Design Thinking:

Walt Disney World’s Epcot

Stephanie Wenning
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**INTRODUCTION**

In this project students were asked to choose a specific example of design activity and focus on the design thinking that went into the actual project. The given areas of design activity to choose from included: architecture, brands, products, services, and experiences. While at the same time the aspects to analyze included: corporate philosophy, design philosophy, design language, ergonomics/usability, and sustainability. With this in mind, the project needed to include a qualitative focus on the philosophy behind the project and the detail of its manifestation.

**BACKGROUND**

Before amusement parks and theme parks were around, there were carnivals and funfairs that traveled around the country to entertain those young and old. These attractions were only temporary and were at a certain location for a period of time ranging from a few days to a week. They not only lasted a short period of time, but they also were very scarce and rare because a carnival may only come once a year to a city if at all. The picture to the right depicts what a carnival advertisement would have looked like in the 1800s.

Throughout history however, more stationary attractions came to be and they soon become known as amusement parks and theme parks. To most theme and amusement parks are the same, but while they are both specific terms that are used to categorize entertainment attractions, they do however vary. A theme park is actually more distinct than an amusement park because it known for having buildings, landscaping, and attractions in which all of the components are based on a specific theme. Theme parks are broken down into sections which in some cases are known as “worlds” or “lands” by these particular themes, hence the name theme park. The top 10 theme park in the United States are listed on the timeline below to show the history of theme parks. Also below the timeline are pictures displaying theme parks for a visual display of the different “lands” and “worlds”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cedar Point</th>
<th>Knoebels Amusement Resort</th>
<th>Walt Disney World Resort</th>
<th>Schlitterbahn</th>
<th>Universal Studios Florida</th>
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<td>1870</td>
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<td>Busch Gardens</td>
<td>Disneyland</td>
<td>King’s Island</td>
<td>Six Flags Great America</td>
<td>Legoland California</td>
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Universal Studios Orlando

King’s Island

Busch Gardens
When deciding on a company to focus on design thinking, Walt Disney World was an easy choice for me because to me and many others around the world it is “The Happiest Place on Earth.” Walt Disney world has gained this image because of its philosophy which differentiates itself from other theme park competition. Also the characteristics and aspects of Disney truly place it higher up in the theme park marketplace with respect to its rivals.

Walt Disney, the creator and mastermind behind all of the magic, wanted to create a theme park that was different than the other amusement and theme parks around the 1950s, which were known as dirty and dangerous places that were mainly geared towards thrill-seeking teenagers. Walt didn’t like this concept because it generally resulted in teenagers enjoying themselves on rides while parents sat on benches waiting for time to pass. He had bigger dreams than just creating a theme park for children; he wanted to create something unique and different where children and parents could have fun together as a family. From this dream, Walt opened the theme park Disneyland in July 18, 1955.

Disneyland was successful, but Walt had even bigger dreams of creating a resort property that would be a “utopian city of the future, fully self-sufficient and self-governing.” Unfortunately, Walt died shortly after his plans had gone underway to create this magical land in Florida, but his brother, Roy, made sure that the project was completed, and on October 1, 1971 Walt Disney World opened with the Magic Kingdom theme park. With time more theme parks were added to Walt Disney World including Epcot, Disney's Hollywood Studios, and Disney's Animal Kingdom (History of Walt Disney World). Below are pictures representing all four Walt Disney World theme parks by their iconic centerpieces.

From right to left are the theme parks: Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Hollywood Studios, and Animal Kingdom.

Walt Disney’s philosophy was that “Every child is born with a vivid imagination” which this imagination can also been seen throughout Walt’s lifetime. He was able to make his wildest dreams come true with a little imagination and the idea stated in one of Walt’s famous quotes “If we take care of our guests and our cast members, the rest takes care of itself.” Some may view this idea as too simplistic or impossible, but the concept of Walt Disney World has proven to show that this angle of a theme park truly works because Walt Disney was able to give his company a niche, a place where families can have fun together. While Walt Disney world may not be the number one theme park in the United States, it is number two followed behind Cedar Point and ahead of others including Universal Studios, King’s Island, Legoland, Busch Gardens and Disneyland. They key to success in this case is a man, a mouse, and a dream.
**Case Study: EPCOT**

**Origin**
Walt Disney had always wanted to create a utopian futuristic city that he referred to as the “Progress City”. His plans were to make this dream become a reality, but unfortunately he passed away on December 15, 1966 before the completion. However, the Walt Disney World company did not forget one of Walt’s biggest dreams and on October 1, 1982 this “city” known as Epcot opened. Epcot wasn’t really a city, but it was a theme park based on a showcase of ideas of past and future technologies. These ideas are found in the Future World which includes inventive ideas created by imagineers as well as the World Showcase which represents 11 countries from around the world. One of the first Epcot Center theme park maps is shown to the right.

**Design Thinking**
According to Tim Brown, design thinking is about the big idea and the system of what one is trying to create. In order to do so, the Design Thinking Personality Profile is an important concept to consider. First, the way in which a product or concept will effect others must be addressed and this is known as empathy. Second, integrative thinking must be done in order to bring more factors to the table to see aspects of the design. Third, one must be optimistic about the process and results. People must understand that no matter how challenging a problem may be, there will be at least one solution that is best out of a list of alternative solutions. Fourth, a designer must experiment in order to explore all constraints in a creative way. This may be done with prototypes as well as other experiments with design. And finally, the fifth step is collaboration. In order to make a design a reality, the designer must work with psychologists, marketers, architects, and engineers in order to fully understand every aspect of design and how to implement it (Brown). With the use of design thinking, Epcot was created by evolving from inspiration to ideation to implementation.

**Imagineering**
Walt Disney’s Imagineering is known as “the master planning, creative development, design, engineering, production, project management, and research and development arm of The Walt Disney Company.” The imagineers are the talented who are responsible for the creation of everything Disney including the resorts, theme parks, attractions, hotels, water parks, real estate developments, regional entertainment venues, cruise ships, and new media technology projects. With Disney Imagineers, Epcot was created to be the Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow. (Walt Disney Imagineering).

**Philosophy**
The design thinking philosophy of Epcot was that “the future belongs to the dreamer, the dreamer inside of you.” Walt was a dreamer and wanted to create this utopian futuristic city for all to enjoy with their imagination and dreams of the future. He believed this was the heart and the most important part of the Florida project, which would be later known as Walt Disney World. Walt Disney World now revolves around the nucleus of the Epcot design philosophy (Epcot: Living up to Walt’s Original Dream).
Walt Disney’s dream of having a utopian city was implemented by Imagineers along with the collaboration of the most influential names in the technology and science industry. The design ideas of Epcot were and still are today to allow guests to experience vivid entertainment that will spur their imaginations and lead them to new discoveries. The Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow includes two parts the World Show case and the Future world. The World Show case was designed to allow guest to enjoy and experience the true surroundings and tastes of different countries. While the Future World was designed to give guests a glimpse of new products and technologies of the future (Epcot: Living up to Walt’s Original Dream). These design ideas are best understood by looking at the attractions themselves.

The well known spherical icon of Epcot is Spaceship Earth which is an attraction that allows guest to ride in time machine carts that travel from the dawn of time to the 21st century. This ride includes man’s first words, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, Rome’s first road system, the Industrial Revolution, and to the final Age of Information known as the Cyber Age. The idea behind Spaceship Earth was to enrich the minds of others about the past, but to also excite them for their own future. The design language in the time machine carts actually have built-in interactive touch screens that allow guest to map out their future tomorrow. After the ride, guests are given the opportunity to check out Project Tomorrow: Inventing the Wonders of the Future which contains educational displays and games about the newest technologies in transportation, medicine, and energy management (Spaceship Earth). Below are pictures of Spaceship Earth.

Other well known attractions in Epcot’s Future World are Journey into Imagination with Figment, ImageWorks, Captain EO, Behind the Seeds, Living with the Land, Circle of Life, Soarin’, Mission: SPACE, Advance Training Lab, Sea Base, Test Track, and Ellen’s Energy Adventure. All of these attractions are based on the design thinking of imagination for new and innovative ideas. Not only do they spur the imagination but they also focus on the environment with agricultural research, human communication, energy, and transportation history (Walt Disney World/Epcot). Images shown below are some of Epcot’s attractions.
Branding

Walt Disney wanted Epcot to be different than the Magic Kingdom and Disneyland in California and for that reason; Epcot became a brand of its own. Epcot is its own brand because it has established its own set of principles, to change the world as we know it through a technology revolution. Disney wanted the park’s guests to stimulate different parts of their mind while at Epcot and that is exactly what Epcot allows guests to do. Not all Walt Disney World guests may enjoy Epcot, but those that want to “discover something new on vacation” and want a real Disney adventure will enjoy Epcot. Due to Epcot’s branding, the ideal guests are lovers of science, art, and social studies who like to explore and learn. Disney theme parks, including Epcot, have created their own brands because Disney understands how to separate itself apart from its competitors by having a variety of attractions and concepts in the parks (Marketing Epcot).

Behind The Scenes

Infrastructure

With Disney everything is magical, even behind the scenes. Because of this magic, Disney does not let out a lot of their secrets, and one way to be in the know on what goes on at Epcot is to go on a Backstage Magic Tour. The tour costs $229 per person and last from six to eight hours (Backstage Magic). Tour guides reveal details as to why Epcot is one of Disney’s most popular attractions and show a hidden world of Disney. Part of the hidden world consists of one infrastructure secret that is known to the public, the “Utilidor”, which is a legendary underground tunnel system.

These tunnels allow characters to walk from different areas of the park magically as well as for delivery trucks to be out of sight to the general public. There are also meeting rooms as well as computer rooms in the tunnel complex that allow utilities to be exposed to employees as well as Imagineers. Also behind the scenes and along the Utilidor there are service rooms, wardrobe and costume rooms, locker rooms, kitchens, storage rooms, as well as cafeterias for employees (Magic Kingdom Tunnel). The infrastructure behind the scenes of Epcot and Walt Disney World are safely kept secrets, but a Backstage Magic Tour is the best way to get an inside scoop.

Usability and Experience

Epcot, like all of the other Disney theme parks, allows people of all ages, shapes, and sizes to enjoy their time at Disney. Wheelchairs and Electric Convenience Vehicles (ECV) are available to rent for those with disabilities. These can be found throughout all Disney Theme Parks, and for only twelve dollars a wheelchair can be rented at Epcot and for fifty dollars an ECV can be rented. At Spaceship Earth near the main entrance of Epcot a Guidebook for Guests with Disabilities is available at Guest Relations (Guest Services). Guests with these rentals are also allowed to move closer to the front of the lines in order to make their visit as comfortable as possible. The Epcot experience is truly unlike any other theme park experience because guests experience and interact with the future in a hands-on way.
Sustainability

In order for the world to continue the way it does today and to even improve its standards of living on an environmental level, people must take into consideration their actions on the environment. Walt Disney World has encouraged sustainability in numerous ways throughout its parks. For example, Disney has a garbage system known as AVAC that acts as a vacuum jetting trash through pneumatic tubes underground. This trash is then sent to a central location where Disney’s sanitation crew processes and recycles the garbage. Walt initiated this system because he wanted the majority of the trash to be out of sight to guests (Under the Magic Kingdom).

Walt Disney World has also created sustainable transportation in Epcot with the help of Imagineers. Epcot’s monorail system is used by both Disney employees as well as visitors of the park. The monorail is located above ground level because unlike ground-based transportation it does not disrupt existing Disney real estate as well as prohibit the environment like subways do. This system was created so that it would not totally replace automobiles, but that it would reduce pollution and traffic in the most wasteful area which is near the Epcot’s entrance. The monorail also is more safe and efficient way of transportation as well (Mac Millan). The picture to the right is an image of Epcot’s monorail.

Disney has also incorporated sustainable landscapes at Epcot by using Aquascape which focuses on the future of water gardening. In four of Epcot’s decorative fountains the Aquascape team created an AquaBasin reservoir and a rainwater harvest storage system. The storage system allows rainwater to be harvested and reused in a decorative manner. Epcot chose to implement this system to show guests that Disney is committed to conserving water and the environment (Certified Aquascape Contractors Bring Future of Water Gardening to Epcot Center). The image to the right shows how Epcot informs its guest of the harvesting system.

Disney also supports sustaining communities around the United States. In order to do so Disney created a program called “VoluntEARS” in which cast members donate their time to community organizations and local charities. They help with volunteering time, but Disney also donates grants of money that match the amount of time employees donate. In just one year alone cast members donated 200,000 hours of service which resulted in Disney donating $22 million dollars (The Myth and Magic of Mickey Mouse). The picture to the right shows participates of Disney’s VoluntEAR program feeding the homeless for Thanksgiving.
The theme park Epcot in Walt Disney World is a distinct example of how theme parks have evolved. What once was an idea of traveling carnivals and then into amusement parks and theme parks that first originated in the 1800s has become a true Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. Through Epcot and Disney’s philosophy, Imagineering, design language, branding, infrastructure, usability, experience, and sustainability Epcot has been able to live up to Walt’s expectations of creating a theme park different than other theme parks. Walt dreamt of a place for children and parents to have fun together as a family. Epcot allows not only this, but it also allows families to “discover something new on vacation.” The unique design and concept of Epcot enables guests to explore, learn, and enrich their minds.

Not only do the attractions allow this exploration, but the sustainable initiatives implemented by Disney allow this as well. Adults and importantly children of the future are able to gain an understanding on how they can make a positive impact on the future by learning about Disney’s distinctive initiatives such as the AVAC, monorail, and rainwater harvest storage systems. Hopefully guests will also be influenced to help the needy in their community by learning about Disney’s VoluntEAR program and make donations to make projects possible.

Epcot is a unique theme park of Disney but it confirms Disney’s philosophy of dreams really coming true. One of Walt Disney’s famous quotes is “all dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them.” Walt had a dream of Epcot, and while he passed away before its construction, his brother and Imagineers implemented his dreams of a futuristic city. Walt’s courage to pursue his dreams of Epcot shows that his dream was able to come true. Walt Disney also quoted saying “Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination.” Like Disneyland, Epcot has continued to grow and evolve with technology and innovations of the future.

I believe that because of Disney and Epcot’s futuristic advancements the company has been able to make a positive “dent in the universe.” This is not only true figuratively speaking, but also literally speaking because Spaceship Earth, an attraction in which guests go on a journey from the dawn of time to the future world, is spherically shaped containing thousands of dents. Epcot and Disney have also benefited today’s culture. Walt is famous for saying “If you can dream it, you can do it.” and “It’s kind of fun to do the impossible.” With such positive statements, Walt has influenced others by giving them reasons to dream. Environmentally as well, Epcot has made a positive impact on sustaining resources which will hopefully persuade other companies and business to do so as well. It may have all been started by a mouse, but Disney believes that by making a positive influence on the world, the future will end in the hands of those who make their dreams come true (Walt Disney Quotes).
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