



Dark Tourism: Understanding the concept and the demand of new experiences

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Abstract. *The paper focuses on the development of «dark» tourism as a type of special interest tourism. The study included of the definition of «dark» tourism, tourist motivations for this type of tourism. Also there are important «dark» tourism destinations in the world as an example of this type of tourism development. The concept of dark tourism has been designed and studied for the last years and many are the destinations around the world where it has been implemented, playing an important role in both a country's economy and its image.*

Keywords: *”dark” tourism destination, “dark” tourism, demand, thanatourism.*

Introduction. Tourism is a complex phenomenon involving a wide range of people, increasingly seeking for new and unique experiences in order to satisfy the most diverse motives, reason why the world tourism landscape has been changing in the last decades. Tourists' motivations, as the destinations they seek, are no longer related with the traditional sun, beach and beautiful sceneries. The concept of «pleasant diversion in pleasant places» is changing and broadening into new market demanding, more complex and even unusual. This is the case of dark tourism, considered as the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and modified death and disaster sites. In a more specific way, dark tourism is considered as «the visitation to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continue to impact our lives». Dark tourism is the academic name we give to sites that commemorate and remember disasters and atrocities. The common dominator is the fact that people died there in unnatural situations, said Peter Stone, head of the Institute for Research Dark Tourism. Nonetheless, it has also been referred as the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre.

Dark Tourism-A Troublesome Concept. Dark Tourism as a tourism product started to gain researchers' attention since the early 90s, but there is no consensus not only on the conceptualization but also on the designation. In fact, other designations were used to describe the same phenomenon, namely:”Black Spot” as «commercial developments of grave and sites in which celebrities or large number of people have met with sudden and violent deaths.» “Thanatourism”-is the “travel to a location wholly or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death, which may, to a varying degree be activated by the person-specific features of those whose deaths are its focal objects”(Seaton).”Atrocity Tourism” like the type of tourism that leads the individual to visit holocaust sites(Beech),”Morbid Tourism” considered as the travel to attractions that focus on accidents and sudden violent death.

The term «dark» describes alludes to a sense of apparent disturbing practices and morbid products and experience, within the tourism domain (Stone, 2006, p.146). The attention given to

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events of death, suffering and atrocity and the subsequent development of dark tourism sites is attributed to an inherent curiosity towards mortality and the darker aspects of humanity (Foley, 2009; in Fonseca et al; 2016, p1). Humanity has been interested in the end of life since the time of pilgrimages (Titta, 2010). Death is clearly one such issue that raises uncertainties and anxieties and hence becomes a major issue to bracket out everyday consciousness, contemplating death as taboo. Berger's (1967) seminal text suggested death was essential feature of human condition, requiring individual to develop mechanisms to cope with their ultimate demise.

According to Seaton (1996), the relationship between death and tourism, or «thanatourism», intensified from the nineteenth century onwards, but it is only more recently «dark tourism» has become the focus of increasing academic attention (Biran & Hyde, 2013; Sharpley & Stone, 2009; Stone, 2013). There is broader growth of interest in issues of death and dying within the social sciences as the growing profile of «death studies» as a multidisciplinary research focus testifies (Light, 2017, p. 293). An Institute of Dark Tourism Research (IDTR) has been established at the University of Central Lancashire (UK) (Light, 2017, p. 276). Once recognized as a phenomenon several countries have tried to integrate dark tourism as a product into their tourism industry (Blom, 2000). Many destinations around the world implemented structures to support this new offer, playing dark tourism an important role in both country's economy and its image. Thereby, for the individual who wishes to journey and gaze upon real or recreated death, plethora of sites, attractions and exhibitions are, new emerging across the world to cater to the «dark side of travel» (Sharpley & Stone, 2009).

«Dark Tourism» was first coined by Folley and Lennon (1996 a, 1996 b) in a special issue of the International Journal of Heritage Studies, their analysis relates primarily to «the presentation and consumption of real and commodified death and disaster sites. However, the work was not the first to draw attention to the phenomenon of «darkness» in tourism. In 1989, Uzzell (1989) discussed hot interpretation of war and conflict sites (Sharpley, 2009). In addition Rojek (1993) discussed the emergence of «black spots», which «refer to the commercial developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities of large number of people have met with sudden and violent death» (p. 136; in Raine, 2013, p. 249).

Generally, there are two distinct bases for analysis is evident in the emergent work of dark tourism. On one hand, Seaton explores dark tourism of thanatourism as a behavioral phenomenon, pointing to the existence of «dark tourist» or «thanatourist». Thus, for Seaton, thanatourism is a form of tourism consumption. On the other hand, significant attention is paid to dark sites or attractions—the objects of dark tourism consumption—in general, and their definition, interpretation and management in particular. In either case, however, little attempt is made to delve beneath the surface of these issues, to explore differing approaches to and meanings of dark tourism's demand and supply. Seaton and Lennon (2004; in Femarki; 2013, p. 282) identified two main motives related to dark tourism:

- Schadenfreude (i.e. the pleasure of seeing others' misfortune and.
- Thanatopsis (i.e. the contemplation of death).



According to Seaton (1996),there are just five possible categories of dark travel activity:1.to witness public enactments of death;2.to sites of individual or mass deaths;3.to memorials or interment sites;4.to see symbolic representations of death;5.to witness re-enactments of death.

The demand for new experiences.

Dark tourism responds to the need of contemporary tourists to live unique, impactful, and perhaps extreme experiences. Places connected with tragic events are growing in popularity all around the world.

The term «dark tourism» includes very different practices and activities. For example, heritage tourism, educational tourism, film tourism, adventure tourism. It includes a number of niches according to the theme or the site of the visit: places of executions and death in public, places of mass extermination of death ,murders, battlefields or places where famous people died (James Dean, John Fitzgerald, Kennedy) , internment sites (mausoleums, monoliths of war and cemeteries) sites related to slavery, sites affected by environmental disasters such as hurricanes, tsunami, prisons, simulations of events related to death and catastrophe.

Travelers interested in dark tourism experiences come from various age groups, including seniors as well as young students. Some of them are attracted by cultural and historical aspects of the places, others seek more nature-bound information.

The most popular dark tourism destinations include the Brain Castle in Romania, the Paris catacombs in France, Auschwitz in Poland, Sleepy Hollow, Salem, New Orleans, and the Eastern State Penitentiary in the U.S; Naples in Italy and many more. In Europe tourists can follow the route of 49 cemeteries recognised by the Council of Europe as cultural sites. They are located in 37 cities in 16 countries and Spain has the most cemeteries on the route.

One of the examples of experiential tours related to dark tourism are special tours offered on the Mexican border. Night walks are organized that simulate the crossing of the border with the United States by undocumented immigrants. The route consists of experiential and emotional such as crossing tunnels and suffering the kidnapping by fictitious traffickers of people.

Drug trafficking is the theme of narco tours offered in Columbia. Visitors explore several places linked to the famous drug trafficker Pablo Escobar.

Civil War is the theme of various tours in Spain. They mostly include visits to anti-aircraft shelters and bunkers.

All these different types of tours fall under the umbrella of dark tourism. The industry has been boosted by various war movies or TV series and as such is dynamically growing.

Role of Media. Media Interest is growing: but a fundamental question will respect to dark tourism remain unanswered, whether it is actually possible or justifiable to categorize collectively the experience of sites or attractions that are associated with the death or suffering as «dark tourism».

Since the collective umbrella term includes a variety of sites, attractions, experiences its meaning has been diluted and fuzzy. More specifically, it remains unclear whether dark tourism is tourist-demand or attraction-supply driven as a (post)modern propensity for «mourning sickness» (West,2004).The media generally provide the first impressions

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