

***Dark Tourism – can you have a hierarchy of tragedy ?***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

As the notion of *Dark Tourism* has developed and sought to differentiate itself from other paradigms and from being dismissed as just another example of 'adjectival Tourism', various authors have sought to tackle the major building blocks of supply, demand and integration. Not unsurprisingly, such debate has tended to focus upon the interpretation of high-profile incidents and sites. Recently, the reconciliation process in Ireland has brought the debate as to whether there can (BBC, 2009a) or cannot (BBC, 2002) be a 'hierarchy of victims' back to the fore.

This paper evolved from a series of guest lectures (Parry, 2002-08), that had posed the question 'can you have a hierarchy of tragedy?' and, initially, used the image of a child eating a sandwich (Lennon & Foley, 2000) to ask its audience where this might / might not be seen as acceptable. The series, also, explored whether *Dark Tourism* requires specialist theoretical models / approaches, or whether generic *Tourism* methodology will suffice.

This presentation will compare and contrast high-profile *Dark Tourism* sites and approaches with lesser known ones. It is, most definitely, not the intention to ask its audience to call into question its views on these high-profile sites; rather, that by asking where one might then position other sites, the resulting spectrum might lead to a more interesting evaluation of whether current approaches to interpretation are apposite.

## **DARK TOURISM PARADIGM**

The evolution and forebears of *Dark Tourism* are well discussed within (Stone & Sharpley, 2008) and so will not be repeated here. The interest lies in whether the topic has met the criteria outlined by Kuhn (1970) and truly established itself as a distinct paradigm, or whether it remains disputed territory within the wider *Tourism* sector. Stone (2006) and Dunkley (2005&2006) sought to establish new typologies, whilst (Stone & Sharpley, 2008) position *Dark Tourism* within a wider thanatological framework.

This presentation will compare and contrast such typologies and models with more mainstream approaches, such as a further amendment to Jafari's framework (Cooper *et al.*, 2005) or Laws (1995). The aim being to better understand whether aspects of such notions as 'Dark Medicine' (LaFleur, *et al.*, 2007) or Memorial Museums (Williams, 2007) truly belong within, are contiguous to, or overlap *Dark Tourism*.

## **COMPLEXITIES OF DARK TOURISM**

Emerging paradigms have a tendency to try and distinguish themselves from competing paradigms by deterring notions that seem to question the validity of the new paradigm (Kuhn, 1970) (Fineman & Gabriel, 1994).

Hence, this presentation's approach of deliberately exploring inconvenient exemplars as a means of challenging and evaluating the value of competing frameworks. The beauty of chemistry's 'periodic table' is that it positioned the known elements so well that it was able to leave accurate gaps, awaiting future discoveries. If *Dark Tourism*

is to succeed, as a distinct entity, its frameworks need to be equally robust, in spite of its relative infancy.

To illustrate this point, think of a handful of high-profile *Dark Tourism* sites and then mentally position them on your preferred academic framework. Without changing those positions, now consider whether the following reinforce your perceptions of those positionings, or cause you to re-evaluate any of them.

- most *Tourism* researchers are familiar with the sinking of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*, in which some 193 people died; but, how many can name the two ships involved in the worst peacetime maritime disaster, which came a few months later and saw more than 4,300 people lose their lives (BBC, 2006a) ?
- many are familiar with the sinking of the *RMS Titanic* [some 1,500 lives lost] and even *HMT Lancastria* [at least 5,000 dead]; yet the worst single maritime disaster, involving the *Wilhelm Gustloff* [which saw an estimated 8,000 deaths] has a much lower profile (Jamkowski, 2005).
- if the contested commemoration associated with plans to redevelop the former Maze Prison (BBC, 2009b) has illustrated the difficulties of addressing the concepts of terrorism and freedom-fighting, how should one commemorate the role of the former internment camp at Frongoch, North Wales - which is seen as a significant factor in the development of *Sinn Fein* and the *Irish Republican Army*, after the 'Easter Uprising' (Liverpool Daily Post, 2002).
- it is right that great sensitivity is shown over the redevelopment and commemoration of 'Ground Zero', Manhattan, New York; yet, how then, should one respond to the site of the 'Morgan Bombing' becoming the lobby

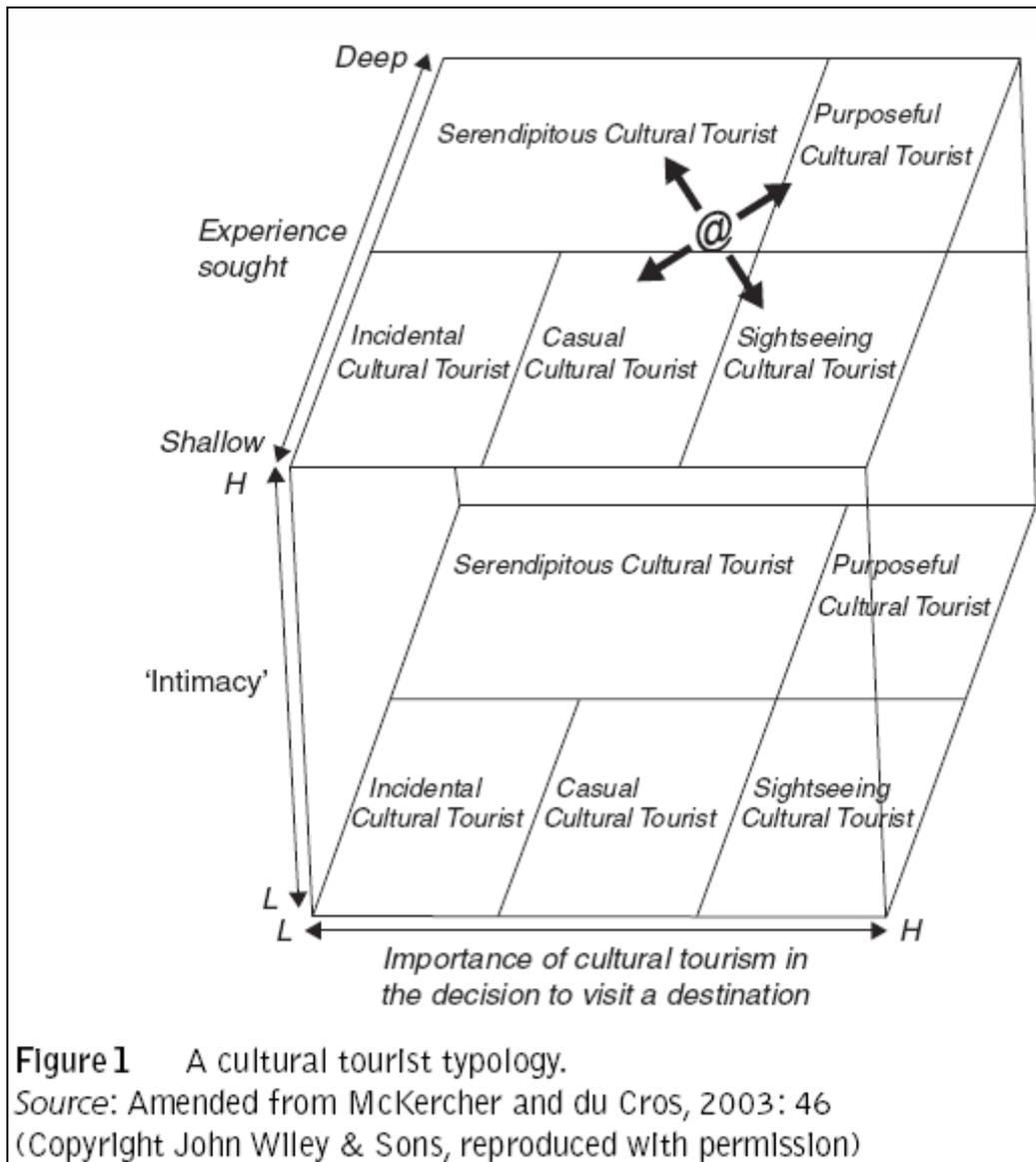
and roof terrace of the *Downtown by Philippe Starck* condominium development (*Downtown by Phillippe Starck*, 2009)

- if Lennon & Foley (2000) raised the inconsistency between the commemoration of NAZI concentration camps on mainland Europe and the site on Alderney; where might one then position any commemoration of the children of Buschmannshof (Manchester, 2003) ?
- Liverpool, England, has responded to its historical association with the African slave trade, through the *International Slavery Museum* (NML, 2009); whereas Belgium's attempts to confront its role within the former Belgian Congo have proved more disquieting (BBC, 2005a).

The challenges of developing appropriate frameworks for encompassing the full range of *Dark Tourism* sites and their commemoration further highlight the need to answer that question of 'can you have a hierarchy of tragedy?' Indeed one has to question whether even to ask such a question is insensitive. *Dark Tourism* tends to throw the debates over Heritage vs History (Hewison, 1987) or staged-authenticity (Cooper *et al.*, 2005) into sharp relief.

## **PURPOSEFUL AND INCIDENTAL DARK TOURISM**

Having utilised the contrast between mainstream and less-mainstream *Dark Tourism* sites, to highlight the challenges of addressing whether you can have a hierarchy of tragedy, it is proposed to use the framework in *Figure 1* (Parry, 2006) to generate debate about whether *Tourism* models can address this or whether *Dark Tourism* models need to be developed.



(Parry, 2006)

This approach enables one to address issues such as:

- the fact that few foreign tourists who travel to Montserrat for the *St Patrick's Day* celebrations realise that these actually commemorate a failed slave uprising (BBC, 2005b).
- the multiple *Dark Tourism* events linked to the Pier Head area at Liverpool, England, which some visitors actively seek and others know little about;

ranging, amongst others, from the last act of the *American Civil War* (Jones, 1992) and the controversial exploits of the *CSS Alabama* (MMM, 2009), to the *WWII Blitz* and the plight of the 'Shanghai Sailors' (BBC, 2006b).

- whether visitors to a stately home fully appreciate the need to set the source of the owners' wealth into context (BBC, 2006c).

This framework addresses the range of 'intimacy' and understanding that different groups of visitors might have for specific *Dark Tourism* sites, as a means of drawing in the conflicting views and expectations of the various stakeholder groups. It, also, highlights the duty that tourism practitioners owe when seeking to commercialise such sites.

## **CONCLUSION**

This session should spark debate over how one might seek to attempt any formal ordering of *Dark Tourism* sites and of their visitors' motivations, when the story behind each site is unique and distinctive. Such debate should, also, address the question of whether this paradigm requires specific models or whether it can draw upon more generic ones.

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