



Understanding tourist's motivation and understanding at Dark Tourism sites: the instance of Auschwitz-Birkenau

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Abstract

This paper arose from a research project conducted across the UK, The Czech Republic and Poland, looking to uncover people's motivations and their experiences at dark tourism sites, with a particular focus on Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp. Currently this is an area of study with limited research, thus this paper looks to explore the drivers and experiences that millions of people are involved in to gain original insights into this little explored area of dark tourism research. The data used was gathered via various methodologies: an ethnographic study; questionnaires; and, literature review. A mixed methods approach was used in order to reveal key strands and provide insight and analysis of tourist motivations and visitor experiences. The findings uncovered the lack of awareness of dark tourism amongst respondents, a surprising result given the media coverage on the matter in recent years [2]. Yet despite this, the findings revealed people's motivations to visit these sites came from their own "curiosity", why this is the case is an area for future work, which this study forms the foundation.

Keywords: Dark tourism; Visitor experience; Holocaust; Emotions feelings

Introduction

This report is constructed upon cooperative research on individuals in areas within the Czech Republic, Poland, and the UK. This research also involves an ethnographic study on a visit undertaken by the author to Auschwitz – Birkenau Concentration Camp. Each of these various research methods used focuses on the concept of dark tourism within a range of tourist sites. The following report will look to answer why tourists visit dark tourism sites as well as their understanding of them. This involves somewhat delving into the theoretical background of dark tourism through use of a literature review. Also, there is further detail as to the approach and methodology taken for the research that was conducted. This research then forms the foundation for discussion in which the research question will looked to be answered.

Dark Tourism

Lennon & Foley illustrate how a large number of sites associated with conflict, genocide, murder and other tragic events have become

significant tourist destinations across the globe [3]. This phenomenon is a concept known as 'dark tourism' [4] which has only 'arisen as a theoretical field of study in recent years' [5]. According to Sharpley & Stone, this has led to the standpoints on and understanding of dark tourism being diverse and theoretically weak due to the lack of research that has been undertaken on the concept [1]. Yet, over recent years there have been various attempts made by academics to define the concept, which has led to various suggestions to its actual meaning [5]. This paper relies on Kendle's definition which clarifies the concept of dark tourism and is stated as "the act of travelling to locations, displays and attractions which have death, suffering or the seemingly macabre as the main theme" [6].

Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp

Auschwitz-Birkenau was chosen as a specific focus for this research since it is often thought to be at 'the vilest end of the dark tourism spectrum' [7]. The camp itself was operated from 1942 to 1945 by the SS and was the centre for the mass extermination of Jews and various other groups via several means but generally through gassing in vast gas chambers [8]. It is estimated that 1.1 million people died in Auschwitz-Birkenau, with 90% of that figure being attributed to Jewish victims [9]. Dark tourism is often most associated with this site, with the site featuring on the covers of many academic writings on the matter [10]. This demonstrates the pivotal nature of the camp in relation to the concept of dark tourism and therefore this report will look to uncover people's motivation and understanding when they visit the site of such an abhorrent piece of human history.

Approach

The primary focus of this research was built upon using a literature review which allowed for a critical, analytical account of the existing research on dark tourism [11]. There were numerous gaps within the current literature in relation to the research question posed and did demonstrate a need to conduct this research. A mind map was employed to enable the visualisation of information gained from the literature review and elucidated the research focus of tourists' motivations and understanding of dark tourism sites [12]. Aside from just addressing the gap in the literature on this issue this research can potentially help lead to better informed management of dark tourism sites. Currently those tasked with running dark tourism sites have limited or no clear strategies or methods to most appropriately manage their sites and with these locations becoming major tourism attractions there are distinct challenges posed [13]. With a greater understanding of those who interact with these sites there is the potential for there usage to be improved.

Approach to the Questionnaires

A UK perspective on dark tourism was utilized alongside tourists who were actively participating in situ, which allowed for a wider view of the research question, so two questionnaires were designed and implemented. There was a distinct possibility of language barriers, so one questionnaire utilises more straightforward English whilst the other is more complex. McLeod states how this method of a questionnaire provides a relatively inexpensive, fast and effective way of gaining data from a large sample of people [14]. This made

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Received: September 17, 2021 Accepted: October 04, 2021 Published: October 11, 2021

it ideal for use in the research, which would have time restrictions limiting our time at each site. Furthermore, this approach allows for a whole host of individuals to be questioned allowing for a broad variety of results, thus helping make stronger conclusions and recommendations. To design both questionnaires, the author again utilised mind maps to make note of a range of questions that could be used, this was shortened to 4 in both cases. Within the methodology, there is specific reference to the reasoning behind the final decision behind each question chosen. These questions chosen will look, as Allman notes, to fill the current gap within the motivations for tourists engaging in these dark activities to enable those running dark tourism sites to better manage them [15]. This then resulted in a completed questionnaire (Appendices 1 and 2) yet before any research could commence an ethics approval was required, which was completed and approved prior to the trip commencing (Appendix 3). An information sheet was also designed (Appendix 4) to inform people about the research further as well as having contact details for any further queries they may have.

Approach to the Trip/UK

The approach in the Czech Republic, would be to utilise the tourist sites we visited to ask the questionnaire (Appendix 1). We would utilise random sampling at each site, following the ethics form guidelines, to allow for those answering the questionnaire to be 'selected in an unbiased way' [16]. The approach for Auschwitz was conducted differently due to the sensitive nature of the site [17], making it inappropriate to adopt the same approach as the Czech Republic, as it is 'beyond just being a museum, as it is also a mass graveyard'. In this case, therefore, the approach was to ask the tour guide to introduce the idea of the research and questionnaire to the tourists and then only ask the questionnaire to those who wanted to take part, thus reducing the risk of causing any unintentional harm or distress, keep in line with ethical guidelines. In both of these cases, the author will ask the questionnaire to the participant and not give them it to complete individually allowing the author to identify those people with greater interest on the subject matter for a more in-depth interview opportunity to elaborate further on their responses. Then utilising the author's connections in the UK, the UK questionnaire (Appendix 2) will be distributed via email and returned completed.

Methodology

This research will principally focus on a qualitative research approach, which allows for "a scientific approach to gather non-numerical data" [18]. Berg & Howard demonstrate how a qualitative research approach answers the why and how questions concerning certain concepts, rather than the quantitative approach which is more statistical. This research is utilising data about people's thoughts and feelings and thus adopting this qualitative approach is vital. Yet there is a need to also focus on quantitative data to allow for further analysis.

Literature Review

The existing studies on dark tourism have highlighted how it is a growing field with more and more people becoming fascinated by dark tourism sites, with Auschwitz 'receiving a record of 1.5 million visitors in 2014' [19]. This has led to a surge in the academic interest of this concept but currently, there is 'too much emphasis on the conceptualisation of dark tourism and not enough on the individual visitor perspectives' [20]. This is a common theme throughout most literature on dark tourism, so with this paper, the author hopes to

focus more on the human element to dark tourism which currently has yet to be fully explored. Furthermore, there is little research on whether people even know about the concept, so this too is something this paper will explore.

Questionnaire Questions Justification

A significant part of this research is the formulation of the questions as they will tap into the views, motivations, and behaviours of the public concerning dark tourism, and ultimately lead to fascinating insights. The Pew Research Centre say if any data gathered is constructed on a shaky foundation of vague or biased questions, it will result in the whole process being wasted [21]. So, therefore, the following section will justify the questions chosen in the questionnaire and their organisation to help demonstrate how they will gather high-calibre results.

Why did you visit today?

This is the first question within the questionnaire and arguably the most vital. Here the author hopes to uncover the exact reasoning behind the motivation to visit that specific area, this is specifically useful within Auschwitz-Birkenau yet, the sites in the Czech Republic will also provide useful insights and so will the UK questionnaire. Sharpley argues how the interest with death is not the only motivation that draws visitors to these sites so therefore uncovering people's exact reasoning behind visiting these sites will uncover what exactly draws people to these dark tourism areas [22]. Once this data is collected the author hopes to display the most common answers and their occurrence rates on a bar chart, thus leading to analysis to be undertaken.

Are you aware of any dark history of the area?

This was included as people may visit an area with knowledge of the area's dark tourism attributes but not specifically visit the area to view this. This is a question specifically focused for the Czech Republic

Are you aware of Dark Tourism and its meaning?

Here the author looks to uncover whether people understand the concept of dark tourism and looks to inform people to its meaning. As, noted within the literature review there is little research to whether it a concept that is well understood or known about.

Based on the above have you taken part in dark tourism, if so what?

From the above question, the author hopes to learn what the most common dark tourism sites are and what people would personally regard as a dark tourism site. As notes we must not ignore the tourist's view of sites as they are the ones who utilise these sites as tourist destinations, making this another important insight [23].

Results

The following is a description of the results gathered from the field. The ethnography in Auschwitz has been completed in place of the questionnaire results, as unfortunately there wasn't the opportunity to apply the approach noted above; this is further detailed within the limitation section.

Czech Republic Results

Here there was a low respondent rate of 7 participants and the majority of those people who answered only answered a few

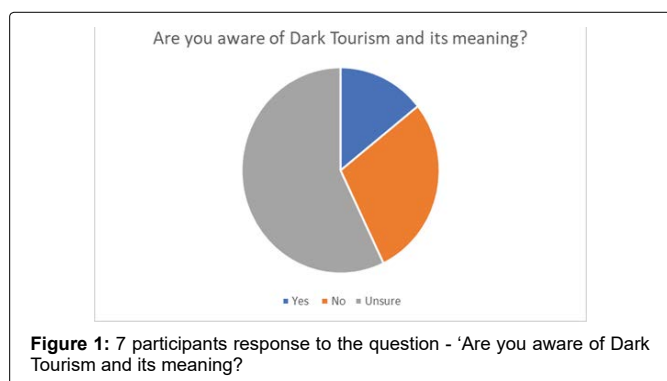
questions. This is attributed to the language barrier faced with most participants having only simple English skills, even our translators struggled with some of the terminology used in the questionnaire making it difficult to complete. However, this is a result in itself, with figure 1 demonstrating the lack of understanding of the term 'dark tourism'. The rest of the results are not of value as it is evident from the participant's response there was confusion about what the question means, yet this is still, a significant discovery.

Auschwitz Ethnography (Appendix 5)

We implemented the approach referred to earlier in the paper, yet we were unsuccessful and thus didn't complete any questionnaires. This was since there was no tour guide, so the author was unable to ask permission to undertake the questionnaire. Rather than settling for the failure of this trip, the author decided to complete an ethnography (Appendix 5), by becoming a participant observer [24]. This approach was chosen as it is "particularly effective when little is known about a targeted market" [25], something that was evident from the literature review. Reeves et. al says how using an ethnographic approach allows for a stronger emphasis on exploring the nature of the particular social phenomenon, something that is pivotal when trying to understand human motivations [26]. The use of an ethnography allows the author, according to Domingo, to explore and be involved in the discovery of meanings within the authentic context of the site itself, thus allowing for the results to become more grounded and accurate [27]. From the ethnography, the author was able to uncover a range of fascinating findings that were not exposed by the questionnaires. The following are the most crucial points associated with tourist behaviour:

- The tour comprised entirely of UK couples of various ages
- No tour guide on the bus journey there just a video that was from a Russian perspective and felt more like a propaganda film rather than the one to inform
- Tourists were of all ages and about half were part of tours with the other half walking around unaccompanied
- Tourists were on the most part respectful of the site, yet the author noted many people weren't. This included people taking selfies outside the train station at Birkenau

These tourist behaviours are noted in further detail in the ethnography (Appendix 5) yet these behaviours above will be systematically analysed within the discussion. Reeves et al., notes how this is vital as by analysing these behaviours there is the ability to generate tentative theoretical explanations for them thus allowing for recommendations to be made [26].



UK Results

Here there was a fairly substantial response rate of 15 participants. The questions here were slightly different from those asked in the Czech Republic for reasons noted earlier.

Figure 2 highlights how the concept of dark tourism isn't well understood, with being key to illustrate the fact that there are no 'unsure' Responses. This highlights how the questionnaire completed in the Czech Republic suffered from a potential language barrier.

Figure 3 highlights dark tourism sites people have visited, with some participants noting more than one site. The participants before answering this question were given a definition by Kendle of what dark tourism is to ensure they were able to note any dark tourism sites they had visited. It is key to note from these results how nearly 1/3 of participants had visited Auschwitz-Birkenau but as well how many had not visited a dark tourism site at all.

Figure 4 highlights how most participants visited these dark tourism sites out of curiosity, with nearly 1/2 of all 15 participants citing this as their reason. It is also interesting to note how a somewhat large majority of 1/5 people noted there visiting of these sites as a method of commenting the victims, all those that visited Ground Zero gave this as their reason to why they visited the site.

Discussion

Within this section there will be an analysis and discussion of the above graphs and ethnography. This has the aim to uncover key

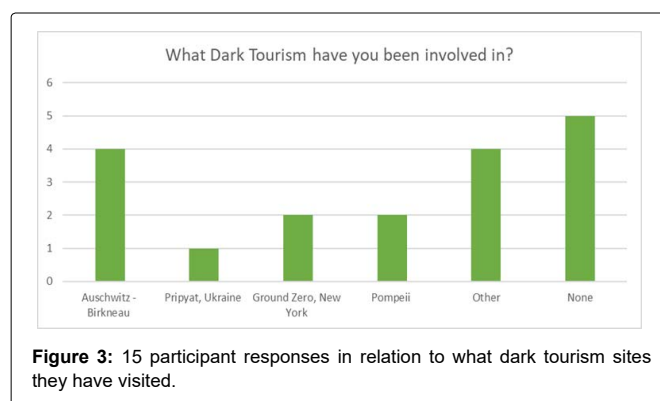
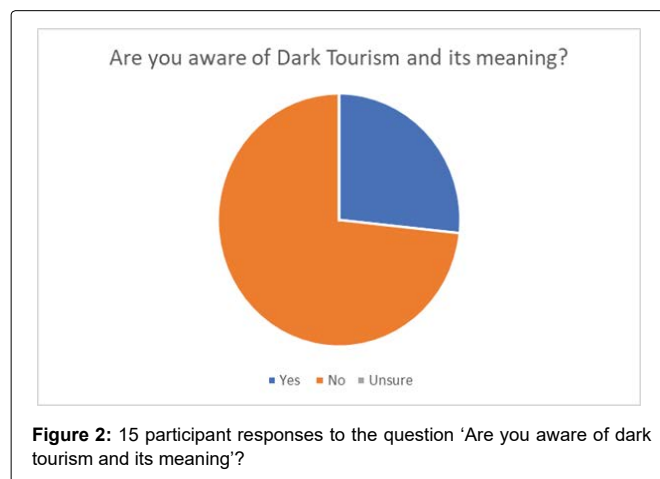




Figure 4: 15 participants response to why they visited the sites noted in figure 4.

strands and information to provide insight and analysis of tourist motivations and visitor experiences in relation to dark tourism.

Czech Republic Analysis

Figure 2 suggests that the Czech Republic is an area that has little interest in dark tourism and dark tourists alike. Yet this is not the case with Fonseca et al. stating how the Sedlec Ossuary (The ossuary is estimated to contain the skeletons of between 40,000 and 70,000 people) is one of most visited tourist attractions in the Czech Republic, attracting over 200,000 visitors annually [28]. The area in which the research was conducted included a trip to a torture museum in Ceske Krumlov (Appendix 6), which when we visited had no other visitors. This highlights how tourists visiting this region, coupled with the results seen in figure 2 had little interest in Dark tourism. O'Neill presents a fascinating look into the reasons behind this, stating how the Czech Republic has negatively dealt with its dark past [29]. He goes on to state that the capital city, Prague, 'has been beaten down by tyranny and existed under the boot of powers much larger than their own' [29]. This, therefore, has inevitably led to the creation of dark tourism sites yet due to the countries somewhat discomfort with its history they are often suppressed and not utilised fully. This somewhat explains the results seen in the research as the tourist sites in the Czech Republic don't actively seek to display their dark tourism histories. This, therefore, would lead to the tourists at the sites we visited being unaware of the concept of dark tourism and only visiting the area for other purposes.

Auschwitz Analysis

The ethnography the author completed unearthed a range of interesting factors to analyse (Appendix 5). The makeup of the tour group was an interesting factor to note, as a tour comprising of all couples was an unexpected finding yet, it does establish how the tour appealed to a particular group of people. The research on who dark tourists are is limited and thus this discovery does help deliver some insight into who these tourists typically are and does establish an opportunity for further research. The ethnography also uncovered the use of a film in place of a tour guide on the way to the site. This film shown felt heavily biased and came from solely a Russian perspective, but it did allow for what Thurnell-Read states as the easy transmission of information and historical facts about the site [17]. Leading people visiting the site to be informed and to treat the site somewhat respectfully. The age of those visiting the site was another interesting point, with the author noting the presence of children as young as

4 or 5 walking through the site. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum notes on its website how it doesn't recommend children under 14 to visit the site, a recommendation that was ignored by some [8]. There is little research as to why people decide to ignore this rule and what impacts it has, yet from different forums the author notes how it is generally regarded as inappropriate to bring children to the camps. Schweber notes how children need to learn about the holocaust, yet visiting sites like Auschwitz-Birkenau must be done at an appropriate age, so the author proposes making it a firm rule that children under 14 can't enter the site. This would require further study however to ensure the correct decision is implemented [30].

The way tourists behaved was usually respectful, yet as the authors ethnography uncovered some people took selfies in places that may have been considered disrespectful to those who suffered at Auschwitz - Birkenau. This may be deemed as disrespectful as it makes "your presence, your story the dominant one, by putting yourself at the forefront, you diminish the unimaginable cruelty done to the people the very site memorializes" [31]. This issue of tourist behaviour at Auschwitz-Birkenau is further highlighted by Lennon & Foley who note how they often saw children on the ruins of the crematorium eating sandwiches, who seemed blissfully unaware of the horrible suffering witnessed at these sites [10]. Wollaston states how this is part of the commercial, political and religious exploitation of Auschwitz- Birkenau with it becoming more and more of a tourism hotspot [32].

UK Analysis

The results gathered in the UK revealed a whole host of useful data. Unlike in the Czech Republic all the participants in the UK understood the question posed, and figure 3 highlights how the concept is not established amongst the majority of tourists in the UK. Brandt & Frostne found different results when asking a similar question to 50 students in Sweden with a majority of them (50%) understanding what the concept is [33]. The participants in the UK research were all over the age of 25 and thus highlights how new the concept is. As figure 4 highlights UK tourists are partaking in dark tourism but are often unaware of that fact. This is something the author feels needs addressing as Walter notes how being a dark tourist as opposed to a regular tourist garners more respect for the sites you visit and thus leads to better more respectful utilisation of these sites [34]. Things like the Dark Tourist on Netflix have helped raise the profile of dark tourism amongst the public quickly and easily. Thus, the author feels that this method of raising awareness is something that should continue to ensure the dark tourism sites we see today are used appropriately and not used for just taking selfies like the author noted in Auschwitz. Figure 5 highlights why participants travelled to the sites, and it is evident that curiosity is the key reason. This is a common finding amongst all research on the subject with Ashworth & Issac highlighting how curiosity is a normal human action that attracts us to the unusual [35]. However, the author feels this wouldn't be the case for Auschwitz, thus demonstrating a need to research the site again.

Limitations

There are clear and obvious limitations to the research that was conducted in Auschwitz, the UK, and the Czech Republic. Wright states how although the knowledge related to dark tourism has grown significantly, it is still a concept that isn't well known amongst the public [36]. This was evident in the Czech Republic, where the distinct lack of knowledge on the concept was surprising; with even the other

academics we were with not understanding the concept. This led to it being difficult to translate in the Czech Republic sites to the tourists, which was down to the poor questionnaire design and naivety about the English ability amongst the tourists visiting the Czech Republic. In the future, the author would ensure the language used in the questionnaire is appropriate for the participants therefore allowing for more meaningful results to be collected.

Within Auschwitz, the author had to complete ethnography, which wasn't the ideal outcome. This was because the focus of the research was to understand tourist motivations, which using an ethnography as Hammersly is difficult to do as trying to understand people's opinions but also viewing them and their behavior more distantly is an impossible task [37]. Therefore, for future research, the author would look to contact Auschwitz staff to gain their opinions on why people visit the site as well as utilising the internet to distribute the questionnaire to get a better understanding of why people visit the camps.

Conclusions

White & Frew (2013) note the common theme throughout their own paper is that the human domain of dark tourism has been largely overlooked in academic literature. The results gained in the Czech Republic and the UK, noted how people were largely unaware of the concept, despite the large media coverage it has seen in recent years [2], a finding that the author did not expect to make. Stone notes how a better understanding of the concept of dark tourism amongst tourists will most likely lead to better utilisation of the site yet is this the case? [7] This uncovers an area in which could be a focus in future work, which could look to discover why people's awareness on the concept is so limited as well as to whether improving tourist understanding on the matter would actually lead to better utilisation of the sites. Which could help site operators uncover how they can improve the way they currently operate sites, as the quality of the interpretation the tourists have of these places is vital, as tourist experiences are a key element of the sites becoming meaningful and utilised in the most optimal way [13]. The ethnography conducted helped illuminate the current use of Auschwitz-Birkenau and how it has elements that require some improvements. Young notes how this current use of the sites and how visitors use them significantly influences the visitors' experience, but the how and why is yet to be explored. So, therefore, the sites need to be both respectfully managed and used to enable the site to be memorialised appropriately, a key finding from this research paper. More research needs to be conducted to uncover how and what this change needs to be, yet the author has highlighted the need for a change to occur.

The author within the Czech Republic discussion noted how the country actively suppresses its dark past, as O'Neill notes is a risky approach to the concept [29]. This therefore has uncovered another opportunity for further research to discover how the concept of dark tourism is managed at a national level, in terms of policy, to highlight how it is managed and controlled. Within the UK there too was a range of findings, the most pivotal to note being how key curiosity is to people's motivations to visit these dark sites. These findings also suggest that the motivations to visit these sites are not merely dark tourism ones, with some visiting to commemorate victims, this raises questions again to why this occurs.

Future Work

The author has uncovered a whole host of future opportunities

for research. This includes gaining insights into those people who take part in dark tourism, as there is little research currently on this area and as Raine notes it will enable us to begin to locate and identify the types of dark tourists [38]. Furthermore, the author would undertake the research again at the Auschwitz site, and would ensure a better approach was undertaken to gain more valuable insights into visitor motivations to visit Auschwitz.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to take the opportunity to thank Dr Sarah Hemstock and Dr Mark Charlesworth for their support, input and advice. Also, I'd like to acknowledge the assistance given by Ivča Hamerníková, Tereza Maccechini and Stanislav Kraft during the duration of the time spent in the Czech Republic, whose understanding, help and support proved vital in the production of the research that forms the basis of this paper

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