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Dark destinations – Visitor reflections from a holocaust memorial site

(Paper accepted for publication in International Journal of Tourism Cities. Expected publication date: November 2015).

Abstract

Purpose – *Dark tourism and, more specifically, visitor experiences at Nazi concentration camp memorials are emerging fields of research in tourism studies and destination management. This paper builds on this growing body of knowledge and focuses on the World War II Nazi concentration camp at Dachau in Germany to explore the psychological impact of the site on its visitors as well as critical self-reflection processes triggered by this experience.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This micro-netnography resulted in fifteen online semi-structured interviews carried out with people who visited Dachau between 2003 and 2015. The interviews involved participants from eleven different nationalities and a range of age groups.*

Findings – *This study has shown that emotions that surface during a tourist's visit to a concentration camp destination can linger well after they have left the site. In fact, feelings of sadness, depression, anger and existential questions can haunt visitors for a considerable amount of time after their visit. Further reflections by visitors also included a more critical appreciation of world affairs. This is of particular significance when considering the behavior of tourists in an urban setting.*

Originality/value – *This research builds on previous dark tourism studies related to the onsite emotions experienced by visitors to concentration camp memorial sites and their travel motivation but takes this knowledge further by exploring the hitherto uncharted longer-term post-experience impacts of these sites on their visitors. Recommendations for dark tourism destination practitioners and academics are also provided based in a critical discussion of the research.*

Keywords *Dachau concentration camp, dark tourism, Germany, netnography, World War II*

Paper type *Research paper*

1. Introduction

Cultural tourism represents an important proportion (40%) of overall tourism in Europe (European Commission, 2013; Kercher and Du Cros, 2012). A growing subset of cultural tourism has been termed “dark tourism” (Joly, 2010) and defined by the Institute for Dark Tourism Research (2015) as “the act of travel to sites, attractions and exhibitions of death, disaster or the seemingly macabre”. Examples of dark tourism destinations include battlefields, prisons, sites associated with the holocaust, and other locations where tragedies have occurred. One of the characteristics of dark tourism destinations is that they allow visitors to gain a closer experience of historical events and often initiate a process of - at times existential - self-reflection (Stone and Sharpley, 2009).

World War II concentration camps are a specific and important element of European dark tourism studies today, even if detailed research in this area is relatively new. In spite of an initial debate in Europe with regards to the necessity for curating and conserving World War II concentration camps,

the European Union introduced legislation in 1993 to fund the preservation of Nazi concentration camps (EUR-Lex, 2004) with the intention of creating memorial sites, primarily. Some such camp memorial sites protected in Europe under this legislation and open to visitors and include Auschwitz-Birkenau, Gross-Rosen, Majdanek and Stutthof in Poland; and Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen in Germany. Of these, Auschwitz-Birkenau is the largest and most researched (Thurnell-Read, 2009; Knudsen, 2011; Minić, 2012; Kidron, 2013), with over 1.43 million visitors in 2012 (Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2015). This study focuses instead on Dachau – Germany’s first Nazi concentration camp, built in 1933 and visited by 800,000 tourists annually currently. The research carried out for this study has gone beyond visitor motivations and on-site experiences, and the findings suggest there are gaps in the understanding of the feelings that can linger in individuals (often for a period of several years) after their initial visit to a concentration camp memorial site. What happens once the tour is over? What type of feelings do these tours leave visitors with? These are some of the issues that this micro-ethnography research study offers a tentative glimpse into.

There is also the consideration that what is considered dark tourism is actually part of wider urban and city based tourism. That is to say, a visit to Dachau is not always undertaken exclusively, but is often one of several things a visitor will do whilst engaging in city tourism. In the case of Dachau that means that a visit to the camp is likely to be one of many tourist activities undertaken whilst visiting Munich, and most of those activities will undoubtedly be more in the traditional city visitation experience.

Despite the recent growth of research into dark tourism (Dale & Robinson, 2011; Lennon & Foley, 2000; Stone, 2013; Tarlow, 2005) and the growth of the dark tourism market (Biran & Hyde, 2013, as cited in Stone, 2013; Stone 2005; Stone & Sharpley, 2008), there has been little interest shown in understanding the relationship between dark and urban tourism (Page & Hall 2002). There are a wide range of dark tourism products available to urban tourists in Europe, but that these are rarely conceptualised as such. The mixture of ‘light’ and ‘dark’ dark tourism products (Stone, 2006, Fig 1) presents difficulties in categorisation and standardisation of the urban tourism offer, but this is a potential area of new product development for destination marketing organisations (DMO’s) across Europe. An understanding of the experiences of concentration camp visitors and an assessment of its place in the urban tourism mix is, therefore, a key component in enabling better planning and attracting more visitors in cities and urban areas where such visits take place (Powell and Kennell, 2015).

Visitation to sites as dark as concentration camps will have an effect upon the mood and emotions of visitors. There are numerous studies cited by Prayag et al (2013) which establish the link between post visit consumption and behavioral intentions. In essence, the negative emotions associated with concentration camps may well impact negatively on other aspects of the urban tourism experience. It is important, therefore, to be able to predict and manage what those emotions might be, and understanding their influence on behavior is likely to prove informative and useful to anyone involved in urban tourism.

2. Literature review

2.1 Dark tourism

The study of dark tourism and its associated destinations is arguably relatively new. This subset of cultural tourism was first coined as “negative sightseeing” by MacCannell (1998). Although there is still some level of debate with regards to the semantics of the ‘dark’ element of dark tourism (e.g., ‘dark’ because it is not a typical sun and fun filled vacation or ‘dark’ as a result of the nature of the deeds associated with its destinations, including murder and genocide), Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) were the first to explore the terminology used in published research associated with this type of tourism. For instance, Rojek (1993) referred to “black spots tourism” as selling an experience of death and disasters to tourists. Other terms used by scholars over time included “thanatourism”

(Seaton, 1996), “tragic tourism” (Lippard, 1999) and “grief tourism” (O’Neill, 2002; Trotta, 2006). Kang et al (2011) added to this with parallel concepts such as “prison tourism” (Strange and Kempa, 2003), “atrocities heritage tourism” (Ashworth and Hartmann, 2005), “battlefield tourism” (Baldwin and Sharpley, 2009), “slavery tourism” (Dann and Seaton, 2001) and “genocide tourism” (Beech, 2009).

The academic study of dark tourism gathered momentum in the early twenty-first century, and is reflecting the growing interest of the citizens of postmodern societies in the sites of death and disasters – an interest that needs deeper research to be understood fully. It also reflects the increased sensitivity of the international community to the significance of such events for nations, national identities and the direction of their history. Dark tourism sites offer the opportunity to capture and conserve the history and collective memories of humanity and make them available, through domestic and international tourism, to the wider public. It should also be noted that vicarious thrill seeking and entertainment motivations are also significant factors that have affected the recent growth of the dark tourism sector. This study of dark tourism in an urban setting, therefore, offers the opportunity to investigate the many ways in which dark tourism offerings are packaged and presented as tourism products within a significant sector of the tourism industry (Powell and Kennell, 2015).

Nevertheless, it is Lennon and Foley’s (2000) seminal work and their term “dark tourism” that is generally used to categorise this type of tourism. Their definition, also widely accepted today, stated that dark tourism is effectively a “phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” (Lennon and Foley, 2000; p. 198). Importantly, this study differentiated visitors between dark tourists (visiting sites out of curiosity) and friends and family of the victims. Crucially, the latter were not deemed to belong to the dark tourism typology, even if it could be argued that the intensity of the visitor experience for this group would have been much darker in relation to Stone’s (2006) dark tourism spectrum as a result of the much more personal connection to people who lost their lives at these sites. Kang et al (2011) add to this by pointing out that dark tourism offers not only an emotional experience but also an educational one as it exhibits significant events that happened in the past and conveys important messages regarding those events. These emotional experiences can vary depending on the type of site. Sites related to disaster and tragic events evoke emotions such as “fear, horror, sadness, depression, empathy, sympathy, and feelings of vengeance” (Kang et al, 2011 p.258). Authentic dark tourism sites such as concentration camps can engender such negative emotions in some visitors. By contrast, purpose built attractions such as The London Dungeon do not arouse negative feelings as they are built for entertainment and commercial gain, and are inauthentic. Furthermore, some authors have argued that there are many sites which may be considered to be in some way “dark”, but not all are equally authentic, which is to say not all are actual sites of death, horror and disaster (Powell and Iankova, 2015).

Stone (2006) suggests that not all sites can be considered as ‘dark’ in the same way, and suggests there are shades of dark, meaning sites may be classified from the lightest (with a lower political influence and ideology, such as sites developed for entertainment and commercial reasons) to the darkest sites (those with the highest political influence and ideology, which tend to be authentic and often actual sites of death and disaster, such as Nazi concentration camps.) (Figure 1)

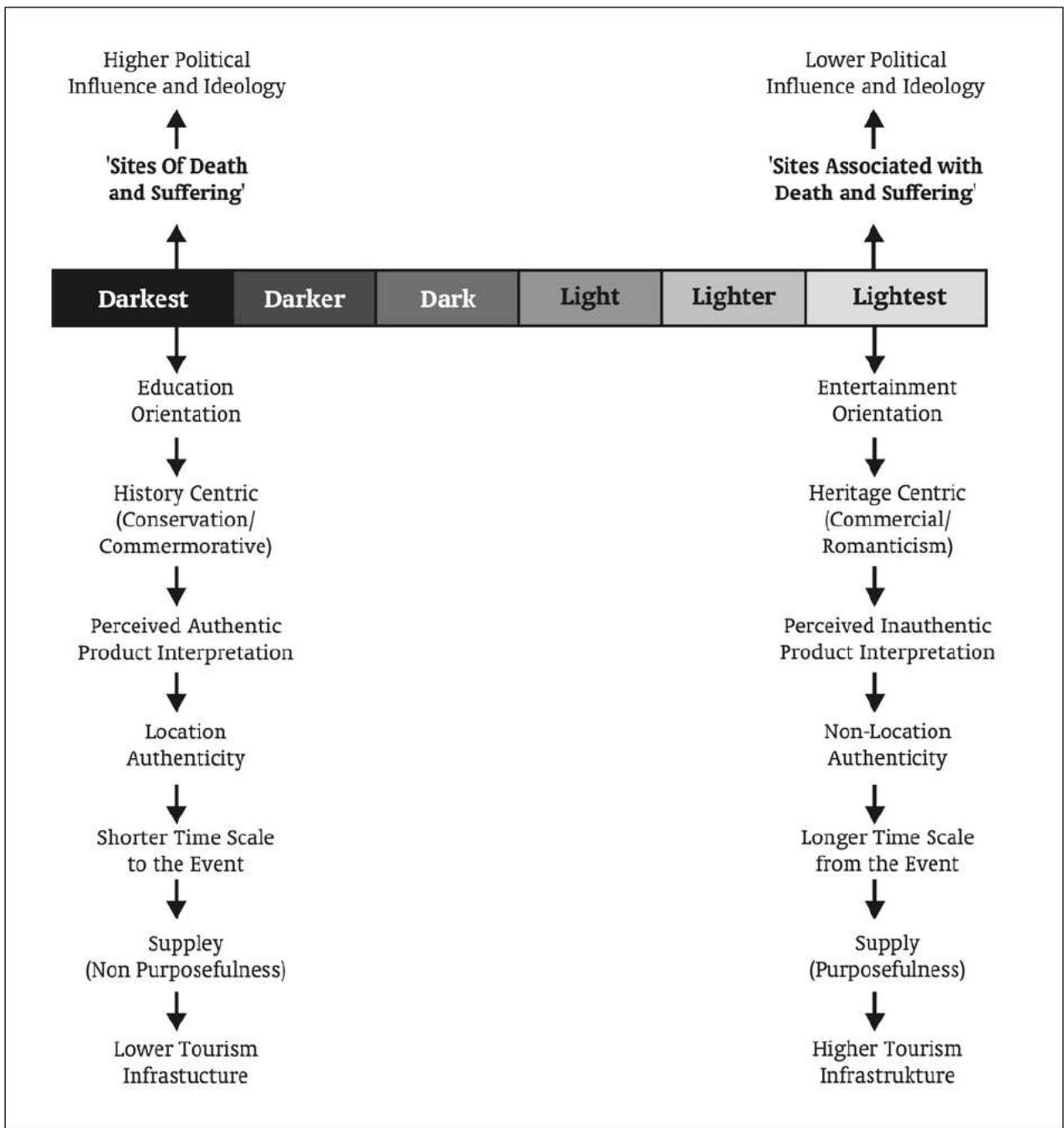


Figure 1. A dark tourism spectrum: perceived product features of dark tourism within a “darkest-lightest” framework of supply (Stone, 2006)

Stone (2008) explores whether dark tourism is driven by supply or demand, and he suggests there are differing types of dark tourism products available for touristic purposes. Although Stone does not clearly state that supply drives dark tourism his research suggests that supply is the driver rather than demand. Some sites are purpose built to remember or re-create fictional or real events. This will increase dark tourism supply which will result in more demand. The reasons for this vary from commercial exploitation to remembrance and commemoration.

Stone and Sharpley (2008) state that death is a taboo topic in today's society as homicide is not legally or socially accepted the way it was centuries ago. They believe that dark tourism can be analysed within a sociological framework which is an aspect that has not been well explored before. This is particularly true when we consider the accessibility of mobile phone technology and the ease of sharing personal experiences with a much wider audience via social media, thereby encouraging more widespread engagement with relevant dark sites and experiences worldwide.

Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) argue that, in fact, dark tourism may be considered to be part of mainstream tourism more than is often considered, and that the distinction between what they call picturesque tourism and dark tourism may be less than often imagined. In other words, dark tourism as a concept is more than simply being a fascination with death and disaster. It provides a motivation for tourism in many, often subtle ways. People will visit Nazi concentration camps for a variety of reasons, therefore.

Historically it can be seen that dark tourism has been a significant factor in providing the motivation for tourism since earliest times. Several commentators (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997; as cited in Lennon and Foley, 2000; Vellas and Becherel, 1995) have identified that pilgrimages were one of the earliest forms of tourism. Pilgrimage sites are often associated with death in one form or another, with religious pilgrims visiting the site of the death, or the graves of individuals or groups. Such visits tend to have religious or spiritual associations relevant to the pilgrims visiting, and are seen as acts of remembrance, commemoration or veneration, and usually feature as part of a ritualistic or tokenistic ceremony, often in a religious context. It should be recognised that there is an increasing demand for dark tourism products which offer a connection with scenes of suffering and death. That is not to say that this is a completely modern phenomenon. Visitation to scenes associated with death in particular (battlefields, graveyards and the former homes of dead celebrities for example), have proven to be a significant motivator for tourism in past-times as well.

The concept of dark tourism is not a new one, but there is a growing trend to develop dark sites for commercial exploitation. Tourists have been drawn to battlefield sites, places of execution, tombs and other related sites for a very long time (Stone, 2005). Seaton (1996) has identified dark tourism as being the visitation of sites associated with death and disaster, something which dates from the Middle Ages at least. Dale and Robinson (2011) also identify dark tourism as being an established practice as far back as the Eleventh Century. However, the increasing consumerism of post-modern Western societies has a tendency towards making experiences entertainment (Ghazali et al., 2015). This matched with the historically decreasing violence, wars and horrors in our societies (Pinker, 2011) creates the desire to "conserve" and protect the horror and murder as a relic of the past stages of our civilisation's development.

Stone (2005) considers dark tourism to be an old concept in a new world. That is to say that the fascination with scenes of death and disaster are old and quite possibly universal, but what is new is the way in which there is a commercialised and functional tourism industry able to make very much more available to very many more people than was the case in the past. Smith (1998) argues that sites associated with war probably attract more visitors than any other single type of attraction. Dark tourism is a widespread and growing reality and it is an important factor when considering the supply and demand of sites and attractions.

The attraction of death, disaster and the macabre has the potential to be a significant factor in the tourism sector worldwide, and in particular when considering the motivations which influence a visit to a Nazi concentration camp, which are multiple and complex. Nevertheless, such motivations sit well with a consideration of more general tourist travel motivation.

2.2 Tourist travel motivation

Motivation is an important psychological factor that initiates any type of holiday. There are push and pull factors that can affect tourists' views of travel motivations (Hudman, 1980). According to this theory the only pull factor for travel motivation is the attractiveness of the destination whereas the

push factors are listed in relation to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as various studies suggest that this is a basis to understand travel motivation. Chon (1989) as well as many other researchers believe that travel motivation comes under self-actualisation in Maslow's hierarchy because it enables the tourist to fulfil certain preferences and dreams they have about visiting a particular place, which could also relate to societal pressure or status.

Swarbrooke and Horner (1999) imply that there are two main factors which are influential when choosing a destination -- motivators and determinants. The motivators are the factors that inspire a tourist to purchase a certain holiday and determinants are the characteristics that make the tourist want to purchase that holiday. The diagram below demonstrates some of the main motivators that make a tourist want to choose a certain destination. The model can be applied to this study to determine what motivators push people to visit concentration camps.

Huang and Hsu (2009) explored travel motivation with reference to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) and Plog's psychocentrism (1974) model. The authors analysed Pearce's research conducted on a sample of 200 tourists, focusing on their experiences and needs. According to the results the main needs that require to be satisfied to have a positive experience are self-actualisation and love, followed by physiological needs, whereas self-esteem and safety play a minor role in creating a positive experience. To create a negative experience safety plays a major role, followed by physiological needs, whereas self-actualisation is the lowest need.

These findings support Chon (1989) and others, as self-actualisation is a significant need that tourists seek to fulfil when going on holiday. Security and safety are also important factors which merit serious consideration, and dark tourism can offer a sense of danger viewed vicariously and sufficiently remote chronologically.

2.3 Dark tourism motivations

Dark tourism is a relatively new topic for systematic tourism research. Nevertheless, the increased popularity of this type of tourism is demonstrated through various studies which analyse visitor experiences and motivations at dark tourism sites, which are different from generic tourist motivation in the main.

Vroom (1964, as cited in Van Eerde and Thierry, 1996) defined expectancy as an individual's likelihood of action or effort. The three stages of expectancy are *valence*, *instrumentality* and *expectancy*. In relation to dark tourism valence can refer to the emotional and personal value a site has in the visitor's mind. Instrumentality is when a traveller decides to visit a destination aiming to visit a city as the main goal and visiting a site that is in that city as a secondary goal. The expectancy factor is related to someone's perception that a desired outcome must be gained through a certain action. For example, when a visitor books a tour guide, they expect to gain more knowledge and insight than they would have on their own. Witt and Wright (1992) have used this model as a guide to understand travel motivations and expectancy. However, they have outlined that the main limitation to Vroom's model is that it is too complex to interpret individual travel behaviour in significant ways.

Korstanje and Ivanov (2012) argue that dark tourism sites sacralise the dead, often via a process of anthropomorphism thus giving the site a staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973). The experiences that visitors have in these sites can differ, depending on their connection and associations with the site itself. Disaster sites attract two types of tourists: those who want to visit the place primarily to experience and attest to what had happened, and others who have a personal connection with the site. These authors question whether dark tourism is a form of resiliency to negative events. Psychological resilience is a post trauma process and the ability of the victims to recover back to normality after a disaster. When applying this theory to tourists, the process of resilience for them is the need and ability to learn about the disaster that happened.

This study will help to assess aspects of resilience in relation to tourists who visit concentration camps. However, Korstanje and Ivanov (2012) believe that tourism is not affected by disaster but that it is disasters that create tourism. It is clear that tourism helps regions economically by generating money from tourists. When taking into consideration an important question that arises is: does dark tourism use tragedies to encourage exhibition rather than help sites and communities recover from the disaster? There is no clear answer, but Stone's (2006) typology differentiates between the darkest sites which often have a clear educational and commemorative function from the more exploitative commercial, lighter end of the spectrum.

2.4 Concentration camp visitors

Thurnell-Read (2009) explores visits to Auschwitz camp by young tourists. The author uses in-depth interviews to find out what motivated them to go, and what their experiences were like. The low prices on flights to Poland made them want to fulfil their interest in visiting the camp. Others had Jewish and Polish friends who talked to them about what their families had gone through and this triggered an interest within the travellers. The historical importance of the camp was also an important reason to visit to gather knowledge. In contrast to Thurnell-Read's (2009) findings, Biran et al. (2011) state that young travellers visit mostly for educational reasons, whereas adults are looking more for self-actualisation.

Thurnell-Read (2009) further states that although guided tours help with gaining knowledge about the camp and events that occurred, young travellers felt that these tours did not give them the space to digest the information they were getting. Furthermore Thurnell-Read attempted to understand if there were links between the young people who visited the camp and family history and it was found that some did not have any connections. Although the author explored the young travellers' experiences the study did not examine what the visitors were feeling at each stage of their visit or pre-visit, and this is something this study considers.

Knudsen (2011) states that Pollock (2003) believes that due to the presence of mass tourism in holocaust sites, the connection and empathy visitors feel towards the victims is reduced. Knudsen argues that sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau are similar to pilgrimage sites, as people are aware of their behaviour and feel a responsibility towards the site. The author also states that being in the site allows visitors to see things from the victims' perspective and relate it to past events. Although Knudsen researched the empathetic feelings visitors felt towards the victims, the author did not state what types of emotions emerged nor compared the degree of empathy which visitors felt at different stages of their visits. This is an aspect that this study will also consider by comparing the feelings of visitors before and after visits.

Minić (2012) explained the importance of tour operators who need to understand the demand of constantly changing trends. In contemporary society tourists do not just seek the traditional tourism product, also called mass tourism, but they are looking for experiences and they want to "buy" emotions rather than a product. Therefore the ambiance, attractiveness and atmosphere are what determine the choice of the destination. In the same vein to Dunkley et al. (2011), Minić states that dark tourism needs to be considered as special interest tourism.

Kidron (2013) examined dark tourism as heritage tourism and focuses on family trips by holocaust survivors and their families. The author has identified that there are growing numbers of war survivors that take their children and families to sites of personal suffering, sacrifice and, ultimately, survival. In contrast to Foley and Lennon (1996) who stated that friends and family visiting dark tourism sites is not dark tourism, Kidron believes that families who witness where their loved ones have suffered offer a highly emotional experience compared to the normal tourist.

Phuong Phan (2008) stated that reflective thinking enables learning and the development of critical skills. There are four different stages in reflective thinking: habitual action, understanding, reflection and critical reflection. Habitual action refers to actions that are done without much thought, almost

by habit. Understanding means learning and reading without relating it to another situation. Reflecting signifies consideration of assumptions and beliefs and finally critical reflection is a further step of reflection where you analyse and think why we perceive and feel things a certain way. When relating these factors to visitors of dark tourism sites it can be said that they understand what a concentration camp is and what occurred there. However, reflection hits them when they are actually on site connecting what they knew and what they experience on site. Finally the stage of critical reflection occurs when they have left the site and they reflect upon their experiences by gaining a better understanding of what occurred there.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research aim

The aim of this research was to explore the impact that visiting a memorial concentration camp has on tourists at Dachau concentration camp memorial site in Germany. The focus of the research was on visitor emotions and post-visit self-reflections. The choice of location was made on the basis that there is a much lesser understanding of visitor experiences at Dachau as opposed to other sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau.

3.2 Research philosophy and approach

In view of this study's focus on visitor feelings, emotions and reflections after their visit, the research philosophy adopted was one of interpretivism in line with similar earlier works in dark tourism by Thurnell-Read (2009) and Stone (2010). Similarly, a mix of deductive and inductive approaches were adopted in line with the prevailing research tradition in many dark tourism studies (e.g., Wight, 2005; Ryan and Kholi, 2006; Stone, 2011; Mowatt et al, 2011; Kidron, 2013; Koleth, 2014), particularly given the study's focus on emotions and experiences in a similar way to earlier studies by Lennon and Foley (1999) and Krostanje (2012).

3.3 Research strategy

The research was Internet-based in line with a similar earlier dark tourism study by Podoshen (2013) and adopted a micro-netnography strategy, which included fifteen semi-structured interviews carried out using the Internet in view of the logistical difficulties and time commitment that on-site face to face interviews would have entailed, particularly given the participant sample selected. The initial stages of the micro-netnography focused primarily on TripAdvisor accounts of visitors to the Dachau memorial site as well as similar Facebook dark tourism discussion groups. This covert online observation (complete observer only) helped to gain a better understanding of emotions, feelings and reflections among visitors to Dachau and similar dark tourism sites in line with similar netnography studies carried out elsewhere (Kozinets, 2010).

3.4 Sample selection

Using a purposive criteria-based sampling strategy, semi-structured interviews were planned with individuals who had personally visited Dachau concentration camp and who were known to one of the researchers as a result of an academic exchange visit to the University of Munich in 2014. The selection criteria for participants in the study included whether the person had visited the site, their age, nationality, and the date of their last visit, which needed to have taken place between 2003 and 2015. The intention behind achieving an adequate spread of ages was that a better understanding could be gained of potential differences in how individual experiences varied across age groups, particularly in terms of self-reflection thought processes after the visit. Similarly, it was intended that

a spread of nationalities among interviewees would help the study to capture cultural differences in interpreting and analysing certain visitor experiences and reflections.

Participants in this study were contacted directly via email and invited to participate in the research. The semi-structured interview questions administered to each interviewee via email were themed around four key categories. The first category was a pre-arrival element, where participants were asked to recall their feelings and motivations prior to visiting the camp (Korstanje and Ivanov, 2012) as well as any prior knowledge (Sirgi and Su, 2000; Kaelber, 2007) or expectations (Stone, 2006) they may have had before they arrived. The second category dealt with the interviewee's recollection of their feelings and emotions upon arrival at the site (Oh et al., 2007). The rationale behind this was to compare pre-visit memories with post-visit ones. On-site experience was the third theme, which explored participants' emotions and thoughts while they were at the Dachau concentration camp memorial site (Thurnell-Read, 2009). Finally, departure was the last theme which allowed participants to reflect about the whole experience (Lennon and Foley, 1999; Dalton, 2009) and discuss what they had learnt from it (Stone and Sharpley, 2008; Biran et al, 2011; Biran et al, 2014; Johnston, 2013).

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

The sample group consisted of fifteen ($N = 15$) respondents from a variety of nationalities and backgrounds, chosen because they had previously chosen to visit the camp at Dachau without prior knowledge of this study or its research aims. Demographic details were collected as part of the survey for comparison purposes, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic details of interview sample used in this study.

No.	Participant alias name	Age at time of interview	Gender	Nationality	Level of education	Year of visit	Related to Dachau victims?
1	Anna	26	Female	German	Secondary school	2003	No
2	Marija	22	Female	Croatian	Higher education	2008	No
3	Maddalene	23	Female	German	Higher education	2008	No
4	Arturas	23	Male	Lithuanian	Higher education	2013	No
5	Sergio	22	Male	Spanish	Higher education	2013	No
6	Doroteia	28	Female	Brazilian	Higher education	2014	No
7	Ling	21	Female	Taiwanese	Higher education	2014	No
8	Lucas	24	Male	Spanish	Higher education	2013	No
9	Hoc	21	Female	Vietnamese	Higher education	2012	No
10	Ayomi	54	Female	Sri Lankan	Secondary school	2015	No
11	Piya	30	Female	Indian	Higher education	2014	No
12	Raina	22	Female	Finnish	Higher education	2013	No

13	Marlene	70+	Female	German	Secondary school	Before 2005	Yes
14	Jeevanthi	22	Female	Sri Lankan	Higher education	2015	No
15	Donna	59	Female	USA	Secondary school	2015	No

The main focus of the interview was finding out how this sample felt during and after their visit to Dachau. The questions explored the motivations that pushed them to visit Dachau and what they were expecting to see when they were there. The questionnaire then enquired about how their thoughts changed, if indeed they did, as they experienced the camp and their thoughts about the experience when they finished touring the camp. Some participants also voluntarily shared other thoughts they had about their experiences. The narrative of their experiences can be categorised into three different categories: pre-arrival, arrival, on-site experience and departure.

A few themes emerged from each stage: the pre-arrival stage was dominated mainly by curiosity of visitors as they were looking forward to witnessing the camp with their own eyes. The arrival stage, however, provoked feelings of shock amongst the visitors as they realised they were witnessing a site where many people lost their lives. During the on-site experience many visitors expressed their grief about the victims and finally after they departed they engaged in some reflective thinking about the experience as a whole. The following themes were identified as being particularly significant when responses were analysed and considered:

4.2 Curiosity

It was clear from participant responses that most visitors ($n = 11$) had expectations as to what their visits would entail. This is best described as a curiosity regarding exactly what they would experience. This curiosity was, in part, a response to the historical and cultural aspects of being at a concentration camp, as well as being part of personal family history in a number of cases. The following statements are typical of the responses which exemplified that sense of curiosity:

“I was in Germany for three days and I was determined to see Dachau.” (Donna)

“Concentration camps are a big part of that history and Dachau the first one of all camps. Additionally, Dachau is very close to Munich so it was easy to travel there.” (Raina)

“I am interested in our history. My father, when he was a boy of 14 years, had to join the army. I want to know our history from all sides and the truth.” (Marlene)

4.3 Shock

The authenticity and the immediacy of the camp often encouraged powerful feelings of shock and horror that such things took place. This was evident again amongst the majority ($n = 9$) of those interviewed.

“It was a very strange feeling when I thought about how many people lost their lives in this place. I felt sad and depressed.” (Anna)

“I saw that sarcastic note on the entrance that says “Arbeit macht frei” [“Work sets free”] and I realised how cruel people can be to other people.” (Arturas)

“I remember being impressed by how big the camp was. Also, I tried to imagine how it would look like back in the days and that's exactly when I started to feel a bit sick. Going through the main door and see those letters in the upper part made me think how many people decades ago had seen them too, and how unlucky they had been.” (Sergio)

4.4 Grief

Often the grief was difficult to define and articulate, but was more of a sense of outrage and sorrow.

“It was so inhuman to see the punishments bloody Hitler has given to men, women and children. I couldn't stop my tears.” (Ayomi)

“I imagined how many people got tortured and killed at the same place, where I was walking around. It was a very depressing experience.” (Marija)

Some of the feelings of sorrow also led to very critical reflections on the state of the world today:

“I felt sad. I felt they did not deserve this only because they were different or had different beliefs. And I realized that the world is still like this.” (Doroteia)

4.5 Reflective thinking

As identified by Stone (2006) concentration camps are at the darkest end of the dark continuum, which necessarily means that they have an authentic and educative purpose which transcends commercial considerations. In other words, they provide the opportunity for commemoration and reflective thinking.

“I had a better understanding of the history with all the small details put in place. When I entered I felt more curious than empathetic, but when I left I just felt down and depressed.” (Jeevanthi)

“I tried to put myself in the place of one of the victims and it was one of the worst feelings I have ever had.” (Maddalene)

There was a general perception that visits made participants feel empathetic towards the victims. The majority of the participants ($n = 11$) stated history as the main motivator to undertake the visit. They saw Dachau as an important part of history and being in Munich they felt it was something they had to see. However, not all participants felt a personal interest in visiting the camp as a few were required to go as part of a school trip. Two participants stated that although they did not want to visit out of personal interest, in the end they visited the camp because their friends decided to go.

“Honestly, I visited it because my friends forced me to do it. Before that, I had a couple of opportunities to go with some university trips, but I rejected them because it was something I was not interested in. I guess I didn't want to go to a place where loads of people had suffered and died for no reason.” (Sergio)

Nevertheless at the end of the questionnaire he voluntarily stated that he would recommend this visit to anyone:

“Some people might feel as I felt before going there because of the nature of the camp, but it is something worth seeing. We don't have to be afraid about our past. We have to be aware of it, and try not to repeat those mistakes in the present.” (Sergio)

It is clear that although some feelings were shared commonly by most participants not everyone necessarily felt the same emotions at the same time.

Whilst acknowledging that every visitor to the camp, and others like it, are largely driven by a complex set of motivators and determinants, it is clear that overall the experience of visitors broadly follows a similar narrative. There is a strong sense of place, of history and sombreness when contemplating the grotesque events which were played out on the very site being visited. This brings a sense of immediacy and empathy which is itself experienced as anger and sadness, but which for many is tempered with a sense of appreciation and hope. Such feelings are shown in a few selected comments from visitors:

“There were some pictures of them smiling and show the belief in the liberation one day, which made me admire their attitude.” (Hoc)

“We have an easy life, we should not complain.” (Jeevanthi)

“I cherished my physical and mental status which was different from victims. I am glad I have freedom, humanity and the right to live.” (Ling)

5. Discussion

This study has shown that factors such as Dachau’s history, its proximity to a major city destination such as Munich and its good transport links remain key motivating factors for tourists to visit this concentration camp memorial site in line with the instrumentality stage of Vroom’s expectancy theory (1964), as it could be argued that the visit is in effect a secondary objective to a larger national (Germany) or international (Europe) tour involving several other major destinations. A much observed trend in modern tourism is that which shows tourists increasingly moving towards niche or specialist holidays. The days of the 3s’s (sun, sea, sand) mass tourism package holidays aren’t yet over, but there are an increasing number of viable options open to both the more adventurous tourist as well as those looking for a more homogenised and pre-packaged experience. In many ways the consumption of dark experiences are part of that changing landscape of urban tourism, and as such need to be understood in a touristic context as well as an historical and commemorative one.

In spite of the fact that earlier studies Biran et al. (2010) argued that older tourists tend to visit concentration camp memorial sites driven by self-actualisation whereas younger tourists do so mainly with educational purposes in mind, this study has shown that this division may become increasingly blurred as education and self-actualisation become motivating factors for both ends of the age spectrum. It is important to note, however, that Biran et al. (2010) conducted their research in Auschwitz-Birkenau, which, unlike Dachau, has two sections to the site – a museum and the concentration camp site itself. This important differentiating factor may have influenced the visitor perceptions recorded by Biran et al. (2010). In addition, research participants in that study were in many cases repeat visitors, whereas in this study only one of fifteen interviewees had ever been to Dachau before.

The feeling of anger reported by participants in this study appears to contradict similar earlier studies by Thurnell-Read (2009), Biran et al. (2010) and Knudsen (2012), where empathy was found to be a widespread emotion. A possible explanation for this could be that time elapsing since the visit leads to an evolution in thought processes by visitors towards a more tempered position from their initial feelings of sadness and anger. In line with this and considering reflective thinking more specifically, interviewees who had visited the Dachau concentration camp memorial five years before this study’s interview appeared to have reached the final stage of Dewey’s (1933) reflective thinking framework – critical reflection. Conversely, visitors who visited the camp within months of this study’s interview appeared to be still at the “habitual action and understanding phase” of the framework, so their reaction to the visit experience was perhaps more spontaneous.

Critical self-reflection was also evident in responses from visitors who said that they had gained a new appreciation for their lives after the visit. The suffering of Dachau's victims had often led to a new appreciation among visitors of their material comforts as well as the rights and freedoms they enjoyed by living in democratic systems. Similarly, the experience of the visit appeared to echo sentiments of resilience to tragic events researched by Korstanje and Ivanov (2012) in the form of self-reflections among many of the interviewees related to a new realization of the severity of war and genocide, as well as the need for these events not to occur again.

The media and pre-visit research also seem to have affected the experiences of visitors to Dachau. In fact, this study found that visitors who knew what to expect in advance of their visits as a result of documentary research (e.g., books, documentaries) tended to experience lower levels of emotion than those who did not know quite what to expect. This is in line with earlier research by Knudsen (2011), who found that the media can play a significant role in creating an image and expectation of dark tourism sites in tourists' minds prior to their visits. Furthermore, Knudsen suggested that empathy is the main feeling that dominates visitors' minds in these situations. Although the interviews carried out as part of this research on Dachau have largely confirmed this in broad terms, it was also found that the degree of empathy that visitors felt changed throughout their visits. Moreover, none of the participants in this study stated explicitly that they felt empathetic towards the victims of the camp prior to their visits or even upon arrival at the camp memorial site. In fact, most of them experienced feelings of sadness upon their arrival as well as a certain level of curiosity with regards to the experience that awaited them. In spite of this relative detached state of mind upon arrival, most of the visitors recalled feelings of empathy for the victims during and after their visits to Dachau.

The complexity of the emotions felt by visitors to Dachau and the insights into the site's longer-term impact on tourists' thinking with regards to their own lives and awareness of international affairs are issues with important implications for practitioners in destination management as well as academics in tourism studies.

6. Conclusions

This research has shown that emotions engendered in tourists' minds during a visit to a concentration camp memorial do not leave visitors' minds immediately after their visits. Feeling of sadness, depression, anger and existential questions can haunt visitors for some time (in some cases several years) after their visits. One of the most common questions that lingered in visitors' minds was how could one person's racial prejudice have caused such a big tragedy. Similarly, other existential self-reflections were common among participants in this study, including a renewed sense of appreciation for the value of life, freedom and quality of life.

Inevitably, due to the nature of the research (qualitative) and its focus on a single site (Dachau concentration camp memorial), the findings of this study cannot be generalised to a wider population or to other dark tourism sites. This is in line with methodological observations by Wight (2005), who also pointed out that there is a lack of quantitative research studies in dark tourism, which would help to build and test theories in this emerging discipline, particularly in areas where it differs from other sub-disciplines of tourism.

Nevertheless, this study has attempted to contribute to the growing field of experience research in dark tourism, where post-visit experience research and the longer term impact of dark tourism sites on the psyche of visitors remain major knowledge gaps to be explored further. In fact, a similar argument could be made for tourism studies in general, as Ritchie et al.'s (2011) pioneering assessment of published research in tourism experience showed that research related to the delivery of experiences to destination visitors remains under-represented in academic tourism journals. A more recent study by Shen et al. (2014) showed similar results, with the majority of dark tourism research focusing on countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, Lithuania, China, Thailand, Palestine, Ghana, Cambodia and the Ukraine. It is therefore evident that major geographical knowledge gaps remain to be addressed in this emerging field of research. Furthermore, given that visitor experiences are often influenced by the ethics value system of the tourist's country of origin, this geographical knowledge gap would appear to be all the more pertinent for academics as well as practitioners in destination management and marketing.

On a wider level, dark tourism research will continue to build a more resilient theoretical underpinning (Stone, 2005), particularly through a better balance between quantitative and qualitative studies. Stone (2011) has taken this argument further by suggesting that dark research should adopt a more post-disciplinary approach. This could be achieved through more transdisciplinary studies that analyse destinations in a more holistic fashion similarly to parallel emerging disciplines such as town centre research (Whyatt, 2004; Coca-Stefaniak, 2014; Wrigley and Brookes, 2014) and place management (Parker, 2008; Kavatzis and Ashworth, 2008; Florek, 2011; Gertner, 2011; Florek and Insch, 2011), which have started to evolve beyond their initial retail and marketing focus towards a more inclusive multidisciplinary approach that includes urban planning, sociology, architecture and experience design, among others. This is particularly pertinent to the development of competitive destinations, especially given the wide range of skills and experience that the tourism sector often demands of its professionals (Littlejohn and Watson, 2004) and directly applicable to the professional profile that these destinations will expect from future generations of destination managers as old paradigms in destination research and practice are challenged (Beritelli et al., 2014) and new more dynamic approaches to how they should be managed progressively enter the scene.

If we define urban tourism simply as tourism that takes place in urban areas, it becomes more important to develop a thorough understanding of the components of urban tourism destinations. The attraction of death, disaster and the macabre promises to be a significant factor in the tourism sector worldwide, and in Europe in particular. This will require sensitivity and knowledge in order to ensure the tourism professionals and other stakeholders fully understand the nature of the attractions, and the motivations and experiences of the visitors to them. There is also, rightly, a marked reluctance to be seen to be making money from other people's suffering, and it may be that esoteric questions of taste cloud the development of more authentic dark sites.

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