

**Ebbing Shores, Flowing Memories:**

How the Immersive Elements of the Panorama Mesdag Recreate the Seaside Environment and  
Evoke Nostalgic Sentiments in its Visitors

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**Abstract and Keywords**

In the heart of The Hague lies the Panorama Mesdag, an immersive circular painting created by Hendrik Willem Mesdag in 1881. This artwork transports its visitors to the 19th-century Dutch seaside town of Scheveningen, enveloping them in a seaside experience that evokes a sense of nostalgia through the ebb and flow of their memories. This raises the question: How do the immersive elements of the Panorama Mesdag recreate the seaside environment and evoke nostalgic feelings in visitors that parallel those experienced at authentic seaside locations? To address this question, the study employed the diary method to capture the emotional and reflective responses of 20 participants who visited the Panorama Mesdag. This approach facilitated a detailed exploration of participants' personal experiences and the nostalgic sentiments evoked by the immersive seaside environment. The findings indicate that the immersive elements of the Panorama Mesdag, including the entry process, faux terrain, visual illusions, and the provision of props, were effective in recreating the seaside and evoking strong emotional responses. However, while auditory stimuli were present, the absence of other sensory experiences inherent to an authentic seaside—such as the sensation of wind and the smell of salty air—was a significant limitation for many participants, preventing them from feeling fully immersed. Despite this limitation, the study concludes that the Panorama Mesdag's immersive elements effectively recreate the nostalgic sentiments experienced in authentic seaside environments. By evoking a longing for simpler times, childhood adventures, and loved ones who are no longer present, the Panorama Mesdag enables visitors to relive personal memories and emotions associated with the seaside. Future research should explore how contemporary immersive technologies can replicate the seaside experience, maintaining emotional, sensory, and nostalgic connections, which will be increasingly important for environments threatened by climate change.

**Keywords:** Nostalgia, Seaside Experience, Immersion, Panorama Mesdag, Diary of Thoughts

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## 1. Introduction

*Figure 1. The Panorama Mesdag*

Envision stepping into a canvas where one finds themselves whisked away to a realm that exists outside the bounds of time. Where one is able to hear the perpetual crashing of waves and the echoing cries of seagulls that compose an enchanting symphony of the North Sea. As visitors enter this circular canvas they are transported to a scene frozen in time, where the horizon seems to bend, and the boundary between reality and



illusion gradually fades away (Halkes, 1999). This immersive journey awaits any tourist or local who finds themselves in The Hague and enters the Panorama Mesdag. Created and painted by the skilled hand of Hendrik Willem Mesdag in 1881, this artwork captures the essence of Scheveningen, a Dutch seaside town (Halkes, 1999). The Panorama Mesdag, towering at 14 meters high and stretching 120 meters in circumference, surrounds its viewers within a 360-degree view of the seaside. The meticulous detail and grand scale of the painting creates such a convincing illusion that visitors feel as though they are standing atop the Seinpost dune, able to take in the expansive seascape while listening to the distant murmur of the shore (Sillevis, 2017).

Through Mesdag's masterful brushstrokes, the essence of 19th-century Scheveningen springs vividly to life, seamlessly portraying fishing boats returning with their catch, children playing along the shore, and the bustling daily activities of a vibrant coastal town (Sillevis, 2017). One might even wonder if Hendrik Mesdag would recognize his beloved Scheveningen today, given the extensive modern transformations it has undergone. Therefore, the Panorama Mesdag not only provides a historical snapshot, allowing its visitors to take a glimpse into the past, but also provides a sense of nostalgia, resonating deeply with moments experienced at the seaside etched in their own memories (Halkes, 1999). In other words, the Panorama Mesdag transcends the confines of a mere painting; it functions as a portal to a bygone era, a gateway to the seaside experience, and a key to unlocking treasured memories.

After all, the seaside's ability to evoke sentiments of nostalgia is not novel and has been extensively researched by scholars such as David Jarratt (2015). Particularly, in his work with Sean Gammon, Jarratt explores the nostalgic feelings elicited by seaside environments, emphasizing how these settings naturally prompt reflections on the past and personal memories (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). They argue that the timeless nature of the seaside, with its enduring natural and sensory elements, such as crashing waves, crying seagulls, sandy feet, blowing wind, and salty air, remains constant over time. This constancy contrasts sharply with the passage of time in one's life, serving as a conduit to past experiences. Jarratt's (2015) research particularly highlights how the natural elements associated with the seaside environment can evoke emotional responses like contemplation, reflection, and a deep sense of nostalgia, a term he coined as 'seasideness'.

Nonetheless, experiencing a sense of 'seasideness' is not limited to just physical seaside locations. This is increasingly evident with the advent of virtual reality (VR) tourism, where individuals can use a headset to virtually travel to different destinations (Guttentag, 2010). Typically, when discussing immersive experiences that transport people to alternate realities—whether fantastical worlds or historical settings—examples such as Disneyland or the video game *Assassin's Creed* are often mentioned first. These contemporary examples seem to dominate current discussions on immersive entertainment, causing lesser-known but significant examples like the Panorama Mesdag to be overlooked (Grau, 1999). This oversight is a result of the Panorama Mesdag often being considered an irrelevant media dinosaur within the field of media tourism (Grau, 1999). However, it is important to recognize that this very medium is the predecessor of the very contemporary examples mentioned before. Despite being considered outdated by some, the Panorama Mesdag continues to offer visitors an immersive experience into the 19th-century Dutch seaside. This prompts an exploration into whether such a historical yet artificial environment can replicate the emotional responses typically associated with authentic seaside locations.

Hence, the central focus of this thesis revolves around addressing the following research question: **How do the immersive elements of the Panorama Mesdag recreate the seaside environment and evoke nostalgic feelings in visitors that parallel those experienced at authentic seaside locations?** In other words this research question seeks to explore the specific ways in which the Panorama Mesdag utilizes immersive elements to replicate the seaside

environment and thus evoke nostalgic emotions in visitors, akin to those felt at authentic seaside locations. Hence, the primary aim is twofold: first, to investigate the elements of the seaside environment that trigger nostalgia; and second, to analyze the specific immersive elements in the Panorama Mesdag that create this effect. Therefore this thesis posits that the immersive elements of the Panorama Mesdag can effectively simulate the sensory and emotional aspects of a real seaside environment. More specially, by creating a powerful illusion of presence the Panorama Mesdag can enable its visitors to relive personal memories and emotions associated with the seaside thereby providing a convincing and emotionally resonant experience (Nilsson et al., 2016). To examine these emotional responses and experiences in relation to nostalgia, the research employs the diary method, gathering insights from participants visiting the Panorama Mesdag.

Therefore, this research holds both significant academic and societal relevance. Academically, it addresses a critical gap in the literature regarding the emotional dimensions of seaside tourism. Kelly (2022) argues that the emotional connections between people and coastal environments have not been sufficiently explored by researchers. Similarly, d'Hautesserre (2015) advocates for the reintegration of emotions into tourism research, emphasizing that an introspective engagement approach can yield a more nuanced understanding of tourist experiences. This is further reinforced by Tunstall and Penning-Roswell (1998) who believe that “qualitative research would deepen our understanding of individuals’ lifelong experiences of coasts and the meaning they attach to them.” (p.331). By employing the diary method to capture the emotional responses of participants visiting the replicated seaside at the Panorama Mesdag, this study specifically responds to Tunstall and Penning-Roswell's (1998) call for qualitative research. Additionally, the research's focus on the immersive elements of the Panorama Mesdag is academically significant, as Morales et al. (2019) highlight that there have been few studies conducted that investigate the ability of immersive environments to evoke similar if not the same emotional responses as real locations. Therefore, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how, an arguably outdated, immersive environment such as the Panorama Mesdag, is able evoke emotional responses similar to those experienced at authentic seaside settings.

Socially, this research shines light on the emotional connections people form with coastal environments, which is crucial for understanding the enduring appeal of seaside tourism (Kelly,

2022). These insights can inform tourism strategies aimed at enhancing seaside visitor experiences to leverage nostalgia. Notably, Jarratt and Gammon (2016) emphasize the lack of primary research on the demand for seaside nostalgia, despite Urry's (1990) earlier suggestion that struggling seaside destinations should embrace, rather than avoid, the trend of nostalgia. Therefore by exploring seaside nostalgia through the lens of the Panorama Mesdag, the research can help deteriorating seaside destinations create compelling, emotionally resonant experiences for their visitors. Additionally, Jarratt (2015) argues that understanding visitors' emotional connections to the seaside can contribute to preserving the cultural heritage of these destinations, ensuring their historical significance and societal value are maintained for future generations.

Lastly, this thesis employs a structured approach, beginning with the establishment of a theoretical framework. This chapter will delve into the existing research related to the topic, with a particular focus on the concepts of nostalgia, the nostalgia experienced at the seaside and immersion. Following this, the methodology chapter will provide a detailed justification for employing the diary method as the primary tool for data collection, alongside a discussion of the thematic analysis employed to interpret participant responses. Subsequently, the analysis and results chapter will present the research findings, thematically organized into four main sections. Finally, the concluding chapter will revisit the central research question, synthesizing the final findings to draw a comprehensive conclusion. This chapter will also critically examine the study's limitations and propose avenues for future research.



## **2. Theoretical Framework**

First and foremost, this chapter will delve into the existing research in relation to the topic by organizing it into five main sections. Firstly, the concept of nostalgia will be introduced, outlining its various characteristics and identifying which aspects are most relevant to this research. Secondly, this section will elucidate on why nostalgia is experienced in the seaside context. The discussion then moves to the elements that activate seaside nostalgia, with a particular emphasis on the seaside as a sense of place, the impact of sensory stimuli, and childhood memories associated with seaside experiences. The fourth section explores and contextualizes the emergence and purpose of the panorama as a medium. Lastly, this section addresses the concepts of immersion and authenticity, using the Wizarding World of Harry Potter as a blueprint.

### **2.1. Introducing the Concept of Nostalgia**

Given the centrality of nostalgia in this study, it is essential to define and elucidate this concept to comprehend its manifestation at the seaside. At its core, the term nostalgia derives from the Greek words 'nostos' meaning home, and 'algia' meaning longing; thus, it signifies a longing for home (Boym, 2001). According to Boym (2001), nostalgia is an emotion deeply intertwined with feelings of loss and displacement, often accompanied by a romanticized longing for a simpler past. This romanticized longing is unsurprising, considering that the concept of nostalgia emerged and matured during the Romantic era, a period that celebrated emotion, nature, and the idealization of the past (Boym, 2001). Boym (2001) distinguishes between two types of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia, which aims to reconstruct the lost home, and reflective nostalgia, which focuses on longing and memory. However, this thesis focuses primarily on reflective nostalgia due to its relevance to the themes of longing for the past and its introspective engagement with memory.

Similarly, Goulding (1999) also differentiates between two distinct types of nostalgia: 'real' nostalgia and 'simulated' nostalgia. According to Goulding, 'real' nostalgia pertains to a longing for a personally remembered past, whereas 'simulated' nostalgia is a vicarious experience induced by external stimuli such as images, objects, and narratives. Both types of nostalgia are relevant to this research, as the Panorama Mesdag can evoke 'real' nostalgia in visitors with personal seaside memories and 'simulated' nostalgia in those who experience nostalgia through

passed-down stories of the seaside. Goulding (1999) further identifies two types of nostalgic reactions, recreational and existential. Recreational nostalgics maintain a balanced view of the present while reflecting on the past. In contrast, existential nostalgics idealize the past, projecting their own beliefs and desires onto it (Goulding, 1999). According to Jarratt and Gammon (2016), this group tends to view the past through rose-tinted glasses. Consequently, existential nostalgia acts as a form of escapism, where individuals seek refuge in their idealized memories to avoid the perceived shortcomings of the present (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016).

Given the latter nostalgic reaction it is not surprising that the concept of nostalgia is often dismissed as a pessimistic sentiment (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Consequently, individuals may lose faith in the present and future, clinging instead to an unrealistic view of bygone times ignoring its complexities and challenges (Goulding, 1999). In extreme cases, nostalgia is metaphorically described as a disease, implying it hinders one's ability to engage with the present (Boym, 2001). In tourism studies similar views are reflected (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). For instance, tourists frequently seek meaning and authenticity in places perceived as untouched by modernity, such as rural areas, developing countries and historical sites (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). This search is driven by a desire to connect with what is considered more genuine or simpler, mirroring the nostalgic yearning for an idealized past (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). However, this quest often leads to the idealization and misrepresentation of these locations, ignoring their contemporary realities and complexities (Lowenthal, 2011). As such, while nostalgia can provide comfort and a sense of identity, it is also critiqued for fostering unrealistic expectations (Bishop, 1995). Thus, the ongoing debate about whether nostalgia is a positive, negative, or bittersweet emotion persists (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Bishop (1995) proposes that nostalgia should be understood in more nuanced terms, recognizing it as an emotional state that accommodates conflicting feelings and acknowledges different perspectives of reality. He describes it as a melancholic pleasure, where individuals do not wish to be cured of their past (Bishop, 1995).

To further clarify, it is crucial to distinguish nostalgia from reminiscence and melancholia, as they are often confused and used interchangeably. Reminiscence is generally a more positive recollection that does not focus on loss or perceived shortcomings of the present. It involves recalling past events with fondness, but without the same intense longing or emotional complexity inherent in nostalgia (Davis, 1979). In contrast, nostalgia emphasizes the

irretrievability of the past, thereby intensifying feelings of loss and yearning for what can no longer be recovered (Boym, 2001). Additionally, unlike melancholia, which is largely confined to the individual's internal emotional state, nostalgia involves a dynamic interplay between personal memories and collective cultural memory (Boym, 2001). Based on these definitions, this thesis is fundamentally rooted in the concept of nostalgia, rather than melancholia or reminiscence. Understanding the nuances of nostalgia is crucial for accurately interpreting the emotional responses to both visiting the seaside and experiencing its representations, such as the Panorama Mesdag.

## **2.2. Nostalgia Experienced at the Seaside**

In the context of seaside tourism, Jarratt and Gammon (2016) further expand on the concept of nostalgia. They suggest similar sentiments, noting that nostalgia often arises from dissatisfaction with the present and serves as a counterbalance to the rapid pace of modern life (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Boym (2001) posits that nostalgia acts as a defense mechanism during periods of accelerated change and upheaval, allowing individuals to find comfort in the perceived simplicity of the past. This is reflected in the rise of seaside tourism of the 19th century which was catalyzed due to the societal shift from an agricultural rural society to an industrial modern one (Sharpley, 2018). This transition created a strong desire among individuals, particularly the working class, to escape urban life, a concept Sharpley (2018) refers to as 'urban escapism.' As industrialization brought significant upheaval and transformation, the masses sought refuge and solace in the idyllic and simpler lifestyles offered by seaside locations (Walton, 2000). This desire to escape the rigors and pressures of urban industrial life can be understood as what Goulding (1999) describes as an existential nostalgic reaction.

Interestingly, this transformation in societal perception also altered views of the sea itself. Historically, the sea was viewed with fear and apprehension, perceived as a dangerous place (Jarratt, 2015). However, the rise of industrial society and the influence of the Romantic movement transformed this perception. The sea became a cherished destination, valued for its therapeutic and aesthetic qualities (Jarratt & Sharpley, 2017). During the Romantic period, artists were inspired by the sea's majestic qualities, with figures like Hendrik Mesdag drawing inspiration from its vastness (Halkes, 1999). This shift in perception reinforced nostalgic sentiments, making coastal landscapes symbols of a lost, idyllic past. Thus, the transformation of

the sea from a feared entity to a cherished escape underscores the historical connection between seaside tourism and nostalgia.

While the origins of seaside nostalgia and the allure of coastal destinations date back centuries, these sentiments continue to captivate modern visitors. What factors contribute to the enduring appeal and emotional resonance of the seaside in contemporary times? A simple answer to this theoretical question is that seaside nostalgia continues to offer refuge from the pressures of globalization and technological advancements, providing an escape from contemporary challenges (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). However, a more theoretical explanation is what Jarratt and Gammon (2016) refer to as the element of time. Boym (2001) expands on this, emphasizing that the complexity of time is an essential element in understanding nostalgia. Bishop (1995) elaborates on two different ways one experiences time. One is "objectified time," which is the strict, measured time one follows daily, like work schedules and deadlines. The other is "subjective time," which is one's personal sense of time, influenced by memories and feelings (Bishop, 1995). According to Boym (2001) nostalgia occurs when one tries to connect these two types of time, a process in which one escapes the objective time by immersing oneself in the more emotional time of the past.

Building on this, Urry (1990) adds that certain places, such as the seaside, evoke a sense of timelessness or a slowed-down tempo, attracting visitors seeking an escape from the rapid pace of modern life. Some locations such as the seaside seem to appear unaffected by the passage of time, and embody what Urry (1990) describes as 'glacial time'. According to Urry (1990), this concept refers to a temporal dimension detached from the practicalities of everyday life. More specifically, the timeless nature of seaside landscapes, particularly their shorelines and the sea, contrasts with the fleeting nature of human existence (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). When one visits the seaside that has remained unchanged since their formative years, it can evoke strong childhood memories from that period, and thus a strong sense of nostalgia (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016).

## 2.3. Elements of Seaside Nostalgia

### 2.3.1. Sense of Place at the Seaside

According to Jarratt and Gammon (2016), individuals often connect with the past through their attachment to specific places that hold significant memories or meaning. To explore these attachments, the concept of "sense of place" serves as a critical framework. Relph (1976) defines sense of place as the ways in which individuals perceive, experience, and attach meaning to a location, significantly influencing their identity and sense of belonging. While this research has thus far explored *what* nostalgia is and *why* nostalgia is experienced at the seaside, it becomes essential to understand *how* it manifests itself.

Jarratt (2015) coined the term 'seasideness' to describe the unique sense of place associated with coastal areas. This concept arises from the combination of sensory experiences, emotional connections, and nostalgic reflections, which together create a deep connection to the seaside environment. While the following subsections will delve into the sensory experiences and nostalgic reflections, particularly those related to childhood, this section focuses on the emotional connections to the seaside. Understanding these emotional connections is crucial to comprehending how the seaside facilitates reflective thoughts and therefore reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001).

According to Jarratt (2015), the vast, powerful, and timeless qualities of the seaside uniquely evoke contemplation and reflection among visitors. The expansive nature of the seaside, with its open vistas and endless horizon, starkly contrasts with the confined and structured environment of everyday life (Jarratt & Sharpley, 2017). Consequently, the seaside becomes not only an escape but also a sanctuary where people find solace and comfort amidst life's uncertainties (Jarratt, 2015). This escape is both physical and mental, as the vastness and boundlessness of the seaside make individuals feel small in the presence of something larger and more enduring than themselves. This sensation often fosters a spiritual connection to the larger natural world, which lies at the heart of 'seasideness'. Furthermore, these spiritual and emotional connections contribute to a sense of continuity and belonging, which is central to the sense of place (Peirson, 2023). As individuals contemplate their place in the world and their connections to something greater, they naturally reflect on the people and events that have shaped their identity and life (Jarratt, 2015). This introspective process brings past experiences to the

forefront, allowing individuals to connect their present feelings with their past memories. Thus, the natural elements of the seaside create a unique sense of place that foster an introspective and reflective space where individuals can escape by reconnecting with past experiences and memories, often leading to sentiments of reflective nostalgia (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016; Boym, 2001).

### 2.3.2. The Seaside and the Senses

An integral part of 'seasideness' involves sensory engagement, encompassing activities such as "breathing in the fresh air, smelling the sea, feeling the wind, hearing the waves, and looking out across the bay" (Jarratt, 2015, p.8). This sensory engagement is pivotal in shaping the seaside experience. Kelly (2022) underscores the importance of exploring the 'sensoryscape factors' prevalent in coastal regions, emphasizing their crucial role in enhancing visitors' engagement with each other. While previous studies on seaside experiences primarily focused on an ocular-centric perspective, Jarratt and Gammon (2016) argue that a visitor's encounter with the seaside extends beyond visual observation and includes diverse and rich sensory interactions. Obrador Pons (2007) therefore highlights the significance of tactile interactions in the seaside experience, arguing that touch is fundamental to the coastal experience. He notes that "letting the sun get in, feeling the coolness of the water on the skin, and playing with the sticky texture of the sand are some of the main delights that people find on the beach" (Obrador Pons, 2007, p.138).

Boym (2001) further emphasizes the importance of the senses in experiencing nostalgia, noting that "nostalgia has an amazing capacity for remembering sensations, tastes, sounds, and smells" (p.14). This highlights that nostalgia heavily relies on the materiality of place and sensory perceptions as they are closely linked to memory. Similarly, Jarratt and Gammon (2016) state that "memory is allegiant to the aromas and tastes of our past experiences," underscoring the powerful nostalgic feelings that seaside senses can trigger. Jarratt and Gammon (2016) further elaborate stating that sensory experiences often act as mnemonic triggers, enhancing the emotional connection to past seaside visits. Furthermore, the consistent sensory environment of the seaside over time aids in recalling past experiences, making sensory engagement a critical component in understanding the connection between the seaside environment and nostalgia (Jarratt, 2015).

### 2.3.3. The Seaside and Memories

Nostalgia, while not confined to any particular life stage, often prominently features themes of childhood (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Boym (2001) asserts that "nostalgia is not necessarily a yearning for a place but actually a yearning for a different time, the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams" (p. 15). One key aspect of these nostalgic seaside memories is the element of play, which is frequently linked to childhood (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). This is largely because the seaside is perceived as a sanctioned space for playful activities, allowing both adults and children to engage in carefree fun. Moreover, Obrador-Pons (2007) highlights that the beach is one of the few places where adults can safely reenact their childhood, such as by building sandcastles, thereby reconnecting with their inner child. This ability to reenact playful, carefree moments from childhood significantly contributes to the nostalgic feeling experienced at the seaside (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Additionally, the sensory-rich environment of the seaside, closely associated with play, further enhances visitors' ability to recall childhood memories. The sounds of the waves, the feel of the sand, and the smell of the sea all work together to transport individuals back to their youth. Kelly (2022) supports this notion, stating that the consistent sensory experiences at the beach foster emotional connections and help construct family stories and memories.

Building on this idea, Jarratt and Gammon (2016) propose that seaside experiences create a shared environment where family members form lasting memories, cherished both individually and collectively, thereby contributing to a family's narrative. These family narratives are cyclical, with traditions and stories passed down through generations, further solidifying their significance (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Moreover, Jarratt and Gammon (2016) elaborate that family memories made at the seaside significantly enhance the seaside's cross-generational appeal. This is largely because time spent at the beach, characterized by relaxation and play, is perceived as a timeless experience that resonates with every generation (Kelly, 2022). Furthermore, this notion is supported by Goulding (1999), who found that past leisure activities often serve as objects of nostalgic emotion later in life, particularly those associated with social interactions such as with family. Additionally, Jarratt and Gammon (2016) point out that these seaside memories also act as a nostalgic remembrance of family members who have passed on, further deepening their emotional resonance.

In essence, nostalgia for a simpler childhood is often expressed through memories of uncomplicated times (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Childhood holiday memories frequently inspire adults to bring their own children or grandchildren to the seaside, hoping to share the same pleasurable experiences from their past (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). The act of reenacting their childhood holidays at the seaside underscores the timelessness of these locations, as individuals experience similar feelings now as they did during their youth (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Ultimately, seaside nostalgia allows individuals to reconnect with older generations, loved ones that have passed and their inner child, which often remains dormant amidst the routines of everyday life (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016).

#### **2.4. The Phenomenon of the Panorama**

Before commencing, it is important to acknowledge that the following two chapters will shift in focus. Having established the nostalgic and seaside aspects of this research, this research will now turn its attention to the second half of the study, which examines the panorama and its immersive elements.

To fully understand the Panorama Mesdag, the oldest panorama to exist in its original location, it is crucial to examine the broader context of the panorama medium's emergence and its intended purpose (Halkes, 1999). The concept was first introduced by Robert Barker, who patented this visual format in 1789 (Grau, 2003). Barker's design featured a curved surface that minimized distortion, creating a realistic depiction of landscapes on a concave canvas which was viewed from a designated central position. (Grau, 2003). From its inception, the panorama was designed to create an illusion of reality, representing nature in a captivating and convincing manner (Miller, 1996). Therefore, this medium gained significant popularity during the 19th century, celebrated for its capacity to evoke the aesthetic sublime, an effect that instilled awe and magnified the viewer's gaze (Grau, 1999).

The aesthetic sublime inherent in panoramas is closely linked to the Romantic movement, which aimed to evoke powerful emotions and a sense of awe through artistic expression (Corbin, 1994). Beeton (2016) further notes that the Romantic movement greatly impacted tourism by encouraging people to seek refuge from the challenges of urban life and to reconnect with picturesque natural landscapes. Consequently, panoramas emerged as visual manifestations of



the Romantic era's yearning to reconnect with the idyllic landscapes celebrated in Romantic literature and portrayed in artworks such as the Panorama Mesdag (Beeton, 2015).

As tourism evolved, panoramas emerged as a versatile medium that bridged the realms of art and entertainment (Grau, 2003). They offered an affordable alternative to physical travel, providing immersive experiences that allowed viewers to explore distant locations without leaving their immediate surroundings. Comparisons between "travels with the eye" and actual journeys underscored the appeal of panoramas as cost-effective substitutes for traditional travel (Grau, 2003, p. 69). This capability enabled audiences to vicariously experience both inaccessible events, such as maritime disasters and battles, as well as serene landscapes, exemplified by the Panorama Mesdag's depiction of the seaside (Grau, 2003). Ultimately, panoramas were designed to "lure viewers into seeing in a particular way," engaging them in a unique visual dialogue that transcended traditional art forms (Uricchio, 2011, p. 225).

## **2.5. Elements of Immersion**

### **2.5.1. Immersion**

According to McMahan (2003), immersion has become "an excessively vague, all-inclusive concept" (p. 63). This vagueness arises from two primary reasons. Firstly, the term encompasses a multitude of different experiences and is often used interchangeably with words such as presence, involvement, and engagement (Nilsson et al., 2016). Secondly, the concept of immersion has been applied across various domains, from virtual reality research to film and music studies (Nilsson et al., 2016). Consequently, there are numerous definitions of immersion, each varying according to the disciplinary focus of the research (Nilsson et al., 2016). However, for the purpose of this paper, the definition by Slater and Wilbur (1997) will be utilized, as it aligns with the general consensus among researchers that immersion involves a sense of being surrounded by something (Nilsson et al., 2016). More specifically, Slater and Wilbur (1997) describe immersion as a state of intense mental engagement in which an individual feels completely enveloped by and absorbed in an environment. This state is achieved through what Slater and Wilbur (1997) refer to as a heightened presence, where viewers feel fully engaged and transported into the depicted scene. As a result, this sense of presence can evoke an emotional response by giving individuals the sensation of actually "being there," causing them to

temporarily detach from their physical surroundings and mentally immerse themselves in the depicted world (Slater & Wilbur, 1997, p.3).

This aligns with Ryan's (2003) concept of spatial immersion, which refers to the immersion experienced in response to a depicted location or scenery. Ryan (2003) explains that spatial immersion happens when pictorial media, like panoramas, immediately immerse viewers into the scene, allowing them to develop a personal connection with the environment and feel as though they are part of the depicted events. Ryan (2003) emphasizes that this sense of presence is not merely passive but involves active engagement and exploration. Similarly, Grau (2003) states that immersive experiences like panoramas transform visitors from passive observers into active participants, engaging them in a journey through time and memory. Additionally, Ryan (2003) posits that this intensified sense of reality is cultivated through sensory engagement, where visual and auditory stimuli temporarily suspend the viewer's awareness of the real world. Ryan (2003) further highlights that the more detailed and intricately designed the immersive environment, the more likely viewers are to develop a sense of place and thus enhancing the environment's authenticity.

### 2.5.2. Authenticity

The concept of authenticity becomes particularly important to look at when considering immersive experiences, as these experiences are after all replications of either reality or fantasy. Similar to immersion, authenticity holds different meanings depending on the context in which it is studied (Wang, 1999). This holds especially true in the field of tourism, where authenticity is a contested term due to its nature as a cultural construct, causing its definition to vary depending on perspectives (Sedmak & Mihalic, 2008). Traditionally, authenticity was defined solely through tangible objects which were deemed either original or genuine, a concept known as objective authenticity (Wang, 1999). However, by this definition, an immersive environment would not be considered truly authentic due to its simulated nature (Olsen, 2022). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the use of the term 'authentic' in relation to the seaside, as referenced in the research question, employs the definition of objective authenticity to denote the original. This distinction is made to differentiate between an actual seaside location and its recreated version at the Panorama Mesdag. However, this does not imply that the Panorama lacks authenticity; it simply means that it is not authentic from the perspective of objective authenticity.

Hence, it is important to refer to Bruner (1994) who developed an understanding of authenticity that goes beyond the traditional binary view of 'authentic' versus 'inauthentic'. He argues that authenticity is continually created and reinvented through social interactions and processes (Bruner, 1994). This dynamic view of authenticity is seen through the introduction of Wang's (1999) concept of existential authenticity. Wang (1999) suggests that existential authenticity in tourism is attained by freeing individuals from the restrictions of everyday life, allowing them to feel more genuine and true to themselves. This form of authenticity is activated through participation, meaning that even a re-enactment can be considered authentic if it allows individuals to genuinely engage and express themselves (Wang, 1999). This perspective aligns with the ideas of Grau (2003) and Ryan (2003), who emphasize the importance of active participation within immersive environments. Therefore, in the context of immersion, the focus is not on whether the environment is objectively authentic, but on the individual's authentic experience within it. Therefore, authenticity in immersive experiences is not merely about replicating real-world settings; it is about creating a convincing and engaging representation that allows visitors to explore and interact with it meaningfully (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018).

To delve deeper into this idea, it is essential to understand how existential authenticity is achieved within immersive environments by highlighting the concept of sense of place. According to Crouch (2000), it is through embodiment which he describes as 'a process of experiencing, making sense, knowing through practice as a sensual human subject in the world' (p. 68) that one is able to gain a real sense of a place. Thus embodiment is the foundational process through which individuals physically and sensorially engage with their environment (Crouch, 2000). This embodied interaction leads to the development of a sense of place, where emotional and symbolic connections are formed with that environment (Relph, 1976). These meaningful connections then provide a setting in which individuals can engage with their surroundings in a way that feels genuine and true to their identity, thereby experiencing existential authenticity (Wang, 1999).

However, it is important to note that not all immersive environments need to be perceived as authentic to achieve immersion. This is particularly elucidated by Saler (2012) through his concept of 'ironic imagination.' This concept describes the phenomenon where visitors are aware of the constructed nature of an immersive environment yet willingly suspend their disbelief to engage fully with the sensory details. In other words, despite recognizing the artificial nature of

these settings, visitors remain emotionally invested in the immersive environment, experiencing a 'double consciousness.' This double consciousness allows them to simultaneously appreciate the artificial world and the craftsmanship involved in creating it.

### 2.5.3. Blueprint

To understand how the immersive elements of the Panorama Mesdag recreate the seaside environment, it is essential to examine how immersion is achieved through another example. Therefore, this section will explore Waysdorf and Reijnders' (2018) analysis of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park, using their insights as a blueprint for the later analysis. According to Waysdorf and Reijnders (2018), a themed environment is considered authentic when it effectively engages the senses. Theme parks achieve this sensory engagement through meticulously crafted simulations that evoke the sounds, atmosphere, and visuals of beloved narratives such as Harry Potter (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018). By stimulating sound, taste, smell, and physical movement, these experiences allow visitors to fully immerse themselves in the park's narrative world. (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018).

Additionally, the immersive and sensory experience in themed environments is further enhanced by the use of props, which play a vital role in creating a believable and engaging experience (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018). According to Connell et al. (2021), strategically incorporating props not only increases sensory engagement but also increases the perceived authenticity of the experience. Consequently, this aids visitors to suspend disbelief and fully immerse themselves in the recreated environment (Connell et al., 2021). Moreover, props go beyond mere decoration as they are often interactive, inviting direct engagement from visitors. For instance, in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, interactive wands enable visitors to cast 'spells' that trigger various effects throughout the park (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018). This interactivity not only entertains but also reinforces the sense of being an active participant in the magical world (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018).

Moreover, theme parks often start the immersive experience with a dramatic entrance (Waysdorf and Reijnders, 2018). Upon entering, visitors are immediately immersed in the themed environment, marking a clear departure from the ordinary world and transporting them into a realm of imagination (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018). Visual and auditory cues enhance the

physical transition from the mundane to the extraordinary, captivating the senses and preparing visitors for the immersive journey ahead (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018).

Nonetheless, emotional responses also play a crucial role in enhancing immersion and authenticity within themed environments. To understand how the immersive elements of the Panorama Mesdag evoke sentiments of nostalgia, it is important to consider Reijnders' (2015) concept of 'small treasure troves.' Reijnders suggests that individuals carry a collection or 'trove' of cherished stories and personal narratives that are often formed during childhood that shape their identity. Typically dormant in everyday life, these memories can be reawakened through specific environmental stimuli associated with particular places (Reijnders, 2015). Thus, when applied to immersive environments, replicating sensory details, ambiances, and settings that mirror the places of treasured stories can activate these dormant memories and narratives.

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter is organized into five distinct sections, each elucidating a critical component of the research methodology. The first section elaborates on the qualitative research design, with a specific focus on the rationale behind selecting the diary method for this study. The second section discusses data collection, detailing participant selection criteria, sampling techniques, and the implementation of the diary method for gathering empirical data. The third section addresses the operationalization of the study's concepts, emphasizing how the diary-like questions were crafted to elicit responses related to nostalgia and immersion. The fourth section outlines the analytical techniques employed, explaining the use of thematic analysis to interpret the collected data.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

To explore the sentiment of nostalgia experienced at the Panorama Mesdag through subjective experiences and interpretations of its visitors, a qualitative approach was deemed the most suitable. Bryman (2012) posits that qualitative research is ideal for exploring participants' personal sentiments and experiences, as it emphasizes a deep understanding of human behavior, emotions, and perceptions. By delving into these subjective aspects, qualitative research offers nuanced insights into the complexities of the social world (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, qualitative research enables an in-depth exploration of visitors' subjective experiences, feelings, and interpretations related to their engagement with the Panorama Mesdag.

Within qualitative research, the diary method was selected as the primary method of data collection due to its capacity to elicit personal viewpoints, interpretations, emotions, and experiences. Researchers, as noted by Bartlett and Milligan (2020), prefer this method for its capability to capture life unfolding in real-time, allowing participants to document sentiments as they occur or soon after, thus minimizing recall bias. In other words, this method is able to "capture life as it is lived," offering a more immediate account than retrospective methods like interviews where participants recount a feeling or event (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015, p.8). Unlike interviews, diaries provide an introspective element, allowing participants to document their thoughts and feelings during or shortly after their experiences (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). This method is particularly adept at investigating phenomena like nostalgia, which are deeply personal and often best elucidated through self-reflection. Moreover, the distance between

researcher and participant inherent in the diary method can mitigate feelings of judgment or pressure to provide socially desirable responses (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). Which is especially pertinent when exploring vulnerable sentiments such as nostalgia, as they are reliant on personal memories and experiences.

In general, individuals maintain diaries for various purposes; while some may utilize them as appointment reminders, others may opt for more detailed recordings of their emotions or life events (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). However, this study specifically employed solicited diaries, which are diaries requested solely for research objectives (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). Additionally, it is important to note that this diary study differs from traditional diary studies, as it spans only a single day rather than requiring entries over an extended period. Therefore, this research refers to it as a diary of thoughts rather than a diary study, as it will only capture immediate reflections and insights from participants at a single point in time.

Furthermore, a structured diary approach was chosen, incorporating predetermined questions to guarantee the collection of data aligned with the theoretical framework as well as reducing respondent burden (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). The structured diary approach involves providing participants with a set of predetermined questions to guide their diary entries. These questions are carefully crafted to align with the theoretical framework of the research, ensuring that the data collected addresses specific aspects of the research objectives (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). Additionally, this approach facilitates the systematic analysis of data, as it allows for the research to easily compare responses across participants and identify patterns or themes that emerge (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). Essentially, the structured diary approach enhances the validity of the research findings by providing a standardized method for collecting and analyzing data.

### **3.2. Data Sampling and Collection**

Having established the rationale for employing a solicited and structured diary of thoughts, it is imperative to outline the data sampling, dataset size determination, and research implementation. This study maintained a non-critical stance towards the sampling of participants, employing maximum variation sampling (Suri, 2011). This approach signifies that there were no predefined criteria for participation; mirroring the diverse demographic that visits the seaside. Given that the research question focuses on visitors' experiences, it was essential to

reflect the broad and varied population that frequents such locations. Hence, participants encompassed all genders, various nationalities, and ages ranging from 21 to 71. The decision to expand the scope of the research to include participants of various nationalities, rather than solely focusing on locals who are familiar with Scheveningen, was primarily driven by the tourism dimension inherent in the study. Tourism inherently involves travel to diverse destinations, where individuals bring their unique perspectives and experiences, distinct from those of locals (Urry, 1990). Given Panorama Mesdag's status as a tourist attraction, this broader approach offered greater potential to engage with different experiences. As a result, the participant pool achieved a balanced representation, consisting of both local residents, up to 50% of whom were from the Netherlands and familiar with Scheveningen and international visitors. This diversified sample enriched the study's insights, capturing a spectrum of perspectives.

Initially, 15 participants were personally approached outside of the Panorama Mesdag museum building to ensure a comprehensive dataset. However, to ensure data saturation, a total of 20 participants were ultimately selected (see Appendix B for participant overview). The increase in participants facilitated a thorough and diverse representation of perspectives, where the inclusion of additional data was deemed unlikely to yield new themes or insights (Fusch & Ness, 2015). While a maximum variation sample was employed for participant selection, the research did utilize a purposive sampling technique to select individuals who had just visited or were about to visit the Panorama Mesdag (Suri, 2011). Ideally, participants were intended to respond to open-ended diary-like questions while exploring the circular rotunda within the museum premises. However, due to challenges in obtaining permission for on-site research, the study was adapted to personally recruit participants whilst standing outside the museum entrance. Despite the initial setback, this adaptation ultimately proved advantageous. Participants who were approached after leaving the panorama and provided their responses later at home offered more detailed answers compared to those given on site. This may be attributed to the absence of pressure to answer questions while simultaneously trying to enjoy the museum experience. Consequently, this unexpected outcome enhanced the quality of the data, revealing deeper insights.

The research was conducted over a two week time period in April, which consisted of five total visits to the museum. It is worth mentioning that prior to commencing the research, I visited the Panorama Mesdag a week beforehand to observe its elements and the impact it had on



me personally. These observations were documented as field notes and subsequently utilized as a guideline in formulating the diary like questions. This preliminary observation was crucial in understanding the immersive qualities of the panorama and their potential to evoke feelings of nostalgia, thereby ensuring the relevance and depth of the questions.



*Figure 2. QR code for Diary of Thoughts*

Upon leaving or preparing to enter Panorama Mesdag, participants were asked to complete a series of 11 open-ended questions, accessible via scanning a provided QR code leading to a Google Form seen in Figure 2. The form's first page consisted of an introduction and explanation surrounding the research, along with instructions and an attached consent form. Participants were required to read the consent form and indicate their agreement by checking a box affirming their understanding of the study's ethical considerations. Participants were assured of their ability to withdraw from the study at any point and were ensured of their anonymity throughout. It is worth mentioning that the research was conducted in English, with the option for participants to answer the questions in Dutch if they felt more comfortable doing so. Upon advancing to the subsequent page, prior to the questions, a prompt reading "Dear diary, today I visited the Panorama Mesdag..." aimed to evoke a diary-like format, encouraging introspective and reflective responses. Participants were required to answer 10 mandatory questions and were given the option to respond to an additional voluntary question designed to capture any thoughts or reflections not covered by the structured questions (see Appendix A for guided questions). This open ended question aimed to emulate the unrestricted nature of diary entries, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts without constraint. It is noteworthy that more than half of the participants took advantage of this opportunity to contribute additional insights.

### **3.3. Operationalisation**

The questions posed to participants were meticulously crafted based on the theoretical framework's theories, concepts, and ideas. These inquiries covered a spectrum of aspects, ranging from participants' emotional reactions, triggered memories, connection to the seaside, sensory elements, and reflections on Panorama Mesdag's role in comparison to authentic seaside experiences. Notably, given the research's nostalgia-driven focus and to preserve the authenticity of responses and minimize bias, the term 'nostalgia' was deliberately omitted from all questions. The design of the questions was purposefully open-ended, allowing participants to provide detailed and reflective responses, this format discouraged simplistic yes or no answers. Furthermore, the formulation of questions beginning with phrases such as "how," "in what ways," or "reflecting on" encouraged participants to delve deeper into their experiences and emotions.

Initially, participants were asked to describe their first emotions upon entering the panorama and how it made them feel, capturing the immediate sensory impact. Subsequently, they were prompted to recall specific memories triggered by the artwork, exploring the connection between the depicted scenes and their personal nostalgic experiences. Moreover, questions probed their feelings about nature and the seaside, investigating the emotional bonds and motivations behind coastal visits. Furthermore, participants were asked to identify familiar landmarks or activities within the panorama that resonated with their seaside memories, highlighting elements and activities that had the potential to evoke sentiments of nostalgia. In addition, comparisons between the panorama and real seaside experiences were encouraged, focusing on any missing elements affecting authenticity. Sensory aspects such as visual and auditory elements were discussed to understand how these contribute to immersion and sentiment evocation. Reflective questions then asked participants to envision themselves within the panorama scene, describing the sensations and emotions they might experience. Additionally, the study examined whether the panorama could substitute for actual seaside visits and if it sparked a desire to visit real coastal destinations. This comprehensive approach effectively captured the multifaceted nature of nostalgia and immersion, providing valuable insights into how the Panorama Mesdag and authentic seaside locations evoke emotional and sensory responses.

Lastly, given the open-ended nature of the questions, participants were afforded the liberty to provide responses of varying lengths according to their discretion. To offer guidance regarding the anticipated duration of the research activity, an estimated timeframe of 15-25 minutes was provided to participants. This delineation aimed to set expectations and facilitate informed decision making among potential participants. Moreover, by establishing a time frame, the research attracted individuals who were genuinely interested and willing to invest a considerable amount of time in providing substantive responses, thereby enhancing the depth and richness of the data collected.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

Upon completing the data collection, it was essential to proceed with analyzing the gathered information. This section will outline the application of thematic analysis as the chosen method for systematically interpreting and examining the data obtained from the participants. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within a qualitative dataset. This process involves systematic data coding to develop themes, which represents the researcher's ultimate analytical objectives. In this research, Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for analyzing the dataset were employed, beginning with familiarization with the data, followed by data coding, theme generation, theme development and review, theme refinement, defining and naming of themes, and finally, writing up the results.

Due to the online nature of the data collection, the researcher was able to review the responses on the same day they were submitted. This enabled the research to gain an early indication and understanding of potential themes. Considering the data was collected online, the analysis process was relatively straightforward as it was able to import all the textual data into ATLAS.ti without having to transcribe any responses. However, organizing the data involved some trial and error. Initially, responses were organized by question, grouping all participants' answers to each specific question. This approach was designed to facilitate the viewing and analysis of responses by aligning each question with specific aspects of the theoretical framework, thereby making it easier to identify patterns across the data. Nonetheless, this approach proved confusing, as many participants expanded on their answers across different questions, referring to previous responses or elaborating on stories in subsequent answers.

Consequently, the data was reorganized and analyzed on a participant basis, ensuring that codes and marked quotes remained contextually coherent.

After the initial reading, organizing and familiarizing of the data the process of coding could begin. This means that the collected raw data was systematically deconstructed into smaller segments, and each segment was assigned a specific label (Bryman, 2012). This process of coding was facilitated by the use of ATLAS.ti software, which played a crucial role in systematically labeling, quoting and color-coding of the codes. In essence, this process involved assigning labels to the most recurrent observations, creating codes such as “childhood memories,” “seaside escape,” “auditory senses,” and “immersion through staging”. These are merely examples, as approximately 38 codes were generated in total, the complete coding list and the code tree can be found in Appendices C and D. As the analysis progressed, emerging patterns became more apparent, allowing for the refinement and elimination of codes that, although interesting, were not relevant to the research objectives. This iterative process ensured a focused and relevant thematic analysis.

Through this coding process, the research was able to identify and categorize the data into broader themes. This was accomplished by grouping smaller codes into larger categories, known as coding groups. These coding groups enabled the study to refine them into overarching themes and then these themes were reviewed and refined multiple times to ensure data saturation. This process of analysis revealed four primary themes: memory and personal experiences, sensory experiences, connection with nature, and immersive elements. These themes will allow the research to answer the research question. Ultimately, this analysis yielded a variety of themes and subthemes, some of which were anticipated, while others were novel and unexpected.

## **4. Analysis and Results**

This chapter presents the findings derived from the analyzed data and is organized around four main themes that emerged from the research. The first theme elucidates on the elements of the Panorama Mesdag in which it is able to immerse its visitors into a seaside representation. The second delves into the sensory experiences at the panorama. The third theme highlights the connection participants have with the natural elements of the seaside. The last theme delves into the memories and personal experiences that were evoked within participants.

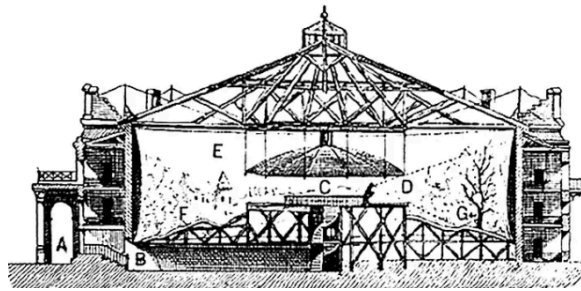
### **4.1. The Panorama Mesdag and its Immersive Elements**

The Panorama Mesdag, akin to other panoramas of its time, emerged as a visual embodiment of the Romantic era's desire to reconnect with idyllic landscapes. Despite appearing towards the end of the panorama craze, the Panorama Mesdag successfully captured the essence of this movement by immersing viewers in a detailed and expansive depiction of the Dutch seaside (Halkes, 1999). Unlike other panoramas that depicted distant and exotic scenes, the Panorama Mesdag featured a scene of Scheveningen, a location just a fifteen minute bike ride away from its original location. According to Halkes (1999), the compelling experience of the Panorama Mesdag, despite the proximity of the actual seaside, demonstrates how it rivals the appeal of the real seaside. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze how the Panorama Mesdag achieves this level of immersion.

#### 4.1.1. Entering the Panorama

The immersive experience at the Panorama Mesdag begins with the entry process. It mirrors the approach used in theme parks like the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, as discussed by Waysdorf and Reijnders (2018), where the entrance sets the stage for the immersive experience that follows. Visitors to the Panorama Mesdag begin their experience by ascending a dimly lit staircase, which then leads them to emerge at the center of the rotunda platform. Grau (2003) explains that this transition from darkness to light in panoramas signifies a departure from the ordinary, physical world and ushers visitors into a new realm. This physical separation from the outside world underscores Slater and Wilbur's (1997) concept of temporary detachment, which establishes a foundation for heightened presence and full immersion for visitors.

Participant responses support this notion in their diary of thoughts as one participant noted, "as I walked up the spiral staircase to the Panorama, what struck me immediately was how realistic and true to life the artwork felt" (Participant 8, Female, 24). Another participant commented, "coming up the stairs, a whole new world unfolds, as you go from darkness into this circular rotunda of light" (Participant 14, Male, 62). The seamless entry process for these participants was able to transport them to the scene depicted, enhancing their sense of immersion and making them feel as though they were stepping into another world.



*Figure 3. Entering from below. Retrieved from: Medium (2017)*

Furthermore, the clear boundary between entry and exit defined by the staircase in the panorama replicates the journey experienced by visitors to authentic seaside locations. As visitors move from the darkness of the staircase into the light-filled panorama, it mimics the holistic seaside experience, encompassing not just the state of being there but also the transition from urban environments to the open expanse of the seaside (Kelly, 2022). In other words, visitors move from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, represented by the darkness, to the tranquil, expansive view of the sea, symbolized by the light. According to Jarratt and Gammon (2016), this transition can elicit feelings of awe and relaxation, which are sentiments echoed in participant responses. A majority of participants noted that entering the panorama "evoked feelings of awe" (Participant 5, F, 60). This is further supported by a participant who stated they felt "a deep sense of awe and wonder, like I was seeing something truly special" (Participant 9, F, 25). Additionally, the effectiveness of this entry process design is reinforced by another participant who noted that the entrance significantly enhances the overall experience, stating that it helped "sell the experience" and allowed him to "experience both arriving at the beach and leaving it," making the visit feel complete and familiar (Participant 11, M, 26).

#### 4.1.2. Illusion

Upon ascending to the viewing platform, visitors are immersed in a 360-degree view of 19th century Scheveningen. The Panorama Mesdag, through its circular rotunda, blends reality and imagination using an illusion (Miller, 1996). This illusion is created by a frameless canvas that removes any external reference points, effectively substituting the viewer's reality with the painted scene (Halkes, 1999). As one participant noted, “because it is circular, you are literally in it” (Participant 3, F, 53). To enhance this illusion, the bottom edge of the painting is cleverly disguised with faux terrain, bridging the gap between the canvas and the viewing platform. This technique, paralleling methods analyzed by Waysdorf and Reijnders (2018), evokes a strong sense of authenticity and immersion, albeit through more traditional means. Specifically, the visual illusion is heightened by integrating real elements into the rotunda, creating a three-dimensional effect that enriches the multi-sensory experience for visitors (Grau, 1999). This effect is achieved through blending the painting's lower edge with actual sand, grass, and various props such as shoes, enhancing the scene's realism (Halkes, 1999).



*Figure 4. Faux Terrain. Retrieved from Panorama Mesdag (n.d.)*

Participant responses frequently underscore the effectiveness of the panorama's faux terrain in enhancing the illusion. One participant wrote down that "the sand and scattered objects were very effective" in creating a believable scene (Participant 4, M, 66). Another emphasized that "the vegetation on the dunes is what enhanced the realism of my experience the most" (Participant 8, F, 24). Additionally, one participant even described it as “visual trickery, like not seeing the edges of the canvas” (Participant 12, M, 55). The use of faux terrain and seamless blending techniques are not just aesthetic choices but strategic methods to enhance the sensory experience and create a convincing illusion of reality. This approach aligns with contemporary examples of immersive environments, which suggest that the integration of real-world elements

into an immersive environment can significantly enhance the viewer's engagement and presence (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018).

#### 4.1.3. Spatial Immersion

Through the entry process and the illusion created by the Panorama Mesdag, spatial immersion among its visitors is achieved. The criteria for this immersion are met when visitors feel transported into the space, providing them with a sense of presence, or in other words, a sense of "being there" (Slater & Wilbur, 1997). This immersive experience is vividly reflected in participant responses. One participant states, "in this moment, I am fully present, fully alive, and fully connected to the world around me. The panorama envelops me in its embrace" (Participant 16, M, 25). Another participant shares a similar sentiment, stating that they "feel fully immersed in the seaside depiction and it has, in a way, activated my imagination" (Participant 14, M, 62). These descriptions of feeling "fully present" and having their imaginations activated highlight the effectiveness of the Panorama Mesdag in creating a spatially immersive environment for its visitors. Furthermore, given that the panorama depicts 19th-century Scheveningen, it adds another layer of immersion, as many participants felt a sense of time traveling. This sensation of being transported not only spatially but also temporally was a recurring theme in participant responses. For instance, one participant noted, "the small details, like the boats, horses, old-fashioned clothes, a few scattered houses, and wagons, make it feel like you've time-traveled. (Participant 13, F, 21). While another participant recalled a sensation of time traveling to the simpler time of his childhood stating that "the artwork acted as a time machine, transporting me back to those carefree days of building sandcastles and chasing waves" (Participant 19, M, 58). These responses suggest that the Panorama Mesdag does not just transport visitors to a different world but also to a different time, enhancing the overall sense of immersion and a sense of nostalgia.

Additionally, spatial immersion is achieved through a sense of presence that involves active engagement with the immersive environment rather than passive observation (Ryan, 2003). This engagement is evident in the experiences of some participants, as one expressed, "I am drawn to explore every corner of this immersive environment, eager to discover hidden treasures" (Participant 16, M, 25). Given that the viewing platform is situated in the middle of the circular canvas, it is difficult not to engage with the environment, as visitors are compelled to



explore all the details within the panorama. This is reflected by a participant who wrote down “there were great details that really helped sell the illusion” (Participant 11, M, 26). Depending on where one stands on the viewing platform, different scenes become visible, such as the local fisherman’s town, the busy shore with fishing boats, or the grassy dunes. For some participants their active engagement within the space can make them see things that they recognize making the immersive experience more authentic. As a previous participant notes, “as I scan the panorama, I recognize familiar objects and scenes that resonate with my own memories of visiting the seaside.” (Participant 16, M, 25).



*Figure 5. Participant with Binoculars*

Active participation is further facilitated through the use of props, which significantly enhance the illusion and make the scene feel more realistic (Connell et al., 2021). For instance, the provision of binoculars at the Panorama Mesdag serves a dual purpose. Not only do they allow visitors to examine the details of the painting more closely, but they also fit naturally within the seaside context. By engaging in activities that appear fitting for the depicted scene, visitors can lose awareness that the scene is not real, thereby achieving a deeper level of immersion (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018). This immersive experience is clearly reflected in participant responses. One participant referred to the binoculars and notes that “it’s these small details that make the artwork feel so immersive and realistic. They mimic real life in a way that sparks the imagination and draws you deeper into the scene” (Participant 9, F, 25). This statement underscores the importance of such props in enhancing the realism and immersive quality of the panorama. The thoughtful integration of these elements not only enriches the

visual experience but also encourages visitors to interact with the environment, making the scene come alive in a way that mere observation could not achieve.

The provision of the binoculars also fosters interaction and active engagement with other visitors at the Panorama. As one participant who visited with friends noted that using the binoculars facilitated “experiencing something together and sharing what we are seeing with each other by pointing and discussing” (Participant 15, F, 23). The act of pointing out details, discussing perceptions, and collectively exploring the panorama creates a communal atmosphere, such interactions contribute to a deeper sense of immersion. When visitors communicate and share their experiences, they validate each other’s perceptions, making the simulated environment feel more real and tangible (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018). This collective engagement helps bridge the gap between the replica and the real, as the social dynamics mimic those found in authentic settings. This appears to be evident as another participant elaborates on how the binoculars “reminded me of how my grandma used to bring binoculars whenever we went to the beach. She loved birdwatching, and she would spend hours with me, pointing out different species and teaching me their names. The binoculars in the panorama felt like a nod to those memories” (Participant 9, F, 25).

#### 4.1.4. Aware of Immersion

Although a handful of participants felt immersed within the Panorama Mesdag, it is important to note that some participants were doubtful of the immersion. These participants experienced what Saler (2012) refers to as ironic imagination, where visitors are aware of the constructed nature of the environment yet choose to engage with it nonetheless. Multiple responses reflected this ‘double consciousness’. One participant remarked, “You know what you are seeing and feeling is not 'real,' yet it feels very much like you're overlooking a real setting” (Participant 12, M, 55). Another participant described it as a “strange sensation”, noting, “I am aware that I am standing inside a small room but at the same time having such a real perception of being at the beach” (Participant 13, F, 21). A third participant makes an intriguing analogy by stating “It feels like that feeling of looking at an old family picture, you know it's you and your family in the picture yet something about it feels removed and distant but in a beautiful way.” (Participant 13, F, 21). These responses highlight how some participants are aware that the Panorama Mesdag is not an authentic seaside, yet they still choose to suspend disbelief and

engage with the setting as though it were real. When participants are consciously aware of the artificial nature of the environment, their sense of genuine connection and presence may be compromised, ultimately affecting the depth of their experience.

#### **4.2. Sensory Experiences**

Although staging and technique significantly contribute to the immersive experience, sensory engagement, particularly through auditory cues, plays a crucial role in fostering a heightened sense of reality and emotional connection with the depicted scene (Ryan, 2003). When an environment effectively engages all sensory levels, it becomes authentic and allows visitors to experience embodiment (Crouch, 2000). This sensory experience is evident at the Panorama Mesdag, where the sounds of crying seagulls and crashing waves play over loudspeakers and fade into the background as one walks around the circular rotunda. Many participant responses reflect that the auditory stimuli enabled the panorama to immerse them in the depicted seaside. This is reflected in the following two responses, “the way the waves crashed and the seagulls squawked in the background, it was like I was right there on the shore” (Participant 18, F, 28). Similarly, another participant shared that, “the sound of crashing waves was very powerful in immersing me into the artwork” (Participant 20, F, 26). These responses demonstrate how the sensory stimuli at the Panorama Mesdag enable visitors to experience the depicted seaside authentically. The auditory elements bridge the gap between the real and the simulated, creating a believable environment. Through this, the Panorama Mesdag not only visually represents the seaside but also evokes the sounds and ambiance associated with it.

Another sensory stimulus frequently noted by participants is the changing of the natural light from the skylight above the viewing platform. This element was particularly effective, if not more so, in immersing participants within the seaside depiction. One participant remarked, “the lighting was probably the most impactful element of my first impression. The sun was shining from the skylight directly onto the portion of the painting depicting the shore, making the boats look ethereal” (Participant 8, F, 24). Another participant highlighted the authenticity of the natural light, stating, “It is very similar to what happens at the real seaside. Especially considering the unpredictable Dutch weather, this makes the artwork incredibly real” (Participant 14, M, 62). Therefore, the use of natural light in the Panorama Mesdag enhances the immersive experience by mimicking the dynamic lighting conditions one would encounter at an actual

seaside. As the light changes throughout the day, different parts of the panorama are illuminated, creating a sense of movement and time progression. Furthermore, the natural light contributes to the emotional impact of the experience. Bright sunlight casting warm hues on the shore can evoke feelings of warmth and tranquility, while diffused light through clouds can create a more somber and reflective atmosphere. A participant takes note of this by stating, “there is quite a dichotomy at the sea where it can be serene, beautiful and tranquil and then the next day it can be wild, powerful and chaotic.” (Participant 18, F, 28).

Additionally, the alignment of sensory input with emotional response deepens the viewer’s connection to the depicted environment (Ryan, 2003). Jarratt and Gammon (2016) highlight that the sensory stimulation experienced at the seaside can act as mnemonic triggers. This is vividly illustrated by a participant's response, who noted, “it was the memories and emotions stirred up by these sensory cues that truly immersed me in the scene” (Participant 19, M, 58). The auditory cues at the Panorama Mesdag, such as the sound of seagulls, serve as powerful triggers for personal memories. One participant remarked, “it made me think about all the times I heard seagulls as a kid and would worry about my ice cream being taken away” (Participant 13, F, 21). This illustrates how specific sounds can evoke childhood memories and associated emotions, enhancing the immersive experience. Furthermore another participant states that the auditory “elements help transport me mentally to the seaside, evoking feelings of serenity, joy, and nostalgia.” (Participant 16, M, 25). This response underscores the role of multi-sensory engagement associated with certain locations with in this case the seaside has the ability in evoking emotions and memories. This is further highlighted by one participant who reflects on how these sensory and visual elements "trigger vivid recollections of playing in the sand, building sandcastles, and swimming in the sea with loved ones" (Participant 16, M, 25). The interplay of natural light and auditory cues enables visitors to connect deeply with the depicted seaside and thus creating an emotionally resonant experience.

This connection to the depicted scene is further illustrated by a participant's response, noting how the auditory elements, including the sounds of seagulls and waves, along with the ambient noise from other visitors, enhanced the immersion. Reflecting on the essence of the seaside, the participant emphasized the importance of children's play in creating an authentic atmosphere. He remarked, "As there are kids here now, their chatting and playing around feels natural. While at other museums this would disrupt my experience, here it adds to it" (Participant

14, M, 62). This response highlights how natural, incidental sounds contribute to the overall authenticity and immersive quality of Panorama Mesdag. The interaction between curated auditory elements and the spontaneous sounds of children creates a dynamic soundscape that mirrors real-life seaside experiences.

Interestingly, the auditory and lighting simulation within the Panorama Mesdag also caused participants to imagine other sensory experiences that were not physically present. This demonstrates that an immersive environment, when perceived as authentic, can stimulate the imagination to evoke sensations that are not actually there. This is notable in several participant responses, with many reporting that they imagined feeling the wind and smelling the salty sea air. This is exemplified by a participant who stated, “the sounds and light changes are an exact replication of the seaside, making me imagine other senses such as the salty smell and the wind” (Participant 14, M, 62). Another participant noted, “my brain is playing a trick on me where I can almost feel the crisp wind on my cheeks” (Participant 19, F, 55). These responses highlight the immersive auditory cues, such as the sound of waves crashing and seagulls crying, coupled with the dynamic lighting, enhance the realism of the panorama. This realism prompts the brain to fill in the gaps with imagined sensory inputs.

Nonetheless, it is important to mention that a majority of participants also noted the absence of certain sensory experiences, which disrupted their immersive seaside experience. This is not surprising, as the Panorama Mesdag primarily engages the visual and auditory senses, but omits olfactory and other crucial tactile sensations. Participants specifically noted the lack of wind and the sensation of sand beneath their feet as significant omissions. One participant responded to the question of what was missing at the panorama by stating, “what I’m really missing is the smell of the beach and the salty humid air that sticks to your skin almost as if the wind painted on it” (Participant 8, F, 24). Another participant highlighted the absence of tactile sensations, particularly “walking barefoot in the sand,” as a missing element from the Panorama Mesdag (Participant 15, F, 23). As indicated in the theoretical framework, where scholars such as Kelly (2022), Jarratt and Gammon (2016) and Obrador Pons (2007) indicate that sensory elements such as the smell of the sea, the feel of sand, and the sensation of wind blowing through one's hair are integral to the seaside experience. The absence of these sensory inputs can affect the perceived authenticity of the immersive environment.

### 4.3. Connection with Nature

As visitors interact with the Panorama Mesdag by walking around, looking through binoculars, and engaging with its sensory stimuli, they experience a form of embodiment (Crouch, 2000). This embodiment can lead to the development of an emotional connection to that place, or a sense of place (Relph, 1997). Key features of a sense of place include the physical setting, activities, and the meanings associated with a location (Relph, 1997). Although the Panorama Mesdag makes a commendable effort to recreate the seaside experience through physical seaside elements such as the faux terrain and seaside activities like using binoculars, it falls short of fully replicating it. This limitation is particularly evident in the section above, where participants expressed that the absence of certain sensory stimuli hindered their immersive experience. However, while the Panorama Mesdag may fall short in replicating certain physical and sensory aspects that creates a sense of place, it is able to recreate the emotional connections that individuals form with the seaside.

This is evidenced by the significant number of participants who noted experiencing a sense of connection to the nature depicted in the artwork, comparable to their experiences with the actual seaside. One participant particularly illustrated this, stating, "The panorama made me feel a deep connection to nature and the sea... the sea has a kind of power that I can't explain" (Participant 9, Female, 25). This response demonstrates how the panorama mirrors the powerful emotional ties individuals have with the sea and suggests that the sea's power is not only in its actual presence but also in its artistic representation. Another participant echoed a similar sentiment, noting, "A sense of vastness and timelessness comes over me. It is almost an eerie feeling, as I feel connected to the seaside depicted in the artwork as much as I do when visiting the seaside." (Participant 14, Male, 62). This demonstrates how the panorama effectively captures the expansive and timeless qualities inherent to coastal environments, and in turn is able to replicate a sense of 'seasideness.' The panorama's ability to evoke similar emotional connections makes visitors feel as though they are part of a larger, enduring natural world, even within the confines of an indoor setting.

Additionally, Halkes (1999) elaborates on this by explaining that when visitors experience the Panorama Mesdag, their subjective self is subordinated to the larger unity of nature. The immersive and grand scale of the artwork diminishes the visitor's individual presence, making them feel part of a greater whole, a sensation also reflected at the seaside

(Halkes, 1999). This experience often carries a spiritual dimension, as visitors feel a connection to something greater than themselves (Jarratt, 2015). One participant illustrated this by noting, “Whilst looking at the panorama ... I have always had this profound connection, particularly with the seaside, almost in a spiritual way, something that is difficult to describe” (Participant 14, Male, 62). Another participant echoed similar spiritual sentiments, emphasizing a more existential perspective. The participant wrote that the panorama should “remind us that there is something big out there, that this world we live on is more than a floating rock, that there is power in nature and that we are, after all, part of it too” (Participant 20, Female, 26). The panorama’s ability to invoke such responses indicates its success in transcending mere visual representation. These introspective engagement mirrors the experiences of seaside visitors, reinforcing the panorama's effectiveness in fostering an emotional connection to the replicated nature.

The connection that visitors feel to the seaside depicted in the Panorama Mesdag significantly enhances its perceived authenticity. Specifically, the Panorama Mesdag is perceived as authentic when visitors experience existential authenticity (Wang, 1999). This form of authenticity allows visitors to express their true selves, free from the constraints of everyday life. This is particularly evident among participants who view the seaside as a place of escape. For instance, one participant remarked that the seaside depicted in the panorama “feels almost like an escape from reality, to a simpler and more peaceful place where none of my problems exist” (Participant 20, Female, 26). Another participant noted, “I feel truly relaxed and take a moment to appreciate the natural beauty that I normally do not have access to as a city resident” (Participant 11, Male, 26). These responses illustrate that the seaside is perceived as an escape from the fast-paced demands of modern life, enabling a reconnection with one's true self. This contrasts sharply with the often constrained experiences of their normal lives.

This is further demonstrated through the frequent use of the Dutch term "uitwaaien" in participants' responses. "Uitwaaien" is a Dutch term that is difficult to translate directly into English, but it loosely describes the act of walking on the beach to clear one's mind and refresh oneself. One participant highlighted how effectively the Panorama Mesdag portrays this sense of 'uitwaaien,' stating, “If I ever need to escape a hard study day and the weather is not favorable, I will definitely consider coming to the panorama as it truly has that 'uitwaaien' effect on me” (Participant 18, Female, 28). This response underscores the panorama’s ability to replicate the

restorative qualities of a windy Dutch seaside walk, thereby providing its visitors a sense of existential authenticity. Additionally, the depicted seaside, much like the real one, seems to embody 'glacial time,' transporting participants to a realm detached from the practicalities of everyday life (Urry, 1990).

Ultimately, the participants' connection to nature and their emotional responses toward the recreated seaside demonstrate that they experienced a sense of 'seasideness' within the Panorama Mesdag (Jarratt, 2015). The panorama's ability to engage emotions allows visitors to later on relive and cherish their seaside memories. By mirroring the emotional connections typically experienced at the seaside, the Panorama Mesdag provides visitors with an experience that feels existentially authentic as it allows participants to be true to their own identity and memories. This emotional engagement ensures that the panorama is not merely an accurate depiction of the seaside but also a personal reflection of the visitors' own experiences and connections to the natural world.

#### **4.4. Memories and Personal Experiences**

##### 4.4.1. A Simpler Time

Nostalgia can be experienced in relation to various aspects of the past, but is often centered around a longing for a perceived simpler time, a concept Boym (2001) refers to as reflective nostalgia. This sentiment is rooted in a romanticized notion of returning to an idyllic past, driven by dissatisfaction with the present and a desire to escape the complexities of modern life (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Among participant responses, this longing for a simpler past emerged as a significant theme, characterized by a yearning for a time less influenced by modern developments. One participant illustrated this sentiment by reflecting on the panoramic view of the seaside, stating, "There's this sense of calm and simplicity about the past that we don't have anymore. When I look at the panorama, it's obvious that it can't be from today; it doesn't have all the modern clutter like cars, electronic billboards, fast food places, or ice cream stands every few feet" (Participant 13, F, 21). Similarly, another participant expressed this longing by noting, "The depicted seaside in the panorama makes me yearn for a simpler time, a time without technology, a time when life seemed simpler" (Participant 14, M, 62). These reflections underscore a nostalgic desire to return to a time perceived as less complicated and more serene



than the modern present. This longing for simpler times reflects an existential nostalgic response, wherein individuals seek refuge in an idealized past to avoid contemporary challenges (Goulding, 1999).

Furthermore, this type of nostalgic response tends to view the past through rose-colored glasses, idealizing it as a period of greater contentment and simplicity (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). This sentiment is beautifully captured by a Portuguese participant who stated, “Standing in the Panorama Mesdag, I’m reminded of the Portuguese feelings of *saudade*. It’s a mix of longing, sadness and nostalgia...It’s like a yearning for the good old days when life was simple” (Participant 20, F, 26). This expression of ‘*saudade*’ encapsulates the complex emotions associated with nostalgia, blending a deep longing for the past with a recognition of its irrevocable loss (Boym, 2001)

Additionally, the longing for a simpler time is further enhanced by a sense of nostalgia intertwined with sadness and disappointment due to the transformation of cherished places over time. Participants express a yearning for the past and a sense of regret for the changes brought about by modernization. One participant notes, “I just think it’s a shame how a beautiful and romantic fisherman’s village turned into such a run down and chaotic disaster” (Participant 19, M, 58). This quote highlights the participant’s sorrow and regret over the degradation of a once idyllic location, now perceived as spoiled by contemporary developments. Similarly, another participant shares, “I do feel a sense of sadness that the Scheveningen that I used to visit as a child has changed so much and is almost unrecognizable... I think that is what makes this artwork so special is that it depicts a romantic idea of Scheveningen, where it was merely a fisherman’s village and where mass tourism had not influenced it yet” (Participant 14, M, 62). This sentiment underscores how the artwork becomes significant because it captures an idealized, untouched version of Scheveningen, providing a visual representation of the past that contrasts sharply with its present state.

This juxtaposition is further illustrated by another participant who describes her first visit to Scheveningen after moving from Portugal: “I found it to be quite loud and flashy, with lots of snack bars and shops, flashy signs, bikes, and people. I missed that feeling of just being me and the sea. Here at the panorama, I am reminded of home. It is quiet and peaceful. I feel connected to this peace. It all feels a bit simpler than the beach today and reminds me of the simplicity of the beach back home” (Participant 20, F, 26).

The participant's sense of nostalgia is evident as she longs for the simplicity and serenity of her past experiences by the sea. The Panorama Mesdag's depiction of the seaside provides an environment stripped of the distractions of contemporary beach settings, allowing visitors to reconnect with the unembellished simplicity of nature. This reflection also illustrates existential authenticity, where the participant finds a genuine and authentic connection to her sense of self through the experience of the Panorama Mesdag. Ultimately, these responses illustrate how nostalgia can be a complex emotion, encompassing both a yearning for the simplicity and beauty of the past and a critique of the present (Boym, 2001). They reveal the participants' deep emotional connections to their past experiences and environments, highlighting how the changes over time have impacted their perceptions and feelings about these places. This is further established by the response of a participant who “wonders how Mesdag would feel if he saw what had happened to his beloved Scheveningen” (Participant 14, M, 62). This reflection adds a historical dimension to the sense of loss, suggesting that even the original artist of the panorama might share in the nostalgia and regret for the transformation of the seaside town.

#### 4.4.2. Childhood memories

According to Jarratt and Gammon (2016), seaside trips during one's formative years, characterized by freedom, family interactions, and play, often become treasured memories for individuals. Reijnders (2015) describes these memories as "small treasure troves," consisting of recollections from one's youth, often recounted with great fondness. This is particularly highlighted in one participant's response: “viewing the Panorama Mesdag was like taking a stroll down memory lane, where each brushstroke was a step closer to the seaside of my youth” (Participant 19, M, 58). Although these memories are not consciously recalled on a daily basis, they resurface when triggered by specific places and stimuli (Reijnders, 2015). These triggers can include the sound of waves, changes in lighting, the use of binoculars, and the overall sense of place associated with the seaside. This is significantly evident in the responses of many participants, as the majority referred to their childhood when viewing the seaside depicted in the Panorama Mesdag.

In other words, the panorama effectively triggered and unlocked participants' treasure troves of childhood memories, prompting them to recount these recollections in varying degrees of detail. One participant was particularly moved by the visual aspect of the panorama, recalling,

"as a kid I would love to swim in the sea. The colors of the ocean depicted in the art really reminded me of that, as it is not crystal clear like other seas but more muddy. I would always be scared that there would be creatures trying to eat my feet!" (Participant 18, Female, 28). Another participant recalled childhood memories after using the binoculars, stating, "My brothers and I used to go bird watching or watch the ships in the distance with binoculars that we got from our grandpa. This was a long time ago, of course, but the use of the binoculars triggered memories in me as it mirrored what I used to do at the seaside" (Participant 14, Male, 62). These responses demonstrate how the seaside portrayed in the panorama serves as a catalyst for childhood nostalgia. The participants' reflections illustrate how childhood memories can often remain dormant in everyday life but can be recalled through sensory stimuli—whether the colors of the ocean or the use of binoculars. This process allows individuals to relive moments of joy, fear, and familial bonding experienced at the seaside.

Additionally, participants frequently recalled childhood memories involving activities centered around play, particularly interactions with sand and the ocean. One participant noted, "Looking at the painting reminded me of many things from my childhood. I remembered going to the beach with my grandma, building sandcastles, and feeling the sand between my toes" (Participant 9, Female, 25). This example highlights how the seaside is perceived as a legitimate space for performative play, where both adults, such as the grandmother, and children can engage in activities on equal footing (Obrador-Pons, 2007). Furthermore, another participant recounted that the panorama made him feel as though he was "stepping back in time to those carefree days of my youth, where I played with siblings for hours on end. Building sandcastles, eating ice cream, and swimming in the ocean" (Participant 19, Male, 58). This nostalgic reflection emphasizes the fond memories he associates with the seaside, where the act of play served as a medium for bonding with his siblings. These accounts collectively illustrate the enduring significance of the beach as a site of shared, intergenerational play, and how the Panorama Mesdag is able to evoke this 'real' nostalgia among its visitors. The panorama not only captures the visual essence of the seaside but also rekindles cherished memories, allowing visitors to reconnect with the simplicity and joy of their youth.

Additionally, it is worth noting that most participants' responses regarding nostalgia were based on 'real' nostalgia, as they were rooted in personally remembered past experiences. However, one participant experienced simulated nostalgia (Goulding, 1999). This particular

participant recalled a story prompted by viewing the panorama: “A story my grandmother told me whilst growing up of people who would visit the panorama during the war because they missed the sea due to the German occupation. That has always stuck with me” (Participant 14, Male, 62). In this instance, nostalgia at the Panorama Mesdag is experienced vicariously. The participant does not draw upon his own memories but instead relives the nostalgia of those who visited the panorama during the German occupation to feel closer to the sea they missed. This form of nostalgia, experienced through someone else’s story and memory, underscores the panorama's ability to evoke a sense of longing and emotional connection, even for experiences that are not personally lived.

Furthermore, childhood memories recalled by participants were often associated with a simpler, carefree time characterized by a sense of freedom (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). One participant illustrated this sentiment by reflecting on a shoe prop in the faux terrain, which immediately reminded her of taking off her shoes upon arriving at the seaside. She elaborated, stating that she “thinks shoes can be seen as a symbol, taking off the seriousness and constraints of everyday life and freeing your inner child with every footprint left in the sand” (Participant 18, Female, 28). This observation highlights the symbolic act of removing shoes as a metaphor for shedding adult responsibilities and constraints of everyday life, thereby reconnecting with the unburdened joy of childhood. Another participant echoed the notion of freedom, expressing a longing for the uninhibited liberty experienced during childhood. She wished she had “the same freedom I had as a kid. Running and roaming with no care in the world. With nowhere else to be. No one to please. Nothing to do. Just to be there. Enjoying it” (Participant 20, Female, 26). This reflection highlights the stark contrast between the boundless freedom of childhood and the structured demands of adult life, suggesting that nostalgia for childhood serves as a defense mechanism against dissatisfaction with the present (Boym, 2001).

#### 4.4.3. Cross-generational

As briefly mentioned in the previous subsection, a significant factor contributing to participants' nostalgia within the immersive environment of the panorama is the cross-generational appeal of the seaside. More specifically, visiting the seaside has evolved into a family tradition that spans multiple generations (Kelly, 2022). As older generations share and relive cherished moments from their past seaside adventures with later generations, a sense of

nostalgia can be experienced. This nostalgia arises from the continuity and repetition of experiences that link different generations through shared memories and experiences. This is particularly evident in the responses of older participants in the study. For instance, one participant noted, “viewing the artwork triggered memories of carefree days at the beach with my siblings and later with my own grandchildren” (Participant 19, M, 58). This response demonstrates how the seaside, even one that is not real, serves as a conduit for nostalgic recollections, as this participant links past experiences with siblings with new experiences with present family members like his grandchildren. After all, family memories made at the seaside are cyclical, with traditions and stories passed down to generations (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Childhood memories frequently inspire adults to bring their own children and grandchildren to the seaside, hoping to share the same pleasurable experiences from their past.

Another participant reflects this notion of wanting to share his own pleasurable experiences from the past by bringing his grandchildren to the seaside. This participant notes, “In the summertime, of course, I visit the seaside with my grandchildren, where I get to play and swim with them, something I did with my grandparents as well. Of course, a lot has changed since my time, but the essence has remained the same. Reflecting on it, the place may change physically, but the memories remain, and the nature of the seaside remains the same” (Participant 14, M, 62). This statement underscores how the consistent sensory experiences at the seaside, such as playing and swimming, are often passed down through generations. The participant's account illustrates that he engages in the same activities with his grandchildren that he once enjoyed with his grandparents, demonstrating the enduring nature of these shared family traditions. This continuity not only fosters a sense of nostalgia but also reinforces the emotional connections associated with seaside visits, highlighting their timeless appeal and significance within family narratives.

The act of reenacting childhood activities at the seaside underscores the timelessness of these locations, as individuals experience similar feelings and activities now as they did during their youth. This notion of timelessness is further reinforced by a third participant who observed, “visiting the Panorama Mesdag signified a message to us from the people of the past: we are not so unlike. We all enjoy a day in the sun on the open beach with our friends or a walk down the boardwalk and in the sand with our boyfriends, girlfriends, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, grandparents etc.” (Participant 15, F, 23). This reflection highlights the enduring nature of

seaside experiences, emphasizing that the fundamental pleasures of spending time at the beach are shared across generations. The participant's remark suggests a connection between contemporary visitors and those from the past, implying that the essence of enjoying seaside activities remains unchanged despite the passage of time. It illustrates how the seaside serves as a constant in an ever-changing world, providing a reliable source of joy and connection for people of all ages and backgrounds.

#### 4.4.4. Loss of loved ones

Lastly, while nostalgia experienced at the seaside is often perceived as positive due to childhood and generational memories, it can also manifest as a more melancholic emotion through the remembrance of lost loved ones. After all, nostalgia is a bittersweet sentiment (Boym, 2001). This duality is particularly evident in the responses of two participants. For instance, one participant expressed gratitude for the Panorama Mesdag's ability to evoke nostalgic feelings, stating, "Revisiting old memories that I forgot about, and thinking about my family, as most have passed away, is something I hold dear. The seaside, whether it is this artwork or the real one, has such power...I'm thankful I got to reflect on my memories" (Participant 14, M, 62). This reflection demonstrates that, although the seaside depicted in the Panorama Mesdag evoked sad memories of family members who have passed away, the participant still found solace and gratitude in remembering them. The power of the seaside, as represented in the artwork, lies in its ability to evoke both joy and sorrow, allowing individuals to reconnect with their past.

Similarly, another participant shared a beautiful story of losing a loved one within the family. This particular participant is from Scheveningen, and her family has lived there their entire lives. In previous responses, she emphasized, "Growing up in Scheveningen, the seaside was always a big part of my life" (Participant 9, F, 25). She further reflects on, "The profound emotional impact that the panorama had on me, especially considering the tragic story of my grandma's sister who drowned at sea so many years ago. Despite the sadness of this memory, visiting the Panorama Mesdag allowed me to pay tribute to my family's history and find solace in the beauty of the seaside that has always been a part of our lives" (Participant 9, F, 25). This response underscores how the panorama not only evokes personal and familial memories but also provides a space for honoring and reconciling with past tragedies. Ultimately, one of the

roles of seaside nostalgia is to uphold these narratives that reflect on the past, shape the present, and extend into the future (Jarratt, 2015). The immersive seaside of the Panorama Mesdag serves as a powerful catalyst for these reflections.

## 5. Conclusion

Reflecting on and returning to the central research question of this thesis: **How do the immersive elements of the Panorama Mesdag recreate the seaside environment and evoke nostalgic feelings in visitors that parallel those experienced at authentic seaside locations?** This thesis sought to investigate how the immersive elements inherent at the Panorama Mesdag were able to effectively replicate the seaside environment, and in doing so were able to evoke nostalgic sentiments in its visitors that parallel those experienced at authentic seaside locations. In response to Tunstall and Penning-Roswell's (1998) call for qualitative research on individuals' lifelong experiences with the seaside and in an attempt to answer the research question, a diary of thoughts was employed. This method captured the reflections of 20 participants who visited the Panorama Mesdag

These reflections provided valuable insights revealing that the immersive elements of the Panorama Mesdag—consisting of the entry process, the visual illusion, the faux terrain, the provision of props, and the auditory cues—effectively created an environment that replicated the seaside setting. This is evidenced by the majority of participants reporting a strong sense of presence within the panorama, as reflected in sentiments of "being there" and feelings of having time traveled (Slater & Wilbur, 1997). Furthermore, the active engagement facilitated by the spatial immersion of the Panorama Mesdag and the provision of binoculars allowed visitors to suspend disbelief and detach from the physical world (Ryan, 2003). However, it is important to note that some participants were unable to fully achieve a sense of presence, experiencing instead a sense of double consciousness (Saler, 2012). These participants recognized the artificial nature of the environment but ultimately chose to engage with it as if it were real.

Additionally, it is crucial to address the significant absence of certain sensory experiences, particularly olfactory and tactile sensations, which hindered participants from fully feeling immersed in the seaside environment. Specifically, the lack of the sensation of wind, the feeling of sand, and the smell of salty air—all vital components of a seaside experience—were evidently missing (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Beyond these sensory stimuli, essential seaside activities such as building sandcastles and swimming in the ocean were also absent, detracting from the authenticity of the Panorama Mesdag. However, given that the Panorama Mesdag is over 100 years old, it is important to recognize its limitations and not be overly critical of its lack of technologically advanced sensory stimuli. Initially, the researcher feared that this deficiency in



sensory stimuli would negatively impact participants' responses, given the close link between sensory experience and nostalgic reflection at the seaside (Jaratt, 2015). However, this concern proved to be unfounded. This outcome can be attributed to the strong emotional connections participants developed with the nature of the recreated seaside environment. These emotional bonds enabled participants to experience both a sense of "seasideness" (Jarratt, 2015) and achieve existential authenticity (Wang, 1999). This is evident in the pattern that emerged, where participants focused not on the objective authenticity of the environment, questioning whether it was real or true to life, but rather on their own authentic experiences within it and their sense of feeling true to themselves. This was reflected in responses indicating that the Panorama Mesdag served as an escape from everyday life, a place where they could immerse themselves in the vastness of the painting and feel part of something larger (Jarratt, 2015).

This focus on personal experience over objective authenticity allowed the Panorama Mesdag to become a sanctuary for introspection and reflection. This is significantly mirrored in the participants' vulnerable responses, where they shared memories and stories about their childhood adventures, the loss of loved ones, and their yearning for a simpler time. These reflections underscored a concept that, while perhaps already assumed, is now further validated: nostalgia is indeed an integral part of the seaside experience. Overall, both 'real' and reflective nostalgia were predominantly experienced at the Panorama Mesdag, with the exception of one participant who experienced 'simulated' nostalgia through a story passed down by his grandmother (Goulding, 1999; Boym, 2001). Furthermore, all responses exhibited an existential nostalgic response, where participants idealized the past while reflecting on the shortcomings of the present (Goulding, 1999). This was particularly evident in the responses seen in the theme of simpler times. This existential nostalgia was also apparent when participants recalled childhood stories of carefree fun, play, and freedom which arises as a defense mechanism of the routine of everyday life (Boym, 2001). The nostalgia experienced at the Panorama Mesdag conveyed a bittersweet longing akin to that felt at an authentic seaside, as visitors yearned for the perceived simplicity of a bygone era and their childhood days spent at the beach with family, as well as moments shared with loved ones who have since passed.

Ultimately, despite the absence of certain sensory elements, the Panorama Mesdag succeeded in conjuring sentiments of nostalgia akin to those felt at authentic seaside locations. The immersive elements wove together a tapestry of reflective and emotional experiences,

enabling visitors to lose themselves in the recreated seaside, much like waves washing over the shore, bringing with them memories of a cherished past. In the words of one participant, "Just like the tide, the panorama ebbed and flowed with memories, washing over me with a sense of nostalgia and wonder" (Participant 19, M, 58).

Thus, this research not only fills a critical gap in the academic literature on the emotional dimensions of seaside tourism (Kelly, 2022) but also provides valuable insights into how immersive environments can evoke emotional responses similar to those experienced in real locations (Morales et al., 2019). This is particularly relevant given the rise of VR tourism, where the potential to create convincing and emotionally engaging virtual experiences is rapidly expanding (Guttentag, 2010). Therefore, the Panorama Mesdag, with its historical roots, has evolved into modern forms like virtual reality, serving as both an inspiration and a practical example of how contemporary media can achieve greater immersion. After all, the objective of media development has always been to create more immersive and engaging experiences for its audiences (Uricchio, 2011). Therefore, the Panorama Mesdag not only enhances our understanding of the emotional aspects of seaside tourism but also offers insights into how contemporary technologies can leverage sentiments such as nostalgia to create deeply immersive experiences.

Additionally, this research provides valuable insights that can transform societal approaches to preserving and revitalizing coastal destinations (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). By examining how immersive environments like the Panorama Mesdag evoke nostalgia and emotional connections, this study underscores the importance of designing tourism strategies that leverage these exact sentiments. Such strategies not only enhance visitor experiences but also contribute to the revitalization of struggling yet cherished seaside towns (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). This is particularly important given the findings on the emotional significance of coastal areas for participants, especially those who expressed sadness and regret regarding the modernization and commercialization of seaside towns like Scheveningen. Moreover, the research highlights the integral role of the seaside in family narratives and traditions, emphasizing that maintaining these connections is essential for preserving cultural heritage and facilitating their continuity (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016).

Additionally, this research significantly contributes to the field of tourism by broadening the understanding of seaside tourism beyond the predominantly Anglocentric perspective

(Agarwal, 2002). By including international participants, the study diversifies the insights on seaside tourism, capturing memories and stories from various global backgrounds, such as the seaside in Portugal and the United States. While the research includes Dutch participants who discuss their experiences with Dutch seaside destinations, this does not significantly broaden the scope due to the geographical and cultural similarities with British seaside tourism (Agarwal, 2002). Therefore, the inclusion of international perspectives is crucial in expanding the scope of research and providing a more comprehensive understanding of seaside tourism globally.

However, despite the relevance and contributions of this thesis, it is important to elucidate some limitations, particularly in relation to the research method. Naturally, this research is subject to certain limitations that may impact its validity and reliability. The use of a structured diary method, while effective for capturing real-time reflections and reducing recall bias, limited the spontaneity of participants' responses due to the predefined nature of the questions. This method also precluded follow-up questions, preventing deeper exploration of certain responses. Consequently, interviews, with their inherent capacity for follow up questions, might have provided a better opportunity for in-depth exploration. Additionally, the sample size of 20 participants, although adequate for achieving data saturation in this specific research (Fusch & Ness, 2015), may not fully represent the diverse visitor population of the Panorama Mesdag. This limitation potentially restricts the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not capture the full range of experiences and perspectives present in a broader population. To address reliability, the study maintained an awareness of researcher reflexivity to mitigate individual biases in data interpretation, as recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000). Despite these measures, the inherent subjectivity of qualitative research necessitates cautious interpretation of the results, acknowledging that the findings are context-specific and may not be universally applicable (Bryman, 2012).

Regarding future research, participants in the diary of thoughts were inquired whether the seaside depicted at the Panorama Mesdag could serve as a replacement for an authentic seaside location. Although this question was ultimately deemed irrelevant to the primary research question and thus not included in the final analysis, it holds potential for future investigation. One participant's response to this question highlights its significance: "If the sea level rises, this is especially precious" (Participant 8, F, 24). Given the urgency of the climate crisis and ongoing societal changes that threaten both the existence and accessibility of seaside environments,

exploring whether contemporary immersive environments can fully replicate the seaside becomes increasingly relevant.

The relevance of this future research is heightened by Urry's (2002) concept of "the end of tourism," which suggests that the traditional distinctions between tourism and everyday life are becoming increasingly blurred. Therefore, future research should investigate the potential of immersive technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), to provide the sensory elements that the Panorama Mesdag and similar representations lack. These technologies could offer valuable insights into maintaining emotional, sensory, and nostalgic connections to environments threatened by climate change, potentially serving as viable alternatives or supplements to physical travel (Gale, 2009). This future research would not only support the notion of the de-differentiation of tourism but also provide valuable insights for the future implementation of immersive experiences as replacements for authentic locations in tourism studies. Furthermore, by fostering emotional and nostalgic ties through immersive experiences, these technologies could ensure that the cultural significance and personal memories associated with seaside locations are maintained. Ultimately, this future research would enhance the generalizability of the research's findings and potentially offer solutions for preserving the essence of tourism in a rapidly changing world.

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## 7. Appendices

### Appendix A - Diary of Thoughts Guided Questions

Dear Diary,

Today I visited the Panorama Mesdag...

1. Describe your initial reaction upon entering the Panorama Mesdag. What are the first emotion(s) that come up and how does this immersive artwork make you feel?
2. Can you recall any specific memories or past experiences that were triggered by viewing the artwork?
3. When you look at the panorama, how does it make you feel about nature and the seaside? Why do you visit the seaside?
4. Were there any familiar landmarks, activities, or scenery within the panorama that particularly resonate with your own memories of visiting the seaside? Think about the use of props (sand, binoculars, etc.).
5. Continuing to think about your own background and memories. How does the panorama differ from experiences and memories at authentic seaside landscapes? Is there anything specific that is missing?
6. Consider the sensory aspects of the panorama, such as the visual (natural daylight) and auditory elements (sounds of the sea). Did you find these elements to immerse you in the scene? Please describe how these elements evoke certain sentiments and memories.
7. Reflecting on your visit to the Panorama Mesdag, did you find yourself longing for or reminiscing about specific aspects of coastal life depicted in the artwork?
8. Imagine yourself transported into the scene depicted in the panorama. Describe the sensations and emotions you might envision experiencing as if you were truly there.
9. Do you feel as though the panorama Mesdag can be a replacement for going to authentic seaside landscapes?
10. Reflect on any desires or motivations the panorama may have sparked to revisit or explore seaside destinations in person. Why or why not?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience viewing the panorama Mesdag? (Optional)

## Appendix B - Participant Overview

	Date of submission	Gender	Age	Nationality
Participant 1	16/04/2024	Male	53	The Netherlands
Participant 2	16/04/2024	Female	54	France
Participant 3	16/04/2024	Female	53	The Netherlands
Participant 4	16/04/2024	Male	66	United Kingdom
Participant 5	18/04/2024	Female	60	British Virgin Islands
Participant 6	18/04/2024	Male	24	United Kingdom
Participant 7	18/04/2024	Female	71	The Netherlands
Participant 8	18/04/2024	Female	24	Belguim
Participant 9	19/04/2024	Female	25	The Netherlands
Participant 10	19/04/2024	Female	26	The Netherlands
Participant 11	19/04/2024	Male	26	The Netherlands
Participant 12	19/04/2024	Male	55	United States
Participant 13	23/04/2024	Female	21	The Netherlands
Participant 14	23/04/2024	Male	62	the Netherlands
Participant 15	23/04/2024	Female	23	United States
Participant 16	23/04/2024	Male	25	The Netherlands
Participant 17	23/04/2024	Male	48	The Netherlands
Participant 18	24/04/2024	Female	28	Portugal
Participant 19	24/04/2024	Male	58	United Kingdom
Participant 20	24/04/2024	Female	26	Portugal

## Appendix C - Code Sheet

Coding Group/ Theme			
Connection with Nature	Memories and Personal Experiences	Sensory Experiences	Immersive Experiences
Smaller Codes within Group			
• Seaside escape	• Bygone era	• Auditory sense	• Staging
• Timelessness	• Childhood memories	• Lack of senses	• Technique
• Uitwaaien	• Generational memories	• Tactile sense	• Senses
• Tourism	• Lost time/ people	• Light	• Imagination
• Changing landscapes	• Past longing	• Imagination of senses	• Time Travelling
• Romantic feeling		• Combination of all senses	• Doubtful of immersion
			• Props

## Appendix D - Code Tree: Visualization of Relation Between Codes

