



Dark tourism motivations: Simulation, emotional contagion and topographic comparison

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HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Dark Tourism can be motivated by processes related to simulation and the emotional contagion.
- ▶ Dark Tourism, similar to media tourism can be motivated by a desire to make comparisons between real and imagined landscapes.
- ▶ Dark Tourism can closely relate to affect and feed from it.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines dark tourism consumption motivations. Using a qualitative and interpretative mixed-method approach, this study traces the dark tourism motivations related to “backpackers” and fans of the musical performance art known as black metal. Steeped in anti-Christian motifs and themes, with a history of past violence, black metal is a long-existing and still burgeoning art form that is growing in popularity throughout Europe and the United States. Through examination that involved participant observation, nethnography and content analysis, simulation, coupled with the emotional contagion were found to be key motivating aspects of this dark tourism related to black metal. Additionally, it was found, that similar to media tourists, many black metal fans seek tourism activity to reconcile comparisons between imaged landscapes and topographical reality. In addition to discussing specific aspects of the backpacking phenomenon, larger theoretical implications related to the greater realm of dark tourism motivations are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Church burnings, suicide, national socialism, Satanism, and murder. This combination of dark events is what gripped northern Europe, especially Norway, in the 1990s, where a series of violent events shocked a nation that, at the time, was not ordinarily accustomed to living in fear. Much of the violence has been directly attributed to the musical and theatric art form known as black metal (Beste, 2008; Moynihan & Soderlind, 2003). Black metal songs and performances often focus on satanic and/or anti-Christian motifs, with much of it extolling the virtues of a neo-pagan renaissance or drawing on the grandeur of Norse mythology (Bouge, 2004; Hagen, 2011). The music itself is dis-harmonic and songs are generally constructed around fast tremolo picking and related signatures that seek to create a profoundly dark, cold and foreboding atmosphere.

This paper explores tourist motivations related to the growing consumption of black metal and its related events. It is believed that some select black metal artists and followers were responsible for over fifty church burnings throughout Scandinavia (mostly in Norway) in the mid 1990s to express disdain over modern Scandinavian society (Monk, 2011). The black metal subculture is also infamous for murder, such as those committed by Varg Vikernes of the musical project known as Burzum, and Bard “Faust” Eithun, formerly of the Norwegian band, Emperor (Kahn-Harris, 2007). Black metal itself is predicated on a prodigiously strong disdain for Christianity. Even with its history of violence, black metal is Norway’s number one musical export (Visit Norway, 2011) and home to a variety of festivals and tours that draw black metal fans worldwide. Black metal festivals, usually found in Oslo, Trondheim and other large cities, are even featured in Norway’s official travel guide (Visit Norway, 2011), and in 2011, Norway’s foreign ministry began training diplomats in black metal culture as a response to inquiries they get at foreign embassies (Boyd, 2011).

Black metal festivals and concerts, which today are definitely not defined by violence, and are far removed from the 1990s’

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activities, have sprung up in a variety of locations over the past twenty years with large scale events held in Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Norway, Latin America and the United States. Black metal concerts can be found in “underground” style clubs, larger capacity clubs and even large arenas and festival grounds. *Inferno*, an annual event in both Norway and Switzerland, is the epicenter of the black metal festival scene and draws thousands of fans from across the world for multi-day concerts at multiple venues. Fans of black metal come from a variety of demographics in terms of age – from teenagers newly embracing the genre, to those over the age of 50 who have been listening to metal for decades. Listeners are generally male, but certainly not exclusively (Wallach, Berger, & Greene, 2011). In recent years, formal tours of black metal related sites have quickly gained momentum as the music genre has grown in worldwide popularity (Weinstein, 2011). As this global interest continues to blossom, Norway, where the modern scene began, has experienced a surge of tourists known as “backpackers,” a term given to black metal fans who engage in tourism activity (see *Metal Review*, 2011), who tour not only to experience live music and festival atmospheres, but to visit sites where violence associated with black metal artists and fans has occurred. These sites might be record shops, such as the former Helvete Records in Oslo, where early purveyors of black metal both resided and held court, or local pubs and apartment complexes where fans socialized and gathered. Similar backpacking experiences are now also occurring in Switzerland and other parts of Europe where black metal is growing in popularity (Hagen, 2011; Kahn-Harris, 2007).

In the past few years, black metal, largely fueled by crossover acts with wider-ranging appeals, such as Dimmu Borgir, Cradle of Filth and Saytricon, has witnessed both a surge in fandom and festival related revenue. While its associated violence has most certainly subsided, the scene’s popularity has spurred sellout crowds and a wealth of tourist activity. Black metal festivals are now found not only in Scandinavia, but France, Italy, Belgium, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Black metal bands, concerts and interest have also gained momentum in South America. More localized black metal festivals (featuring bands with more limited global appeal) have regularly appeared in many Eastern European countries.

Business locations, however, largely take a backseat to tourism destinations where violent acts associated with black metal have occurred. Most of the violence occurred in the 1990s in Norway (Moynihan & Soderlind, 2003). These locations include Fantoft Stave church in Bergen, Norway, which was built in 1150 (Moynihan & Soderlind, 2003). The church was burned to the ground on June 6, 1992, allegedly by Varg Vikernes as an act of retaliation against Christianity for placing the church on “sacred pagan ground.” (Campion, 2005) Adding to the mystique of Fantoft Stave, in 1993, a photo of the burned remains of the church appeared on Vikernes’s black metal classic, *Aske* (Norwegian for “Ashes”) record sleeve. The first 1000 copies of the record were packaged with a cigarette lighter.

This paper explores tourist motivations related to the consumption of a particular art form that is expressly and specifically associated with paganism, Satanism, blasphemy and historic violence and violent imagery. The goal of this research is not to pass judgment on black metal fandom, its fans, and its associated tourism, or on the content of the music and art, but rather to explore the interpretation, from the consumption side of the equation, related to this dark tourism activity. In order to understand the psychological motivations of backpackers and their desire to tour sites associated with death, violence and destruction, a mixed method approach was utilized, whereby backpacking and black metal festival tourism was examined using three specific,

established techniques: participant observation, netnography and content analysis.

Over the course of the analysis, specific thematic elements related to the consumption of dark tourism sites emerged, for some (not all) black metal tourists. We found simulation, coupled with the emotional contagion as a key factor related to tourist motivations. Additionally, the data reveal tourists’ needs to resolve the differences between perceptions of dark tourism sites, spurred largely by the media, and the actual sites themselves – resulting in the motivated desire to engage in the tourism activity. The following section details the relevant literature related to consumption side dark tourism. This is followed by detail about the methodology utilized, and a discussion of the resultant themes from the studies. This paper concludes with specific insights surrounding demand driven dark tourism.

2. Dark tourism motivations and consumption

Humans have been purposely drawn to attractions, sites and events linked with death and disaster (Sharpley, 2009; Stone, 2005a, 2009; Stone & Sharpley, 2008), for example, assassination sites (Foley & Lennon, 1996), concentration camps (Podoshen & Hunt, 2011) and terrorism sites (Sturken, 2007). Travel to these sites associated with death has been referred to as dark tourism (Foley & Lennon, 1996; Lennon & Foley, 2000) or thanatourism (Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2011; Sharpley, 2009). In recent years, there has been a significant amount of research related to dark tourism sites, however, there has been very little study that focuses on tourist motivations and thematic elements that attempt to explain tourist motivations and related dispositions (Podoshen & Hunt, 2011; Tarlow, 2005; Wight, 2005) in light of repeated calls for examination (Biran, Poria, & Oren, 2011; Seaton & Lennon, 2004; Stone, 2005b, 2006; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). As Stone (2009) concludes, the term “dark tourism” implies a focus on death and the dead, therefore developing an understanding of dark tourism from the tourist perspective may actually tell us more about the living. With understanding tourist motivations in mind, the focus of the present study is to examine the phenomena largely from the consumption perspective.

Even though a majority of dark tourism study has been focused on the supply side and its related management and interpretation, there has been some work that allows us to begin to weave a thread through dark tourism consumption study and literature. Seaton (1996) directs attention to the existence of the “dark tourist” and considers thanatourism a form of tourism consumption. Seaton (1996) posits that an interest in death is general, not person specific. This means that there are potentially a wide variety of manifestations related to dark tourism consumption. Some scholars have examined or theorized on dark tourism consumption motivations. Rojek (1997) believes that sensation seeking can lead tourists to disaster sites. Cole (1999) suggests that voyeurism can act as a motivator. Sharpley (2009) believes that *schadenfreude* sparks dark tourism interest and likens these tourists to rubberneckers who gaze at the tragedy of others.

Sharpley (2009) created a typology that examines dark tourism consumption with supply (either purposeful or accidental) as an axiological factor. In this typology, tourism is categorized into one of four quadrants ranging from “pale” to “dark” based on how attractions and experiences are measured by the extent to which interest in death is expressed in conjunction with how the supply is directed toward consumer fascination. The Sharpley (2009) typology, stemming from Sharpley (2005) and influenced by Holt’s (1995) consumer behavior typology, acts as a prime nexus when attempting to come to dark tourism consumption epistemology. This typology can act as a key starting point when looking to classify thanatourism. The current study, however, looks to move

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