Positive Implications of Dark Tourism in a *de facto* Post-conflict Area

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Abstract

Dark tourism is an experience affiliated with negative emotions, such as grief and mourning (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Biran and Poria, 2012). Nevertheless, visiting a dark site can be an enlightening and educational experience (ibid.). This paper takes a new approach to dark tourism by evaluating the level of positive impact it generates through a newly identified niche tourist audience: conflict professionals as business tourists to post-conflict areas.

Little to no scholarly work has been devoted to conflict-related business tourism in post-conflict areas. There is therefore limited understanding on the sociocultural impact of foreign conflict professionals and no sufficient evaluation of the work they produce and the interactions they have. With Cyprus as a case study, this paper analyses data and interviews of foreign conflict professionals and local key stakeholders with regards to the activity of business tourism to post-conflict areas and the level of positive impact it generates.
Introduction

Dark tourism is a fairly recent and unexplored concept. It has been used predominantly to identify the macabre element of certain tourist destinations and to discuss the tourist incentives for visiting ‘dark’ sites. The concept of dark tourism has been distinctly defined as the attraction to sites of death, tragedy and disaster (Lennon and Foley 2000; Sharpley and Stone 2009), but also broadened to include sites with an indirect correlation to death and violence, including activities with a risk of death (Biran and Poria 2012; Robb 2009). The diversity of sites associating with death, disaster and the macabre provides a wide range of dark tourism attractions, with a higher or lower level of ‘darkness’, depending on their authenticity, the severity of the tragedy they depict and the level of sentimentality they provoke to their visitors.

Post-conflict areas are examples of dark sites, as they illustrate the authentic aftermath of a past war and are of great interest to professionals dealing with conflict – social scientists, journalists, conflict photographers and film-makers, policy-makers, practitioners, activists. Conflict professionals have a professional interest in visiting certain post-conflict sites and can be considered a distinct tourist audience under the dark tourism domain, a sub-category of business tourism that is specific to post-conflict areas.

The tourist audience of conflict professionals is noteworthy for two main reasons: first, conflict professionals who visit post-conflict sites for business do so not to satisfy their fascination with death, war and tragedy – recreational travel – but to satisfy a professional interest – necessary travel (Liutikas 2012). It is therefore an audience contradicting the negative connotation traditionally associated with dark tourism. In addition, post-conflict areas are dynamic, transitioning politically, institutionally and socially from a state of war to positive peace (Roberts 2008; Sewer and Thomson 2009). It is therefore important to examine whether the work of this niche audience, their publications, articles, photographs, trainings and contact with locals and key stakeholders has a notable impact on the post-conflict area’s transition towards viable peace.

This study is using the case of Cyprus in order to answer this question. Cyprus, a territory with a history of inter-state war and civil unrest, can be identified both as an intractable conflict as well as a de facto post-conflict territory. Under either scenario, Cyprus is a frozen conflict, whose inhabitants have been experiencing decades of attempted reconciliation and negative peace between its two main communities, the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. At the same time, Cyprus has been a tourist haven due to its picturesque landscape and warm, Mediterranean climate. With the tourist industry making up a considerable portion of the island’s entire economy – approx. €2 billion for the Republic of Cyprus in the south and €343 million for the Turkish Cypriot industry in the north (Farmaki et. al. 2015) – the conflict professionals who have been visiting Cyprus due to their interest in its conflict and post-conflict development have been identified as members of wider tourist audiences and not as a niche audience in itself. By conducting a number of interviews with conflict professionals and related stakeholders, this study will present the conflict professional audience of Cyprus and assess its impact on the island’s transition towards reconciliation and positive peace.
Reviewing the Literature

In order to identify the framework within which lies dark tourism, it is important to acknowledge the complexity associated with the concept of tourism. Burns and Holden suggest that identifying tourism as a product holds certain inaccuracies, as does the classification of tourism as an industry (1995: 5). Jafari (ibid.) identifies tourism as an experience and describes it from the perspective of the visitor, supporting that tourism is the activity of people away from their “usual habitat”, making use of “a foreign industry of their interest, an activity with economic, social as well as environmental implications”.

The act of travel can be divided into three basic categories: recreational, valuistic and necessary (Liutikas, 2012). Recreational travel refers to leisure tourism; valuistic includes traditional and modern forms of pilgrimage – such as religious and ethnic-based tourism to sites of value, as well as travels in support of a sports team – and necessary includes business and health tourism. This categorisation is derived from the motives of the travellers, either as individuals or as groups.

Dark tourism has been defined as “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre” (Stone, 2006; 146). According to Collins-Kreiner (2010), dark tourism refers to the dark experience, one that is subjective to the visitor’s perception. The dark element is therefore not an accurate characteristic for the site – which can combine dark, cultural, heritage, political and historical elements – or the traveller – who can be motivated by dark, cultural, recreational, emotional or other factors at the same time. One tourist experience at a dark site can be darker than another, according to Stone’s “Dark Tourism Spectrum” (2006: 151):
According to Stone’s outline of the Dark Tourism Spectrum, some dark sites can be darker than others, more authentic, more controversial, more political and more sentimental. The classification of a site as authentic, however, and the interpretation of its political weight can be subjective and therefore controversial when developed by conflicting local audiences. It is therefore a frequent phenomenon that such sites are subject to more than one interpretation.
Post-conflict areas can inspire unique types of dark tourism activity, because they combine the macabre element they portray (Timothy 2011) with the dynamic and continuously changing character they adopt due to their transitional nature (Serwer and Thomson 2009). This feature attracts tourist audiences beyond the traditional recreational tourist, and particularly conflict professionals, an audience of business tourists with a professional interest in post-conflict areas. As defined by Davidson and Cope (2003), business tourism refers to conferences, trainings, seminars and exhibitions; in the case of a post-conflict area, international conferences on conflict, reconciliation or related themes can attract foreign professionals, enable the development of new partnerships and develop knowledge products, such as conference publications and journals. The business tourism industry also consists of individual business tourism, taken by journalists, politicians, consultants, artists and other freelancers (ibid.). These professionals, when working on conflict, are prone to travelling to a post-conflict area for business.

Lennon and Foley (2000) argue that 'specialists' are not the biggest share of the dark tourist category. Even though conflict professionals can be a quantitatively negligible audience, their role as business tourists to post-conflict areas might have a substantial qualitative impact, through the work they produce and the interaction they have with local stakeholders. According to Liutikas (2012), business travel is classified as necessary travel, linked neither to the thrill offered by the dark site visited, not to the emotional connection of the traveller to the site in question. Conflict professionals have a professional interest – either personal or institutional – in visiting a post-conflict site and either producing a knowledge product for replication – an article, a book, a report, a collection of photos, audiovisual footage – or interacting with local stakeholders in their professional capacity.

A range of anthropological, psychological and sociological theories have developed to explain tourist motivation. Many tourists are motivated by a search for spirituality, contact with nature and a sense of freedom (Burns 1999), others by their search for authenticity and desire for pilgrimage (MacCannell 1976), while many engage in the visual consumption of new surroundings, an activity defined by Urry as the tourist gaze (1990). Nevertheless, following Liutikas’ categorisation of travellers, tourist motivation has been developed more with regards to recreational travellers, less for valuistic, and even less so for necessary travellers. What is evident following this study’s review of relevant literature is that there is little to no work devoted on the examination of necessary travellers, particularly business tourists in post-conflict areas. As a result, there is limited understanding on the sociocultural impact of their activity as travellers, and to a further extent, no sufficient evaluation of the work they produce, the interactions they have and the overall impact they generate.

**Identifying the Gap**

The audience of conflict professionals as business travellers to post-conflict areas fits the wider framework of dark tourism, which is important to further clarify. The dark element associated with certain destinations – an element that associates with post-conflict areas as well – is linked to negative emotions, such as grief and mourning (Biran and Poria 2012). At the same time, however, visiting a dark site can be an enlightening and educational experience (ibid.), which is a more accurate assumption for the case of conflict professionals. Consequently, the audience of business travellers to dark sites can be seen as an example of ‘positive’ dark tourism.
By examining the impact of foreign conflict professionals to dark sites, this study evaluates the extent to which dark tourism can be an enlightening and positive phenomenon, and therefore worth exploring further.

**Analysing the Impact**

Looking into this paper’s case study, Cyprus is still in the process of identifying a viable political arrangement for its population’s reunification. With reconciliation attempts having up to date failed to come through (Bahcheli and Noel 2005; Clerides 2007; Coughlan 2000), Cyprus continues to operate under the *de facto* partition that was established in 1974, with the Republic of Cyprus of Greek Cypriot constituents in the south and the Turkish Cypriot community in the north, operating under the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), a regime only recognized by Turkey (Berg 2007). The *de facto* partition, which has been in place for forty years, has enabled the institutional development of each community separately, with separate political and constitutional frameworks, separate economic markets and separate social discourse (Farmaki et. al. 2015).

The unique characteristics of Cyprus as a *de facto* post-conflict society have led to the development of two separate tourism industries on the island, yet at the same time the local civil society has developed a joint institutional structure dedicated to social development across communities. This structure has attracted a notable number of foreign conflict professionals to the island, and it could be catalytic in developing this niche form of tourism on an island-wide basis.

Foreign conflict professionals in Cyprus are mainly seen to interact with three categories of local stakeholders:

- a) Local conflict professionals, including primarily conflict management practitioners, civil society activists and social scientists,
- b) Decision-making officials: governmental officers, religious leaders, politicians, UN peacekeeping militants and police officers from both communities in charge of movement across the UN Buffer Zone
- c) Foreign local stakeholders: international civil servants working for international bodies such as UNDP, USAID, EU representation and embassies actively involved in peacebuilding activities

The interaction of foreign conflict professionals with each of these categories of local stakeholders is catalytic in the course of their work as, some stakeholders might have a positive effect by encouraging their visits and contribution, while others might have a more neutral or negative effect that could hinder their input into the area’s post-conflict development. As observed by the interviews, the majority of local stakeholders are positive towards foreign conflict professionals coming to Cyprus and value their work and impact.

The diversity of work that conflict professionals produce in relation to post-conflict areas would unsurprisingly result in a diverse impact over the area and its inhabitants. According to Christopher (category c) (2015, pers. comm.) foreign conflict professionals have instigated social impact both on a personal and a communal level, have contributed to the scholarly recording of the conflict/post-conflict discourse and the production of widely disseminated knowledge products and, although to a lesser degree, have shifted the dynamics of the protracted political process towards reconciliation.
According to the local stakeholders’ feedback, there are three main phenomena to which foreign conflict professionals – across disciplines – appear to have notable positive impact:

1. The conflict’s portrayal/narrative
2. The capacity-building and effectiveness of local stakeholders
3. The promotion of reconciliation across the general public

The reproduction of the conflict’s narrative through foreign conflict professionals can offer new perspectives to the involved communities and potentially new approaches to its understanding. At the same time, both structured and informal interaction with local stakeholders, either on peacebuilding or organizational/logistical practices, is welcomed as beneficial to the capacity-building of local organizations, institutions and individuals. Lastly, the physical engagement of foreign experts with intercommunal activity has been seen as the physical manifestation of support to the otherwise marginalized local peace activists and of intercommunal contact.

One cannot argue accurately whether local civil society attracted foreign conflict professionals, or whether their presence enabled it to establish its presence. Nevertheless, a relationship between local experts and their foreign counterparts has developed due to their mutual desire to share best practices for conflict resolution. Local NGOs such as the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR 2014) and the Cyprus Community Media Centre (CCMC 2014) have arguably increased their legitimacy and scope of influence by hosting foreign conflict professionals for local conferences, presentations, lectures, exhibitions and trainings.

**Conclusion**

The niche audience of business tourists that is unique to post-conflict areas is a clear illustration of the positive implications of dark tourism. In addition to the area’s potential for development and reconstruction through tourism, this study touches upon the impact of this audience on the area’s social development and political progress towards reconciliation. Conflict professionals interested in Cyprus were able to engage international audiences in the country’s post-war transition and at the same time engage local civil society in taking the lead for the establishment of viable peace.

This paper addresses a literature gap regarding business tourism to post-conflict areas, presents the positive implications of dark tourism by identifying a new niche tourist audience and outlines how this audience can affect the socio-political transition of a post-conflict area towards reconciliation. In conclusion, the study of conflict professionals as business tourists in relation to the positive implications of their work can be a valuable tool for the development of business tourism in post-conflict areas and the effective utilization of foreign expertise for post-conflict development.
BIBLIOGRAPHY:


