**Detecting sign-value in visitor attractions and architecture: The case of Titanic Belfast**

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The concept of sign-value was coined by the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard meaning the symbolic attributes of an object. Sign-value is the outcome of the commercialization, advertising and consumerism effects of modern capitalism, thus relating the concept with images of fashion, style, status, luxury and prestige an object reveals. However objects in capitalist economies are predominantly transformed into commodities that determine the main context in which the sign-value has been examined. Therefore, the identification of the sign-value of an object is twofold: first, it reveals the assignment of symbolic meanings and second, it relates the commodified object to items of social prestige and status. This exploratory study identifies the role of sign-value in visitor attractions (as objects). It examines whether and how visitor attractions are loaded with sign-value.

The study explored the ‘Titanic Belfast’, which is a modern designed architectural ‘must see’ iconic attraction in Northern Ireland. Titanic Belfast is situated adjacent to the original dockyard where the famous ship was constructed and is perceived as an iconic sign that drives the rejuvenation of the Titanic Quarter area in Belfast as a tourism destination. The perception of sign-value in iconic attractions is examined by studying the sensory and imaginary interpretations of the symbols attributed to architectural buildings as iconic attractions and their commercialization aspects. A multi-method qualitative approach was used by combining virtual ethnography, content analysis, and a field observation by one of the researchers.

The findings show that architectural buildings as well as their images become commodified objects; they are advertised through the media and their images are used as printed souvenirs. The commercialization of the Titanic legacy becomes a consumable tourism experience in the Titanic Belfast. This study suggests that the sign-value of architectural buildings as iconic attractions is also related to matters of luxury consumption, social status, fashion etc. It is argued that the sign-value concept can explain the commodification of architecture in tourism. Future studies on the relationships between tourism and architecture such as the importance of sign-value in the planning process of new architectural attractions are required. In particular, there is a need to explore the extent to which architectural buildings should become commodified images when being transformed into iconic attractions.

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