stunning” setting, the “seals and birds” and how the experience of landscape and nature is integrated with storytelling, history and activities. Landscape, seascape, flora and fauna can be experienced without walking, but there is something extra about the sensation of using your body to move slowly and thereby feel part of the natural world around you. It is a “slow adventure” different to thrill-seeking adventure such as sailing on a replica Viking ship.¹⁹ I will discuss connections with slow tourism and “slow adventure” further below.

Case 2: Go Viking Hiking with Hands-on History

“Go Viking Hiking” is a tougher experience for able-bodied and committed participants. The team behind it, Hands-on History from Trondheim in Norway, call themselves the “guerrilla of cultural heritage” and see their organisation as “a knowledge, experience and action

¹⁸ For example, Josephine J review of Viking Feast on the Beach, March 2018: “Guides will transport you back to Viking times! They help you to experience the lifestyle from clothing and food to music and dance! All while discovering the wonderful landscape that is Orkney.” Kirsty W review of Viking Voyage to Hoy, May 2019: “The hike went through a really breathtaking setting and ended at the stunning Rackwick Bay, where we got to enjoy a Viking feast (thanks Mark) and some very entertaining Viking activities (including weaving, dancing, writing, drinking beer from a giant horn and axe throwing) on the beach. Ragnhild is very knowledgeable and informative and wove fascinating Viking stories and history through the day.” Sparkykpl review of Viking Voyage to Hoy, June 2019: “After a short ferry trip to Hoy, we walked through the valley to the beach, [...] [where we] watched seals and birds play in the surf. Ragnhild and Mark entertained us with Viking stories and games to make the day interactive and educational.” https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g190780-d13820904-Reviews-Brodgar-Kirkwall_Mainland_Orkney_Islands_Scotland.html#REVIEWS

¹⁹ Varley, 2013.

resource bank” involved in “teaching, preserving and revitalizing cultural heritage”.²⁰ Participants are taken to one of Norway’s national parks for a mountain trek over five summer days, three of which are spent entirely outdoors in the wilderness. Adventure and authenticity are the central ingredients, and when these two combine, participants are taken deliberately and abruptly out of modern comfort zones to the edge of what they thought they could do. They are not allowed to wear their own clothes but are dressed in period attire provided by the organisers. Days are spent in complete wilderness; nights are spent outdoors in a makeshift shelter built from what they carry and find. Instead of sleeping bags, there are reindeer skins. Apart from dried meat and peas, food must be fished or foraged, then cooked over open fire, which is lit without matches and takes as long as it takes no matter how hungry people are. This ambitious concept, which has been described as “Viking survivalist,” takes participants into an uncompromising past.²¹ For the duration of “Go Viking Hiking”, participants are in the Viking Age 24 hours a day, in everything they do.²²

Hands-on History’s strategy is significantly riskier than Orkney Time Travel’s. The level of commitment demanded from participants is high. Advertised internationally, participants travel specifically to take part. Participants spend extended time with each other in conditions far removed from their daily lives, which can be challenging both physically and mentally. Participants and organisers alike risk someone getting ill, injured, suffering hypothermia, or simply losing heart along the way, in addition to the risks of bad weather and other natural dangers that mountains pose. Hands-on History have prepared mitigations for each of these scenarios. Some of the feeling of pastness and authenticity stems from the deliberate

²⁰ Hands on History 2020. See also Nyzell, this volume.

²¹ Återskapat podcast 57: Viking survivalist.

²² There are still many aspects of Viking Age life not included here, such as enslavement, battle, arranged marriage, and hostage taking, to name a few. I do not mean that “Go Viking Hiking” encompasses all of Viking Age life, but rather that what it does encompass has to be taken on wholesale by the participant.

discomfort of sleeping outdoors, carrying equipment without modern rucksacks, wearing wool, and getting hungry and wet. Once the hike has begun, exit opportunities are few, so they spend the entire first day getting to know each other and gauging the mood, preparedness, and commitment level. Hands-on History must accept the risk that someone might have a horrible time or in a worst-case scenario gets hurt and/or begins litigation against the organisers. Therefore, they rely on extensive communication with participants before the outset, beginning with a video-conferenced interview and continuing once participants and organisers meet face-to-face, so that everyone is clear on what to expect.²³

Because of the high stakes and commitment level, and sheer distance from everyday life, Hands-on History reports that participants often come out of the experience with a feeling of euphoria.²⁴ One team member reflected that it is as if participants unlock a new level of themselves; the realisation that “I made it!” leads them to see themselves in a new way.²⁵

Case 3: Martyrdom of St Magnus

The “Martyrdom of St Magnus” is an experience I created for a series of visiting summer school groups over three years, and finally extended into a large-scale community event in April 2017 to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of Orkney’s patron saint.²⁶ On this occasion, the Martyrdom took over the island for the day, with 100 participants, divided between two factions.

²³ Återskapat podcast 57: Viking survivalist.

²⁴ Heidi Carine Brimi, pers. comm.

²⁵ Återskapat podcast 57: Viking survivalist.

²⁶ Orkney Islands Council, *Magnus 900*. <https://youtu.be/NSKnYU89Tbs>

“The Martyrdom of St Magnus” has a nature setting where participants first travel by boat to the tiny island and then play the Martyrdom outdoors, the only building used being a roofless medieval church of significance to the history of Magnus.

Set in 1117, it misses a strict definition of “Viking Age” by about 50 years, but concerns a pivotal moment of *Orkneyinga Saga* in which political rivalry between earls leads to murder. It is played without an audience in the location where the historical event happened, on the small island of Egilsay, using techniques from live action role playing (LARP). In contrast to the above cases, in which participants enter the past as a version of themselves, participants here assume the personae of named saga characters, with their own histories, motivations, and loyalties.²⁷ The participants received their character background in advance, and were asked to come in costume, resulting in a wide array of costuming efforts.

The narrative presented in *Orkneyinga Saga* was made polyphonic by letting participants experience it from the personal point of view of each character; be it the opposing earls, their advisers and supporters, adversaries, family members, servants, or the hapless cook who was ordered to deal Magnus the fatal blow. Characters of all ages and stations, played by participants of all ages, including children. The murder was scripted and the participants playing the two rival earls briefed on what to say and do during this climax. Otherwise, participants were free to improvise dialogue and actions they felt would fit with their character. This freedom resulted in some interesting deviations from *Orkneyinga Saga*, e.g., when a group of younger participants were sent to spy on the opposing side, but revealed themselves and switched allegiance, providing the Magnus faction with valuable intelligence.

²⁷ Participants in the summer school Martyrdoms were visitors to the islands, while the majority of participants in the larger version for the 900th anniversary were Orkney residents, though not Egilsay residents.

Unlike in the other two cases described above, the organiser did not take a leading role on the day and stayed in the background during the event.

<INSERT ILLUSTRATION 3.2>

CAPTION: *The fatal moment for Magnus. “Martyrdom of St Magnus”. Photo by Fionn McArthur, Orkney.com.*

<INSERT ILLUSTRATION 3.3 HERE>

CAPTION: *A young participant in the role of spy spontaneously switches allegiance and brings the Magnus faction intelligence from the opposing side. “Martyrdom of St Magnus”. Photo by Fionn McArthur, Orkney.com.*

Organising this event took months of preparation, writing character backgrounds based on *Orkneyinga Saga* and sorting out logistics. It required medium commitment from participants, who were required to pay for ferry transport and prepare a costume. Their main commitment lay in familiarising themselves with their character, and finding the courage to play it – or, preferably, immerse themselves and *become* it.

Ethical challenges presented by the case studies

Possibly, the case studies present too rosy an image of the Viking past. Kevin Hannam and Chris Halewood find that at European Viking-themed festivals, “the past is constructed and idealised by participants as an authentic way of life and that this is used as an expression of identity.”²⁸ The domestic image of the Viking, as foregrounded in this chapter, is more inclusive of individuals and stories beyond those of the warrior/raider. Herein lies potential for exploring, developing, and sharing broader collective identities. The Viking Age is

²⁸ Hannam and Halewood, 2006.

nonetheless a contentious era of European history, simultaneously glorified and othered as barbarous. Viking Age social mores centred on kinship, loyalty, and honour; values which have not always given rise to positive ideologies or practice in recent times. For example, Viking Age values and symbols have been co-opted by Nazi and Neo-Nazi ideologists who are attracted to its martial culture, which “combined a violent aesthetic with sworn loyalty and a dazzling material culture of killing”.²⁹ By emphasising the positive, the case studies and indeed this chapter may be naively blind to such negative aspects of the Viking past. On the other hand, when choosing which aspects of the past to recreate and learn from, it is more constructive to take forward the positive.

Hands-on History have found a practical solution to the problem of Go Viking Hiking’s appeal to people with far-right sympathies. One cannot simply sign up; one must apply and be vetted through a video-conferenced interview designed to check for any political or religious personal agendas.³⁰ The vetting procedure has not fully protected them, however, from attracting attention from the far right. In 2021, a team member resigned after seeing photos of herself misused online as part of a white-supremacist aesthetic.³¹ Banning right-wing sympathisers from “Go Viking Hiking” also misses an opportunity to enter dialogue and challenge such attitudes. “The Martyrdom of St Magnus” includes violence (the killing of Magnus) in a context of loyalty (two factions) and religion (he became a saint). Such elements are not unproblematic, but rather than glorify violence, *Orkneyinga Saga* and the time travel experience emphasise that Magnus made a choice to preserve peace, in opposition to the prevailing heroic ethos of his time.

²⁹ Price 2020, 92. See also Andrea Freund, this volume.

³⁰ Heidi Carine Brimi, co-founder of Hands-on History, pers. comm. Återskapat podcast 57: Viking survivalist.

³¹ Kringstad 2021.

There are further ethical challenges around accessibility and inclusion. The case studies present different physical difficulty levels, with “Viking Feast on the Beach” and “Martyrdom of St Magnus” being the most accessible to participants with disabilities. “Viking Voyage to Hoy” and “Go Viking Hiking” require physical fitness, which is communicated in advertising. Hands-on History allow such things as modern glasses, medicines, and sanitary products on their hikes.³² None of the cases have taken measures to adapt for example for sight or hearing impaired, or neurodiverse, who must rely on bringing someone to support them. To be fair, the physical challenge of “Viking Voyage to Hoy” and “Go Viking Hiking” is so central to the experience that a fully disability-friendly version would be a completely different thing, and “Viking Feast on the Beach” was in fact developed in response to demand from less physically able and families with children.

Established stereotypes may dictate that a “Viking” has a certain appearance and gender – that warriors should be men with a beard – and thereby exclude people whose bodies do not fit the stereotype, i.e. non-white, female or other genders, disabled, etc.³³ Time travel can deal with this dilemma by choosing to separate body and character, so that a non-white woman in a suitable costume can take on the role of a Viking sailor or warrior, a male participant can take the role of a matriarch, and so on. In “The Martyrdom of St Magnus” a woman played the role of the male cook who dealt Magnus the fatal blow. Alternatively, the stereotype itself can be challenged. Recent DNA studies and archaeological research have shown extensive cultural contact and ethnic mixing in Viking Age Scandinavia, which calls for revision of the Viking stereotype.³⁴ Due to its playfulness, time-travel offers potential for questioning and challenging stereotypes whilst seeking personal and shared identities.

³² Återskapat podcast 57: Viking survivalist.

³³ See Shannon Lewis Simpson, this volume.

³⁴ A genetic study by Margaryan, Lawson, Sikora, et al. 2020 finds genetic influx into Viking Age Scandinavia from the south and east, with substantial ancestry from elsewhere in Europe entering Scandinavia. Price 2020

Discussion and analysis

Each case operates within a scope; they cannot do everything. Orkney Time Travel's "Viking Feast on the Beach" and "Viking Voyage to Hoy" represent simple time travel tourism. The access threshold is low: it is inexpensive, does not require much advance planning, no special purchases are needed, and the decision to join can be made mere hours before the scheduled start. In some respects, "Viking Feast on the Beach" resembles what they could have experienced at a Viking market or living history museum, though an important difference is that time travel breaks down the boundary between performer and visitor by inviting visitors into the fiction to become active *participants*.

The cases also differ in how participants step into a past identity. "Viking Feast on the Beach", "Viking Voyage to Hoy", and "Go Viking Hiking" let participants be a time-travelling version of themselves. "The Martyrdom of St Magnus", however, opts to let participants step into the life of a different person from the past. Pertaining to all cases is the question: Why Viking? Is "Viking" used as clickbait to entice paying customers, or do activities involve a deeper, more genuine engagement with the past? Many of the positive outcomes could also be achieved through *friluftsliv* (i.e., hiking in nature without the time-travel element), or by connecting with another pre-modern period, such as the Bronze Age. However, in all the above cases, "Viking" represents a central local identity and carries a deeper meaning in the place, so choosing "Viking" invites participants into a locally significant past.

shows archaeological evidence for extensive contact with continental Europe, the British Isles and Ireland, the Baltic and Russia, and the Mediterranean. Bergsveinn Birgisson challenges the Viking stereotype in his book *Den svarte vikingen (The Black Viking, 2019)*, a non-fictional work portraying the historical slave-owning non-white Viking prince, Geirmund Heljarskinn.

In the following I will first discuss the case studies in the context of tourism, before proceeding to discuss heritage and pathways to impact more broadly.

Time travel as sustainable tourism and slow adventure

Addressing sustainability, “Viking Voyage to Hoy” and “Viking Feast on the Beach” respond to and contribute to solving problems in the Orkney tourism sector. With 352 000 visitors to the Orkney Islands in 2019, more than fifteen times its resident population, concentrations at the most popular sites have led to problems with crowding, under-dimensioned infrastructure, and erosion due to heavy footfall.³⁵ Spreading visits would help alleviate these problems, and a PhD by Annie Thuesen looks at “opening access to underutilised Norse and Viking sites with the intention of abating footfall erosion at more well-known heritage sites”.³⁶ Orkney Time Travel contributes to sustainable tourism by taking people to underused areas such as Hoy where only 15% of visitors currently go.³⁷ The *Orkney Islands Visitor Survey* further revealed that the top three activities leisure visitors participated in were walking (85%), enjoying scenery (74%), and archaeological sites (67%), while “history/archaeology” was most frequently cited as the “highlight” of their visit.³⁸ Time-travel therefore fits the existing visitor profile but offers an adventurous and unexpected *form* of engagement with the landscape and the past. As tourism, time travel has transcended the dichotomy of passive versus active tourism and become *interactive*.

“Viking Voyage to Hoy” and especially “Go Viking Hiking” fit within what Peter Varley insightfully terms “slow adventure” tourism.³⁹ Without the fast-paced adrenaline rush of

³⁵ 192 000 visitors captured by Orkney Islands Council & VisitScotland *Orkney Islands Visitor Survey, 2020*, 102, plus an additional 160 000 cruise passengers. Orkney Islands Council, “Kirkwall named top cruise destination,” 2019. Orkney Islands Council & VisitScotland 2020, 67.

³⁶ UHI Institute for Northern Studies 2020. Egilsay, the location of “The Martyrdom of St Magnus” is explicitly assessed by Thuesen as underused potential.

³⁷ Orkney Islands Council & VisitScotland 2020, 57.

³⁸ Orkney Islands Council & VisitScotland 2020, 68, 91.

³⁹ Varley, 2013.

adventure tourism, and in contrast to “the fragmented, accelerating, mediated experience of the hypermodern subject,” slow adventure is aimed at “insight seekers” who want “rich, meaningful, potentially transcendent and intense experiences” through outdoor living and journeying.⁴⁰ It takes the form of extended time spent in nature and emphasises the experiential dimension of the journey where meaning and even spiritual feelings arise from activities such as walking, carrying, cooking, or making shelter. It embraces commitment, uncertainty, natural hazards, remoteness and increasing self-sufficiency. Time is felt, and “the significance of time is woven into the landscape as history, heritage, tradition, and origin”.⁴¹ The journey is a *passage* and comfort is derived from re-connecting with place, tradition, and history. Varley remarks that passage suggests the possibility of metamorphosis, the discovery of the “real me”, which Hands-on History alluded to in their observation that their participants feel they have “levelled up”. Metamorphosis also encompasses a new way of seeing; appreciating something bigger, timeless, and seeing yourself as part of an interconnected network of nature.⁴²

Time is central to Varley’s “slow adventure” but time-travel adds an extra dimension by making the connection with past explicit. As a time-travelling Viking, one may experience time differently. Taking watches off and following the rhythm of light and darkness, wakefulness and sleep, is liberating. Taking time over cooking and eating together by an open fire, experiencing strong bonds of community and friendship in the process, and feeling connected with generations past. Storytelling plays a role in anchoring in the past and in the transformation of ways of seeing, as “Viking Voyage to Hoy” exemplifies with stories that animate the landscape, or “The Martyrdom of St Magnus” which peoples it with past lived lives and emotionally connects us with them. Viking Age ways of seeing, experiencing, and

⁴⁰ Varley, 2013, 3, 20.

⁴¹ Varley, 2013, 18.

⁴² Varley, 2013, 4.

being in the world were profoundly different to (hyper-)modern, western mentalities⁴³ and some of these ways help us reorient ourselves as part of the network of nature. Vikings lived in an animated world of visible and invisible beings, where gifted people could shape-shift into animals, connected to the realms of gods and giants via the rainbow and the World Tree, Yggdrasill. These profoundly different mentalities can be made available to us through immersive time travel, using storytelling and drama techniques in addition to what “slow adventure” already brings.

Authenticity and pathways to impact in a heritage perspective

At the core of what makes time-travel work lies *authenticity*. The key is to be honest and upfront about choices, compromises, and sources of information. Vanessa Agnew and Juliane Tomann note that authenticity in re-enactment “[...] seeks to advance historical understanding through an authentic simulation of past objects, events, practices, and experiences [...]” via “fidelity to some other original thing or being” thereby “closing the spatiotemporal distance”.⁴⁴ This notion of authenticity often centres on objects and their processes of origination, such as materials, traditional crafting skills, and using period tools and technology.⁴⁵ In this interest, re-enactment and experimental archaeology overlap in activities and intentions.

However, authenticity relates to more than materiality. A different notion of authenticity is subjective and relates directly to the “affective turn” observed first in North American living

⁴³ Price 2020.

⁴⁴ Agnew and Tomann 2020, 19-20.

⁴⁵ Agnew and Tomann, 2020, 23.

history and re-enactment.⁴⁶ “Go Viking Hiking” successfully uses material authenticity and the outdoor setting as tools to achieve subjective, affective authenticity. You cannot edit out rain and wind, hunger, and tiredness from walking far distances, or the uncomfortable itch and heavy smell of wet wool. Authenticity and meaning arise from having to fish for food and build a shelter before you sleep. Iain McCalman and Paul Pickering describe the affective turn as “a yearning to experience history somatically and emotionally – to know what it felt like.”⁴⁷ The personal authentic feeling involves intentional clashes with modern expectations of comfort and forms an interesting contrast to other types of Viking themed tourism, such as exhibitions or Virtual Reality, where experiences are safe, short, and comfortable. Material authenticity can indeed be an effective tool to achieve affective authenticity, but it need not be absolute. It might not matter if someone is wearing modern shoes with their Viking Age costume if the feeling of being transported to another reality can be awoken nonetheless. Nature does the job of the set, and a few props suffice to transport participants to the past without requiring a budget for purpose-built longhouses, ships, or detailed costumes. In time travel, unlike theatre, “authenticity attempts to conceal or eliminate the mimetic principle underscoring all reenactment”.⁴⁸ The aim is not to act, but to *be*.

If affective authenticity and embodied experience are the aims, what then is the role of the participant and how can organisers assign appropriate roles? In contrast to traditional tourism and museums, the time traveller's role goes beyond consuming history and archaeology, to active participation, including opportunities to influence and shape the experience. In his study of living history in the USA, Scott Magelssen calls for giving visitors a more active role in co-creating a time-travel narrative, for example by letting not just invited re-enactors,

⁴⁶ McCalman and Pickering 2010. Bennedahl, Ellis-Nilsson, Ljosland, Nyzell and Winge, forthcoming.

⁴⁷ 2010, 6.

⁴⁸ Agnew and Tomann, 2020, 20.

but also lay visitors portray characters who *can make a difference*.⁴⁹ He also argues in favour of allowing the storyline to deviate from a well-known historical course or narrative. The case studies do not fully realise this potential, but “The Martyrdom of St Magnus” approaches it by letting participants freely explore their characters, and came closest in the moment when the children switched allegiance. What could happen if I had opted not to script the fatal moment? Whether intentionally counterfactual or in line with recorded history, letting participants take an active role empowers them, and invites to personal reflection on whether history really just takes its course and how history is relevant for us today. This dimension could be enhanced by facilitating group reflections afterwards.

Magelssen presents a useful framework for thinking about different types of roles that can be assigned to staff and visitors/participants.⁵⁰ The classical approach is *third-person* interpretation, where *we*, in the present, look back at *them*, in the past, and use our privileged position as an authority, for example as museum staff or invited re-enactors, to explain *their* life to the *audience* in the past tense. In third person interpretation, there is a very clear separation between *us* and *them*. Some museums and living history establishments employ *first-person* interpretation, where staff members enter the role of a historical character (a known historical individual or a composite deemed typical), while visitors stay in the present and look in as through a window in time. First-person interpretation can lead to time-paradoxes, for example when visitors, sometimes deliberately, ask the historical character questions from the future.

⁴⁹ Magelssen 2006.

⁵⁰ Magelssen 2006.

The cases described above, however, employ *second*-person interpretation, where *you* are invited in. It “[...] allows visitors to pretend to be part of the past and offers possibilities of co-creating the trajectory of the historiographic narrative with the staff, rather than merely passively consuming it”.⁵¹ As Magelssen points out, second-person interpretation can be done with various levels of involvement, from simply letting visitors try their hand at historical crafts and chores (as in “Viking Feast on the Beach”), to inviting them into a more complex narrative (as in “The Martyrdom of St Magnus”), sometimes with an open ending. More ambitious forms of second-person interpretation dare to assign visitors active roles who can influence the story. This is desirable because it helps people see that the past is not a single objective fact, but selected, interpreted, presented, managed, and curated.⁵² As Mike Pearson observes: “What archaeologists do is work with evidence in order to create something – a meaning, a narrative, a story – which stands for the past in the present.”⁵³ Time travel builds on the meaning, narrative, and story arrived at by archaeological research, but opens it up to be experienced from a multitude of different persons’ and characters’ viewpoints so that it is no longer a single story. While “Viking Feast on the Beach,” “Viking Voyage to Hoy” and “Go Viking Hiking” opt for involving participants in collective meaning making, “The Martyrdom of St Magnus” achieves a polyphonic view, each participant experiencing the story from the first-person viewpoint of their saga character in an inter-subjective dialogue, giving participants the chance to reflect on how the authoritative saga story was experienced and felt by different people. From a Critical Heritage Studies perspective, time travel is an important tool because of its inherent power to challenge established historiographical narratives and ask difficult questions of the past. The potential to encourage critical engagement has not been fully developed in the case studies described above. Nevertheless,

⁵¹ Magelssen 2006, 298.

⁵² For a thorough discussion of heritage as a cultural practice, see Smith 2006.

⁵³ In Pearson and Shanks 2001, 11.

as the participant-initiated deviations from the established saga narrative in “The Martyrdom of St Magnus” showed, the seed of critical engagement was there on that occasion and, if nurtured, for example by explicitly telling participants they are not bound by the saga narrative, would allow time travel to become a vehicle for critical reflection. By using second-person interpretation, participants are invited to experience — individually and together — their own meanings, narratives, and stories, thereby achieving the ambition from Critical Heritage Studies of co-curating and co-creating shared pasts rather than leave it wholly to museum and heritage professionals. Time travel shifts emphasis from material evidence as the primary vehicle through which the past is understood to bodily sensations, personal experience, and polyphonic co-created narratives. As Cornelius Holtorf astutely observes, material culture, rather than taking centre stage, here becomes “props” that facilitate the larger stories and experiences of subjective, affective authenticity. There is a shift in emphasis from preserving and remembering to reawakening the past in the present. Authenticity is bestowed by each experiencer who gains new insight by having, in a sense, been there.

Conclusion

The Viking past is today one of a multitude of shared pasts in an internationally connected world. The case studies illustrate how time travel contributes to a local sense of belonging and cohesion, as well as being part of national and pan-European narratives and memoryscapes. Crucially, time travel offers mechanisms to include participants who might not otherwise fit into existing “Viking” stereotypes, and for challenging such stereotypes. There is willingness to carefully navigate and reflect to avoid extremism and ensure inclusion and positivity, thereby ensuring that time travel is an effective vehicle for exploring and developing an inclusive European cultural heritage. Intersecting heritage and creativity, time

travel is therefore a powerful mode not only for probing into “our own” past, but also for sharing each other’s past and *inviting in* across cultures and other boundaries.

But which aspects of the Viking past? Harrison stresses that heritage is an active process where assemblages of objects, places and practices are chosen as mirrors to the present because they represent a set of values that people in the present wish to bring forward into the future. He emphasises the importance of involving people widely in making these selections, and that the process is continuously ongoing.⁵⁴ Because of its capacity to actively involve, time travel is a good vehicle. The aspects of the Vikings past which are chosen here are very different to those emphasised for example in National Romantic literature, and more in line with ways of seeing and being in the world described by Harrison as characteristic of Indigenous peoples.⁵⁵ Temporarily becoming a “Viking” gives access to experiencing a world where humans are part of nature and there is less separation between nature and culture, experiencing connection through bodily sensations, crafts and foodways, and storytelling in which the world is animated. It brings forward traditional crafts and production methods, and local native foods. An environmental humanities research project led by Anne Kalvig from the University of Stavanger further investigates the links between Viking interest, sustainability, and what they term “green citizenship”.⁵⁶ Anna Økstra has found that the keenest members of the “Viking community” of reenactors consciously make a point of bringing elements of their “Viking life” back into their “normal life”, directly affecting their life choices.⁵⁷ Partly, this is expressed through aspirations and attempts at more self-sufficient and sustainable modes of living, and partly more indirectly through trying to preserve some of the feeling of the Viking encampment, and bonds of friendship and community. Brita

⁵⁴ Harrison 2012, 228-9.

⁵⁵ Harrison 2012, 204-226.

⁵⁶ University of Stavanger, 2020. See also for example Big Heritage’s project EcoVikings: <https://bigheritage.co.uk/ecovikings/>

⁵⁷ Økstra 2016, 20.

Timm Knudsen describes time travel as a critical activity, which enhances the present with possibilities and thereby opens new futures, and as an instrument to realise “a more equal, just, inclusive and sustainable [future] society”.⁵⁸ By listening to the testimonies, vestiges, landscapes, animals, plants and so on which one encounters in time travel, Knudsen says, one is given the opportunity to connect morally and ethically with past life and thereby increase one’s knowledge of the present.

Knudsen’s observations chime with the possibilities of metamorphosis and new ways of seeing, as discussed above. Time travel connects with broader “slow” movements, especially “slow adventure”, which bring tourism towards greater environmental sustainability. From the participant’s viewpoint, slow time travel adventures offer an experience of strong connection simultaneously with nature, place, and time, each enhancing the other. Personal growth ensues, sometimes felt as a metamorphosis, which in turn may impact on future life choices. Time travellers emerge with a deeper knowledge of oneself, and stronger human connections of friendship and community, identity, and belonging. Most importantly, in a post- or hypermodern existence which can at times feel disconnected and meaningless, time travel fulfils a need for enchantment and meaning.

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⁵⁸ Knudsen, 2017.

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