

Tourism to Places with a Difficult Past
A Discussion Paper on Recent Research Trends and Concepts: Heritage Tourism, Dissonant Heritage Tourism, Thanatourism, Dark Tourism, Holocaust Tourism

Rudi Hartmann (February 2009)
Department of Geography & Environmental Sciences
University of Colorado Denver
Rudi.Hartmann@ucdenver.edu

In recent years, the theme of *tourism to places with a difficult past* has become an increasingly popular topic for scholars and consultants in the interdisciplinary field of recreational travel and tourism research.

Before 1990, this field of study in tourism was largely neglected or - if included at all in a research agenda - placed in the wider field of *cultural tourism* or *historical tourism*. Then and now, it has been frequently presented as a type or distinct expression of *heritage tourism* (particularly, in English speaking literature).

Today *heritage tourism* is widely recognized as a growing market segment within tourism. Consequently, there have been many more studies of heritage/historical resources for the development of *heritage tourism* on a local or regional level. Many preservation organizations in the U.S., e.g. the *National Trust for Historic Preservation* on a national level or *Colorado Preservation Inc.* on a state level, argue that the development of *heritage tourism* has beneficial sides and consequences: from community pride in its history (or a specific chapter in its history) and the subsequent rehabilitation of historic resources (e.g. restoration or renovation of prominent historic buildings and/or whole ensembles in a town or city) to the financial impact for a locale or region. *Heritage tourism* contributes \$ billions annually to communities and regions nationwide (\$ 3.4 billion total expenditures of heritage tourists in Colorado according to “The Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation in Colorado” Clarion Associates 2005). It has been acknowledged as a very effective tool in economic development policy making – although the issue of *authenticity* has raised some flags in the debate over *appropriate* heritage tourism development. In academe, this field has led to the establishment of two fairly new professional journals in the field: *The International Journal of Heritage Studies* (since 1995) and *The Journal of Heritage Tourism* (since 2006, with editors and editorial board members who mainly come from English speaking countries).

While the number of studies about *tourism to places with a difficult past* increased considerably in the 1990s, it is also notable that at least four new concepts and/or research traditions emerged: *dissonant heritage (tourism)*, *thanatourism*, *dark tourism* and *holocaust tourism*.

The terms *dissonant heritage*, *dissonant heritage tourism* and *dissonance in heritage tourism* (development) were introduced by Gregory Ashworth and J.E. Tunbridge in the early/mid 1990s. It is an analytical approach and tool which Ashworth and Tunbridge initially applied to the analysis of complex urban planning situations in historic towns

and cities of Central/Western Europe. By analyzing the process of heritage development and in particular, the commodification of historical resources for a heritage product they examined the question of who creates a heritage product for whom. They realized that there is frequently *dissonance* implicit in the commodification processes, *dissonance* implicit in the creation of place products as well as *dissonance* implicit in the content of messages which may in some cases even lead to disinheritance. Further, they discussed strategies for the management of atrocities sites and specifically elaborated on how these motives and strategies differ among three groups: motives and strategies as prevalent among the *victims*, as prevalent among the *perpetrators* and as prevalent among the (more or less uninvolved or innocent) *bystanders*. Two of the examples the authors chose for a discussion of “Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict” (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) were the concentration/extermination camps of Central & Eastern Europe and sites pertaining to the colonial heritage of Apartheid South Africa.

The concept of *thanatourism* was introduced by Anthony Seaton in the mid 1990s. In his preeminent early article “Guided by the dark: From thanatopsis to thanatourism” (1996) he proposed that we should recognize the deep fascination some visitors of battlefields and cemeteries have with death and dying – thus often identifying with those who are buried and remembered at these sites. His qualitative studies which carefully explore the motives and life world of *thanatourists* (“motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death”) include present-day visitors to the battlefield sites of WWI in Europe: “Another weekend away looking for dead bodies: Battlefield tourism on the Somme and in Flanders” (2002).

Out of this initial interest in and/or parallel to the perceived fascination of tourists with death and dying came a much wider – though also more nebulous - concept into being: *dark tourism*. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, main authors/creators of this term and idea “Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster” (2000) share a similar geographical and professional background. Both Anthony Seaton and John Lennon who are credited with pioneering this new parallel approach of *dark tourism/thanatourism* taught at tourism study programs in Southern Scotland (at the University of Strathclyde and the Glasgow Caledonian University respectively). Dark tourism studies have spread to other colleges and universities in England and Scotland. A main research center is currently found at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, UK where a very successful dark tourism forum website www.dark-tourism.org.uk has been hosted since September 2005.

What is *dark tourism*? Philipp Stone, University of Central Lancashire and founder and editor of The Dark Tourism Forum, considers the new and now heavily used term as a “fascinating, provocative and emotive concept” and defines it in the following way: “Dark tourism is the act of travel and visitation to sites, attractions and exhibitions which has real or recreated death, suffering or the seemingly macabre as a main theme”. (Stone/Dark Tourism Forum 2005, as highlighted at www.dark-tourism.org.uk 2009). Though, Stone concedes that “the dark tourism literature remains both eclectic and theoretically fragile”. Meanwhile the dark tourism approach has been applied by

academicians and journalists alike to everything and anything seemingly ‘dark’ or ‘macabre’ in perceived tourist consumptions, from a curiosity in sites of genocide, torture and crime to the places of yesterday’s or yesteryear’s natural catastrophes.

Agreeably (by both proponents and critics), *dark tourism* has remained a ‘fuzzy’ concept. It is worthwhile mentioning that the major research centers and proponents in UK academe continue to make an effort in the further foundation of the dark tourism concept either within or parallel to the original thanatological orientation. Two conferences to be held at the University of Central Lancashire in late March/early April 2009, “Dark Tourism: Current Themes, Issues & Consequences” and “Tourist Experiences: Meanings, Motivations, Behaviors”, with a dark tourism track (for details see www.dark-tourism.org.uk), are intended to provide some clarifications and, maybe more importantly, to maintain the high profile this new research tradition has gained in interdisciplinary tourism research in UK.

One of the most interesting directions and/or distinct expansions in the study of *the dark side of tourism* was taken by Graham Dann, now Professor Emeritus at Bedfordshire, Luton (where Professor Anthony Seaton has also been teaching for the last ten years). Dann’s perspective on and his elucidation of *dark tourism to and in places with a difficult past and present* are grounded in three sub fields of humanistic studies which he effectively combines: a cultural anthropology of tourism, the linguistics of tourism and a qualitative examination of media contents. Dann argues that we have seen a convergence of media and tourism with far reaching implications for travel motivations and expectations. In particular, he sheds light on what it means for young people growing up in a current media fascination with violence and how it may also express in the desire to visit *dark tourism* sites. Dann is not only able to explain *that* tourists (also) show interest in the darker side of humanity but *why* some of these *dark tourism* destinations are more popular than others. As we can no longer (completely) free ourselves from the influences of a contemporary media fascination with violence we all might be – to some extent – “children of the dark” (2005).

Indirectly, Dann’s reflections on the close relations of media & tourism help to understand the rise and growing popularity of the *dark tourism* concept within contemporary tourism studies. It is the most visible approach tirelessly marketed and promoted by The Dark Tourism Forum web site. Thus, the *dark tourism* literature in academe and the media – so easily accessible on/widely disseminated by the internet - has outshined (or should we say ‘out-darkened’) the older and more complicated terms of *dissonance in heritage (tourism)* and *thanatourism*.

What all the above discussed approaches and concepts have in common seems to be a significant or paramount interest in Auschwitz. Tourism to and the visitor experience at the Auschwitz Concentration Camp Memorial site is most often chosen for an elaboration of a given research approach. Both Tunbridge and Ashworth’s study of dissonant heritage and Lennon and Foley’s volume on dark tourism have the Auschwitz site on the cover of their books.

No doubt authors who have chosen to use the *holocaust tourism* term, the fourth and last new concept presented here, have frequently dwelled on this site as well. With the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union 1990/1991, the 'iron curtain' no longer prevented travelers from visiting the major sites of the Nazi concentration and extermination camp system in Poland: Auschwitz/Oswiecim near Krakow, Maydanek near Lublin, Treblinka northeast of Warsaw as well as the southeastern death camps Sobibor and Belzec near the Polish/Ukrainian border. Though visitation of the memorial site at the concentration camp Auschwitz and death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau has not reached or surpassed tourism to the most accessible site in Germany, the memorial site of the first Nazi concentration camp in Dachau near Munich, "Auschwitz has eclipsed Dachau as the most widely recognized symbol of Nazi atrocities" (Marcuse 2001, 2005).

One of the main reasons for the more frequent uses of the *holocaust tourism* concept is the growing numbers of Nazi Germany memorial sites now accessible to travelers. Out of the one thousand plus Nazi concentration camps and subsidiary camps in existence in Central & Eastern 1933-45 more than one hundred memorial sites in Germany and Austria alone have staffed museums, visitor centers and educational resources accessible and available for the interested visitor (see for a detailed, annotated list – in German - Bundeszentrale fuer politische Bildung 1995, 1999 and several web sites including a German Wikipedia web site, Liste der Gedenkstaetten fuer die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus, a list of memorial sites in 19 countries including Germany; www.erinnern.at Gedaechtnisorte-Gedenkstaetten, Katalog, a list of memorial sites in the nine states of Austria). Each year more sites are added and/or expanded and updated – as interest in the history of the 1933-45 period has increased and/or is publicly supported by the state and communities. In addition, there are several major Holocaust/Shoah museums/memorial sites/research centers outside Europe such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. and the Holocaust Remembrance Site of Yad Vashem in Israel which receive more than a million visitors each year.

The study of *holocaust tourism* emphasizes the meaning, value and extent of visits to sites that have been established to honor the victims of Nazi Germany 1933-45. It can be considered a type of *heritage tourism* limited to the commemoration of lost lives and human tragedies in a distinct period. Most often, the major memorial sites and museums give equal attention to the fatal socio-political processes leading up to the empowerment of autocratic/fascist regimes with a racist ideology in Europe, though. For many visitors, the motivation for participating in *holocaust tourism* is not so much satisfying a curiosity in finally seeing an infamous site associated with atrocities they have seen on TV or in a movie but to learn in a more focused way about the losses of Jewish community life in Central and Eastern Europe and to commemorate the millions of lives perished in the Holocaust. In most places honoring the victims of Nazi Germany *holocaust tourism* has consequently become a form of educational tourism with a normative character or end. In particular, there are two 'agents' with distinct goals in the educational tourism processes at these sites: 1) organizers of group visits, e.g. teachers carefully preparing an educational experience for their audience, most often young people and students and b) the management of the memorial sites trying to help to facilitate a lasting learning

experience. Relatives and/or friends of the victims (or members of the same ethnic, social and/or political group) are another major visitor group at these sites. Thus, the visit to e.g. Dachau or Auschwitz may attain the form of a pilgrimage and/or represent pilgrimage tourism (see, for instance, “Global Jewish Tourism – Pilgrimages and Remembrance”, Mara Cohen Ioannides and Dimitri Ioannides 2006).

Meanwhile specific forms of *holocaust tourism* can be distinguished: ‘Schindler tourism’ and tourism to sites associated with the life of Anne Frank. Backdrop to these distinctly spatial expressions of holocaust tourism (e.g. to the former Jewish neighborhood Krakow-Kazimierz in the case of ‘Schindler tourism’ or to Amsterdam, the Westerbork transit camp and the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in the case of ‘Anne Frank tourism’) are literary landscapes appreciated by millions at home or on the road to these sites (Ashworth 1996, 2002; Hartmann 2004).

As visitors often closely associate with a featured hero (Anne Frank, Mr. Schindler, etc.) a trip in the foot steps of the admired person can be considered a pilgrimage to ‘sacred’ sites within complex landscapes of memory. Cultural and historical geographers have recently revived the notion of ‘geographies of memory’ and presented examples: “Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory” (Owen, Dwyer and Derek Alderman 2008). In “Shadowed Ground” (1997) Kenneth Foote talks about the process of ‘sanctification’ in places where violence and tragedy once occurred. Steps toward sanctification are first the designation of a site, then a rectification of information that initially had been disseminated about the events. In the long run, though, some of the sites associated with a ‘shadowed history’ may ultimately be erased from memory: obliteration.

Interestingly enough, there are no rules when and how a place with a difficult past enters the process of sanctification. It may take a few years, a few decades or more than a century to finally designate a place as a public memorial site which can and will be visited equally by insiders and outsiders of a given event. Examples from Colorado illustrate the seemingly arbitrary nature of when the processes of sanctification are initiated:

a) temporary memorials for the victims of the *Columbine* shootings immediately after the tragic events in Littleton, Colorado in 1999 and continuous discussions about the lay-out of a permanent memorial in a nearby park after the first anniversary of the shootings
b) the decision for the *Camp Amache National Historic Landmark* status 2006, some sixty years after ten thousand Japanese Americans were relocated in a large internment camp outside Granada in Southeastern Colorado 1942-45
and c) the *Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site* which opened to the public near Chivington, Colorado in 2007, some 140 years after Colonel John Chivington led an attack on a camp of peaceful Southern Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians in 1864.
(Hartmann 2009)

The National Park Service has given due attention to “Places of Conscience/Places of Commemoration” (2007) in a double feature issue of their *Common Ground* magazine. It is a summary of the long time efforts in the rectification of events, designation and

sanctification of places where ‘shadowed history’ played out in the Deep South (slavery, Civil Rights Movement), on the High Plains of Montana, South Dakota or Colorado (Little Big Horn, Wounded Knee, Sand Creek) or in California/American West (Japanese-American Internment Camps). Thus, numerous federally administered sites have become destinations for *heritage tourism* fostered on a national level.

Wherever people travel the globe, they are reminded of landmarks which are adorned with great national pride. In the United States, the homes of the founding fathers of the country certainly fall into this category of travel destinations: George Washington’s Mount Vernon or Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello. And yet, new research perspectives and discoveries in both places have led to a partial re-evaluation of problematic historic situations. Issues are, for instance, the complex relations and interactions the Washington family and Thomas Jefferson personally may have had with on site living slaves (www.mountvernon.org, slavery; Casper 2008; www.monticello.org, slavery at Monticello; Stanton 2002, Gordon-Reed 2008). Was it a ‘difficult past’? Visitors get a glimpse that it may have been for some.

What matters most in *tourism to places with a difficult past* is what we individually and collectively get out of our efforts of re-visiting a tainted past. Facilitators of visits and tourists alike should hope that the memory of a once ‘shadowed’ chapter of history can be *transcended* at such sites. One place that comes to mind is the new Ypres Museum in Flanders, Belgium, locale of a battlefield where hundreds of thousand of soldiers were sent into death for the sake of their nation during the WWI years. It is a museum created in the spirit of the New Europe where countries have become partners in a politically and socially changed reality. A visit to Flanders’ Bruges, Ghent or Ypres *is* heritage tourism in many forms and expressions. May the multitude of travelers’ experiences there remain open to all kinds of interpretation including mine: a region *also* willing to offer tourism to places with a difficult past - yet safe from having to repeat the experiences and painful mistakes made nearly a century ago!

Dr. Rudi Hartmann
Dept. of Geography and Environmental Sciences
University of Colorado Denver
Campus Box 172
P.O. Box 173364
Denver, Colorado 80217-3364
rudi.hartmann@ucdenver.edu

Rudi Hartmann teaches tourism geography and tourism planning at the University of Colorado Denver. He has contributed to research on tourism to places with a difficult past in Europe and the United States as well as lectured on problem based teaching approaches in geographic education (Hartmann 1989, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2009; Ashworth and Hartmann 2005).

References

Ashworth, G.J. (1996). "Holocaust tourism and Jewish culture: The lessons of Krakow-Kazimierz". In M.Robinson, N. Evans, & P.Callaghan (Eds.), *Tourism and cultural change*, Newcastle and Sunderland: Centre for Travel and Tourism, and Business Education Publishers, pp.1-12.

Ashworth, G.J (2002). "Holocaust tourism: The experience of Krakow-Kazimierz", *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, Volume 11, Issue 4, pp. 363-367.

Ashworth, G.J. & Rudi Hartmann (2005). *Horror and Human Tragedy Revisited: The Management of Sites of Atrocities for Tourism*. New York: Cognizant Communication Corporation.

Ashworth, G.J. & J.E. Tunbridge (2000). *The Tourist-Historic City: retrospect and prospect of managing the heritage city*. London: Pergamon/Elsevier.

Bundeszentrale fuer Politische Bildung (1995). *Gedenkstaetten fuer die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus – Eine Dokumentation Band I*. Ulrike Puvogel/Martin Stankowski unter Mitarbeit von Ursula Graf. Bonn (Memorial Sites for the Victims of Nazi Germany in West Germany), 840 pages.

Bundeszentrale fuer Politische Bildung (1999). *Gedenkstaetten fuer die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus – Eine Dokumentation Band II*. Stefanie Endlich/Nora Goldenbogen/Beatrix Herlemann/Monika Kahl/Regina Scheer. Bonn (Memorial Sites for the Victims of Nazi Germany in Berlin and the states of former East Germany), 991 pages.

Casper, Scott (2008). *Sarah Johnson's Mount Vernon – The Forgotten History of an American Shrine*, Hill and Wang.

Clarion Associates (2005). *The Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation in Colorado – 2005 Update*, Denver: Colorado Historical Foundation.

Dann, Graham (2005). "Children of the Dark" in *Horror and Human Tragedy Revisited: The Management of Sites of Atrocities for Tourism*, Ashworth, Gregory and Rudi Hartmann (Eds.), New York: Cognizant Communication Corporation, pp. 233 -252.

Dann, Graham and Anthony Seaton (2002). *Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanatourism*, New York: Taylor & Francis.

Foote, Kenneth (1997). *Shadowed Ground – America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Foote, Kenneth and Maoz Azaryahu (2007). "Towards a Geography of Memory: Geographical Dimensions of Public Memory and Commemoration", *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, July 1, 2007.

Gordon-Reed, Annette (2008). *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*, W.W. Norton.

Hartmann, Rudi (1989). "Dachau Revisited: Tourism to the Memorial Site and Museum of the Former Concentration Camp", *Tourism Recreation Research*, pp. 41-47. Reprinted in *Tourism Environment*, Tej Vir Singh, et al. (Eds.), New Delhi Inter Indian Publications, 1992, pp. 183-190.

Hartmann, Rudi (1998). "Dealing with Dachau in Geographic Education", in *Visions of Land and Community – Geography in Jewish Studies*, Harold Brodsky (ed.), College Park: University of Maryland Press, pp. 357-369.

Hartmann, Rudi (2002). Forum Section Introduction: "Places of Horror We Should Never Forget – Approaches to Teaching the Holocaust, Atrocity Sites and Pariah Landscapes in the Geography Classroom". *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, Volume 11, Issue 4, pp. 354-358.

Hartmann, Rudi (2003). "Zielorte des Holocaust Tourismus im Wandel: die KZ-Gedenkstaette in Dachau, die Gedenkstaette in Weimar-Buchenwald und das Anne-Frank-Haus in Amsterdam", in *Handbuch der Geographie der Freizeit und des Tourismus*. Wien/Muenchen: Oldenburg, pp. 297-308.

Hartmann, Rudi (2004). "Das Anne-Frank-Haus in Amsterdam: Lernort, Literarische Landschaft und Gedenkstaette" in *Festschrift C. Becker Anja Brittner-Widmann, Heinz-Dieter Quack and Helmut Wachowiak* (Eds.), Heft 27, Trier: University of Trier Press, pp. 131-142.

Hartmann, Rudi (2009). *The Southeast Colorado Heritage Tourism Project Report* (forthcoming). Denver: Wash Park Media.

Ioannides, Mara W. Cohen and Dimitri Ioannides (2006). "Global Jewish Tourism: Pilgrimages and Remembrance" in *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*, Dallen Timothy and Daniel Olsen (Eds.), London: Routledge, pp. 156-171.

Lennon, John and Malcolm Foley (2000). *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, New York: Continuum.

Marcuse, Harold (2001). *Legacies of Dachau – The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Marcuse, Harold (2005). "Reshaping Dachau for Visitors: 1933-2000" in *Horror and Human Tragedies Revisited: The Management of Sites of Atrocities for Tourism* Ashworth, Gregory and Rudi Hartmann (Eds.), New York: Cognizant Communication Corporation, pp. 118 – 148.

National Park Service (2007). "Places of Conscience/Places of Commemoration", *Common Ground*, 64 pages.

Owen, Dwyer and Derek Alderman (2008). *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory*, Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press.

Seaton, Anthony (1996). "Guided by the dark: From thanatopsis to thanatourism", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2 (4), pp. 234-244.

Seaton, Anthony (2002). "Another weekend away looking for dead bodies: Battlefield tourism on the Somme and in Flanders", *Tourism Recreation Research*, 25(3), pp. 63-78.

Stanton, Lucia (2002). *Free Some Day: The African-American Families of Monticello*, Longleaf Services.

Stone, P.R. & R. Sharpley (2008) "Consuming Dark Tourism: A Thanatological Perspective" *Annals of Tourism Research*, pp. 574-595.

Tunbridge, J.E. and G.J. Ashworth (1996). *Dissonant Heritage – The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*, New York: Wiley.