

Educational Application of Dark Tourism and Related Issues

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Abstract

Dark tourism is a phenomenon including visitation of places associated with death and suffering. It has become an independent study and a field after the first time it was defined by John Lennon and Malcom Foley. Since it is connected with death, ethical dilemmas and questions arise; it is seen unethical and even evil by some under specific conditions. Nevertheless, dark tourism may actually be a beneficial and ethical activity because there are various ways to benefit from it in education. Dark tourism involved mandatory education curriculum form different countries, including Japan and Germany, and the application of them are indicated. For Japan, the alternative versions of dark tourism, peace tourism and hope tourism, are important for the education and the interpretation is required for the culture. In Germany, concentration camps constitute an important phenomenon and educational approach for the mistakes of the past. In this paper, the ways of using dark tourism in education and their effects with related issues are discussed. The solutions are suggested to relevant ethical dilemmas and problems.

Keywords: Dark tourism; Educational tourism; Fukushima; Peace Tourism; Hope Tourism; Hiroshima; Concentration camps; Yoloocaust; Holocaust memorial

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“The past can hurt. But the way I see it, you can either run from it, or learn from it”

– Walt Disney

Dark tourism, also known as thanatourism, is the visitation of places associated with suffering, killing, genocide, assassination, crime, incarceration, war, suicide, and especially death. All places that are somehow connected with some of these concepts can be considered as dark tourism locations, including old battlefields and genocide memorials. It was initially defined by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley in 1996; after that, it has become a study and the field of tourism. Even though the field is comparatively new, the concept is not so; experiencing the end of a human's life has become an attractive phenomenon for centuries (Lennon, 2017). For instance, the arenas of the Ancient Roman Empire hosted numerous people who came to watch gladiatorial duels where two men tried to kill each other. Moreover, public executions attracted many people until a few decades ago, especially in London (Lennon, 2017). However, because such activities and public punishments are not continued anymore, at least in the modern world, the appeal of death shows itself as dark

tourism. Therefore, such sites are pulling factors for visitors worldwide because, according to Dalton (as cited in Lennon, 2017), they induce viewers to adopt memories of death, pain, or suffering. In some cases, dark tourism is represented as disrespectful to the dead, an unethical and even an evil practice since it is connected with death. Nevertheless, visiting dark locations is actually a significant activity because it might be an educative process. Hence, remembering past mistakes and teaching them to the next generations might guarantee that such mistakes will never happen again. As a result, thanatourism constitutes an essential phenomenon for education, making it ethical and practical.

As expected, dark tourism is a controversial concept since it is directly connected with death. Many consider it as an irreverence to the dead and an unpleasant activity; as a result, they show their reactions against it. Yolocaust is a good example that explains both the reasons for the controversies and the actions taken. Yolocaust is a movement taken against people who are disrespectful at the Holocaust memorial. This movement was started by Shahak Shapira after people started to take inappropriate and disturbing photos there (Gunter, 2017). Even though this memorial is not an actual grave, it is still attributed to the victims of the past Nazi regime; these disrespectful acts are considered as impudent and unethical. Yet, the educational benefits of dark tourism are irrefutable; stopping all visitations or closing them to the public definitely would not be an effective solution. On the other hand, it is a fact that tourists should be informed about the zone and its historical importance. So that, by increasing the awareness, visitor-related ethical issues, like tourists' contemptuous acts at Holocaust memorial, can be concluded successfully.

Nonetheless, as stated earlier, dark tourism is an integral part of effective education because it can be exceedingly instructive since dark sites stand as the connection of the past. Tourists may have an educational chance to learn about the historical events surrounding the

gloomy locations. As a result, instructional components are seen as an essential part of the entire visitor experience (Dresler & Fuchs, 2021). Therefore, visitors still learn about the site and the history even though such an educational aim is not a primary reason for their visit. Also, Stone (as cited in Dresler & Fuchs, 2021) claims that dark locations are connected with stronger political and ideological past; thus, they provide more informative and memorable experiences than non-dark touristic zones. Hence, especially for young individuals, dark sites may be helpful instructional resources in their learning process. Cowan and Maitles (as cited in Dresler & Fuchs, 2021) assert that educational field visits to dark sites are helpful in accomplishing specific learning objectives. For example, architectural constructions, physical items, and symbolic interpretations on-site may all play a part in offering alternate learning paths to supplement traditional classroom learning (Dresler & Fuchs, 2021). Such places may help students to understand the past, former ideologies, and politics with concrete examples by pulling the past out of the pages and turning it into reality. Additionally, according to Hartmann and Hodgkinson, numerous students, adolescents, and instructors engage in multiple academic trips involving dark zones as part of their educational activities annually (as cited in Dresler & Fuchs, 2021). Western Front battlefields, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Holocaust museums are some examples of dark sites visited by schools. Students are generally encouraged to visit such locations in order to learn about historical occurrences (Dresler & Fuchs, 2021). It is believed that visiting such historical locations is a beneficial pursuit.

Furthermore, according to Endacott (as cited in Dresler & Fuchs, 2021), empathy is seen as extremely important when teenagers visit dark places in order to encourage historical understanding to better comprehend and contextualize the complexity of lived experiences in specific chronological, geographical, and social settings; therefore, students learn about

another's past life experience, principles, viewpoints, attitudes, and beliefs with empathy in order to grasp how that person would have thought about the circumstance in question on a cognitive level. In addition to the blunders of the past, visitors, especially adolescents, may also improve cognitive skills. Consequently, visitation of dark destinations might be enormously beneficial for guests by informing them in many different subjects, including historical and even cognitive.

Moreover, the current Japanese education system takes dark tourism to a new level in understanding of education. In Japan, thanatourism and its educational applications differ from the West. Instead of promoting dark sites as dark tourism, there are several situations in Japan where an element of it is an integral part of educational tourism, contrary to the general approach in the West (Jang et al., 2021). Tourism places a strong emphasis on educational features in Japan; the most common example is school travels, which are formal tours organized by secondary schools for instructional objectives, and this particular school trip system has continued since 1868 (Jang et al., 2021). However, in Japanese culture, the term of dark tourism is considered to be complicated since the equivalent of tourism — *kankō* is meant to be 'seeing the light;' therefore, they have their own terminology, which is *fukinshin*. According to Makihara and Okuno (as cited in Jang et al., 2021, pp. 481-482) *fukinshin* can be defined as "when a disaster or calamity occurs, sympathy from the whole of society is required, and pleasant or enjoyable activities at these times are considered to be inappropriate." The term is frequently preferred in relation to social empathy; for instance, for the Great East Japan Earthquake that happened in 2011. However, it is not used for older events or disasters like Nagasaki. Japanese people have found a way to divide dark tourism and benefit it in education without leading to social issues. Applying such an understanding into different education systems might be a practical solution to related ethical problems.

Correspondingly, due to this understanding of dark tourism and the heritage of instructional tourism, Japan has produced a hybrid of the two, with Hiroshima and Fukushima serving as exemplary instances. Hiroshima is a quintessential dark tourism location since it was hit by a nuclear bomb during World War II (Jang et al., 2021). Nonetheless, in Japan, Hiroshima is not considered to be a dark tourism location since such an approach has the potential to be *fukinshin* for the deceased. On the contrary, Hiroshima is to be regarded as a symbol of peace and a site of remembrance. As a result, in Hiroshima, Peace Tourism, a type of dark tourism with an educational component, is created (Jang et al., 2021). The predicament in Fukushima dubbed the “second Chernobyl” after the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant incident, is the same; the phrase “dark tourism” is either not used in Fukushima. Instead, another new term, Hope Tourism, is preferred. After the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, dark tourism evolved in Japan, which had not before been observed in the Japanese tourism sector or culture (Jang et al., 2021). In light of this, Fukushima Prefecture launched a Hope Tourism initiative in 2017, which is the polar opposite of dark tourism. Hope Tourism is aimed towards both national and international students studying in Japan and news organizations from various countries. The prefecture has previously undertaken tours for junior and senior high schools and will market it as part of a Fukushima Gasshuku (Fukushima field study) educational tourism initiative (Jang et al., 2021). Japanese people have developed this particular way in order to avoid the concept of dark tourism and related ethical issues, and they developed new ways to integrate it into their education.

Additionally, there are some other examples of educational thanatourism, besides Japan. Genocide-related locations, such as the concentration camps and genocide memorials, have an educational potential as well. The concentration camps, for instance, are widely

visited each year; in only 2012, Auschwitz memorial site was visited by around 1.4 million people. While a big part of these visitors is schoolchildren on instructional tours, some might be survivors or, perhaps, relatives of particular victims, while others may be people memorializing the fate of all these victims. (Hodgkinson, 2013). Visiting an erstwhile concentration camp, such as Dachau that is a well-known camp located in Germany, is a mandatory element of the German school curriculum. Because it is an icon of World War II, it is the camp that German students visit the most. It is visited by approximately 800,000 people each year, and students are a large part of it (Hodgkinson, 2013). In addition, according to Hodgkinson, concentration camp memorial sites are a significant part of history education in order to learn from atrocities, future generations must be educated about these tragic periods of history (2013). Since almost no one alive has witnessed this tragic past, the only way to learn about it and truly understand it is possible by visiting the concentration camps and trying to understand it so that humanity will not ever experience such a failure again.

However, there are also several ethical issues regarding both dark tourism and its application in education. For instance, Biran et al. claim that visitation of Holocaust memorials is frequently chastised for belittling death and suffering, reinforcing the disparities in views and expectations of what constitutes acceptable behavior in such a context (as cited in Dresler & Fuchs, 2021). Another issue regarding the sites is the difficulties relating to site management concerns such as marketing, promotion, and retail operations. Lots of dark locations contain stores; however, selecting what may be sold can cause moral problems because businesses are very restricted by concerns of taste and decency (Dresler & Fuchs, 2021). As a result, numerous people believe that dark tourism is unethical. Although this argument has some logical justification, regarding dark tourism as unethical is not that reasonable because, as stated before, it has an irrecusable educational effect on society.

Nonetheless, it is a fact that visitation of thanatourism destinations requires regulations and inspection in order to preserve human rights and cultural values and resolve the current ethical dilemmas and problems. Still, contrary to the general sight, because its cultural, historical, and instructional impacts, dark tourism cannot be considered morally wrong. Such an approach would be ignoring an essential part of reality.

To conclude, dark tourism is a growing market with several ethical problems. By some, it is even seen as totally unethical and a disrespectful act to victims and the dead. However, there are different ways to benefit dark zones in instructional interest. Dark tourism may help students by supporting the entire learning process with concrete items. Furthermore, visitation of dark locations is even a part of the mandatory curriculum in specific countries, like Germany and Japan. However, there are also ethical issues and misunderstanding that are needed to reevaluate and adjust if necessary; regulations are required in some cases. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that dark tourism is strongly important to make sense of the past and learn from it. Just like George Santayana, a poet and philosopher, said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

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