

# **An Investigation of the Differences that Exist between Generations in Relation to Supporting Dark Tourism in Northern Ireland**

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## **Abstract**

*In dark tourism research there is a scarcity of literature that discusses Northern Ireland as a dark tourism destination. This research study was undertaken to investigate the difference in the level of support for dark tourism in Northern Ireland between the generations who lived through the Troubles and those who heard about them. This study employed a qualitative research method based on the completion of focus groups consisting of Protestants and Catholics from different generations. This allowed the authors to gather the views of different Northern Ireland residents' groups. The research found that the views of the younger generation (aged 18-35) and the middle-aged generation (36-55) are similar. These generations believe that the Troubles should be utilised for the purpose of dark tourism as this will benefit Northern Ireland financially and socially. In contrast, the older generation (aged 56-75+) believes that the Troubles are too recent to be exploited for dark tourism development. This is in line with the literature on the topic that was consulted as part of this research.*

*Keywords: Dark tourism; Northern Ireland; Different generations; Viewpoints; The Troubles*

## **Introduction**

Dark tourism involves travel to sites associated with death, disaster and destruction (Sharpley and Stone, 2009). Although the phenomenon has historic roots, i.e. battlefields and cemeteries have been drawing in tourists for years, dark tourism is a relatively modern concept in scholarly literature (Timothy and Boyd, 2002; Cohen, 2011). Sharpley (2005) states that 'dark tourism literature remains eclectic and theoretically fragile, raising more questions than it answers' (p.216). In the context of

Northern Ireland, dark tourism refers to the thirty years of civil unrest colloquially termed the 'Troubles'. Due to the growth in the number of tourists visiting dark sites (Seaton, 2009), and the growth of academic interest, the authors decided to undertake research on dark tourism in Northern Ireland. A consistent theme that arises within dark tourism literature is that of tourist motivations for visiting a dark tourism site. Lennon and Foley (2000) suggest several main motivators that drive dark tourists, namely remembrance, education or entertainment. In Northern Ireland, visitors are inspired to visit sites of bombings, tragedies, and political memorabilia such as Loyalist and Republican wall murals, which are all categorised as dark tourism. However, there are those who oppose dark tourism; Strange and Kempa (2003) explain how the growth of dark tourism and the curious connection between the sad and the bad has generated frequent ethical debates about mixing leisure with tragedy (Rojek, 1993; Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996). As the Troubles ended within the last twenty years, some residents of Northern Ireland believe that it is too soon to use these sites to boost dark tourism. Thus, the central aim of this research study was to investigate the difference in the level of support for dark tourism in Northern Ireland between the generations who lived through the Troubles and those who heard about them. To achieve this aim, three objectives were identified: firstly, to investigate the views on dark tourism held by the generations who grew up experiencing the Troubles; secondly, to investigate the views on dark tourism of the younger generation, who grew up in the aftermath of the Troubles; and lastly, to explore how these views can impact on the development of dark tourism in Northern Ireland..

## Literature Review

Sites associated with death and disasters are becoming a prevalent aspect in contemporary tourism. Tourists can visit sites associated with genocide such as Auschwitz, natural disasters such as New Orleans (after hurricane Katrina), and mass deaths such as Ground Zero in New York City (Stone, 2006). Visiting sites associated with death has become known as 'dark tourism'. Dark tourism can be difficult to define as it covers a wide spectrum of sites; the phenomenon has historical roots; however, the literature on the topic is still relatively new and scarce (White and Frew, 2013). Preece and Price (2005) share this view and explain how 'dark tourism is a relatively new area of research, unrecognized by scholars until the mid-1990's, and many aspects of dark tourism still require further investigation to reveal the intricacies of the phenomenon' (p.191). Various scholarly definitions of dark tourism are available; Stone (2006) states that dark tourism involves travelling to sites associated with 'death, suffering or the seemingly macabre' (p.146). Furthermore, Tarlow (2005) emphasises that dark tourism sites are places where a tragedy or historically noteworthy death has occurred, which continue to influence our lives. Importantly, a main core theme of dark tourism is travelling to sites associated with death.

Dark tourism has seen considerable growth in the last two decades with increased visitor numbers to dark sites and increased demand for this tourism niche (Seaton, 2009). Various aspects may have facilitated this growth. The media transmits images

of disasters throughout the world almost as they happen, this way creating a bond with viewers, who then want to travel to these sites as they feel a connection to the event (Stone, 2010). The movement away from the typical sun, sea and sand holidays towards experiential tourism is another reason for the increased interest in dark tourism. *Despite being a niche activity, dark travel attracts tourists, and in some destinations these dark sites are the sole purpose of one's visit.* Thus, capitalising on dark tourism can increase tourist numbers.

Northern Ireland is a destination with a turbulent past and, as a result, has many potential dark tourism sites. These sites are located throughout the Province as some regions suffered more than others (Hewstone *et al.*, 2004). The Troubles is the colloquial term for the thirty-year turbulent period that started in the late 1960s and ended in 1998 with the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. The conflict between the Catholic/Nationalists and the Protestant/Unionists of Northern Ireland cost almost 3,700 lives and caused a severe divide in the country. This segregation continues to staunch the peace process. Segregation sustains conflict by creating an environment of suspicion and ignorance (Gallagher, 1995; Cairns and Hewstone, 2002; Hewstone *et al.*, 2004). The police force remained at the forefront of the conflict, attempting to enforce the British law; consequently, they became a major target for the IRA. The police force, known as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was viewed as a 'Loyalist paramilitary police force' by the Nationalist paramilitaries (Feldman, 1991, p.277).

Since 1998 there have been minimal, sporadic incidents of conflict, however as the Troubles are so recent, there is a lot of controversy around the idea of capitalising on Northern Ireland's past for financial gain (McDowell, 2008). Tarlow (2005) explains how dark tourism is an economic generator, which may transform past tragedies into economic productivity. Causevic and Lynch (2008) explain how Northern Ireland has received relatively little attention by scholars so far in terms of dark tourism research. Apart from a small niche market, dark tourism is not a main motivator for visiting Northern Ireland, yet once in the country, most tourists will pay a visit to dark tourism sites. Boyd (2000) emphasises this and states that there will always be a market for visitors who want to see such landmarks that reflect a turbulent past, so therefore Northern Ireland would do well to consider the importance of maintaining certain symbols, icons, buildings, and places to reflect and commemorate the past. When understanding dark tourism, it is important to look at tourists' motivations for visiting dark sites.

### **Motivations for Visiting Dark Tourism Sites**

As literature about dark tourism increases, scholars are trying to understand the motivations behind travelling to dark tourism sites. Seaton (1999) provides categories related to dark tourism, based on one's motivations. These include travelling to watch death, travelling to sites after death has occurred, travelling to internment sites and memorials, and finally travelling to synthetic sites at which evidence of the death or disaster has been collected and displayed. Lennon and Foley (2000) state that tourists

travel to dark sites for three main motivations: remembrance, education or entertainment.

Visiting dark tourism sites for remembrance allows tourists to feel connected to a death or disaster and it is an opportunity to respect the dead. By creating a physical memorial where tourists can visit, and remember the death or disaster, such as the reflection pools in Washington D.C., this form of dark tourism allows tourists to feel connected to the past. Memorials are built to appeal to, not only the current generation, but future generations as well; the themes and architecture have to appeal to a wide audience whilst being sympathetic and respectful. Another example of visiting dark tourism sites for remembrance is when tourists visit graveyards or internment sites, such as Arlington Graveyard in Washington D.C. When researching motivations for dark tourism, it is important to acknowledge that these motivations constantly overlap depending on the dark tourism site. For example, tourists most likely visit St. Louis Graveyard in New Orleans for remembrance, but some may visit for religious motivations, architectural reasons or educational reasons.

Education is a strong motivator for visiting a dark tourism site; humans have a natural curiosity in death and disaster. Stone and Sharpley (2008) share this view and explain that death is an 'essential feature of the human condition, requiring individuals to develop a mechanism to cope with their ultimate demise' (p. 579). Educating oneself through visiting the various morbid and macabre sites reduces some of the fears of death. Additionally, most dark tourism sites help educate the current generations about historic events, and in a way, prevent these tragedies from reoccurring. For example, the Titanic Museum in Belfast shows the series of mistakes and incidents which led to the Titanic being such a disaster, from the severely low number of lifeboats to ignoring the iceberg warnings. Moreover, numerous international visitors as well as students studying Politics and Peace and Reconciliation Studies take 'living history' taxi and walking tours around the murals of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry to learn about the Troubles as a result of having heard about the Province's civil conflict on the news for many years (Simone-Charteris and Boyd, 2010). Stone and Sharpley (2008), however, explain that at most sites, the boundaries between the educational message and the commercialisation of the sites has become increasingly blurred. Many dark tourism sites are criticised as they may be considered insensitive towards tragedies.

Entertainment is another main motivator identified by Lennon and Foley (2000); some visitors see the visit to a dark site as a leisure activity. Gaols and prisons are an increasingly popular subcategory of dark tourism. For instance, visitors to Belfast can take guided tours of Crumlin Road Gaol; parts of which are very light-hearted and entertaining with stories about famous prisoners and their escape attempts. Other visitors visit dark sites to satisfy their curiosity. Although this is not strictly for their entertainment, the visit is inspired by some fascination towards a tragic event. The media play an important role in this regard, as they thrive when publicising disasters. Lennon and Foley (2000) suggest that one main example of the media publicising disaster tourism is the sinking of the Titanic, when news companies worldwide filmed survivors landing in the USA, and the stories of survivors were wired around the world.

In addition, on 9/11, news of the terror attacks dominated homes worldwide and most watched live as the towers collapsed. By streaming these stories into the homes of consumers, the media allow them to feel connected to the events; this connection leads to curiosity and tourists visiting dark tourism sites to satisfy their fascination.

It is difficult to pinpoint the motivations of tourists visiting dark sites, because as mentioned before, these motivations tend to overlap and intertwine. Tourists may be visiting these sites for reasons other than indulging in a leisure activity. It is unrealistic to assume that classifying the various motivations is simple (Wight, 2006).

### **Opposition to Dark Tourism**

The overriding theme in dark tourism is the close association with death. As death is a sensitive topic, dark tourism can be controversial and there are numerous moral and ethical predicaments that arise with regard to exploiting tragic history for tourism (Lennon, 2005; Stone, 2007; Sharpley and Stone, 2009). Consequently, there are various factors, which generate a resistance in individuals to dark tourism. These include commercialisation, ethical issues and the tragic event being too recent. Some authors in particular, are strongly opposed to dark tourism; Avis (2007, cited in Sharpley and Stone, 2009, p.57), for example, states that governments need to abolish this 'sick kind of tourism' fearing that wars and misery may be created 'for potential dark tourist benefits'.

As previously mentioned, the media plays a huge role when it comes to dark tourism as it contributes to the popularization of sites; this could result in over-commercialisation of dark tourism sites and these sites becoming a spectacle. If large amounts of grieving tourists arrive to a dark site turning death into entertainment, this could be considered unethical and insincere. West (2004) dismisses the emotional hysteria of many tourists as manufactured emotions. The media appeals to these narcissistic types of tourists by creating sensational exposés around dubiously verified stories; this creates a moral frenzy around dark tourism (Seaton and Lennon, 2004). In short, the media creates mass hysteria around a dark tourism site and tourists attach themselves to these sites, whether they have a real connection to them or not. These sites are then turned into commercialised tourist attractions, which could be considered unethical. Furthermore, Rojek (1993) coined the term 'black spots' when referring to the commercial aspects of dark tourism, and stated that these are 'developments of grave sites and sites where celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent deaths' (p.85). This is detrimental to dark tourism, as the sites are no longer a place of remembrance and are now a place where all moral respect has been disregarded due to the commercialisation of this site.

Several studies have suggested that dark tourism sites can provide significant and memorable experiences, however, at the same time, new anxieties and ethical dilemmas can arise (Ashworth and Hartmann, 2005; Wilson, 2008; Sharpley and Stone, 2009). Therefore, it is important to know the extent to which it is acceptable to market a tragedy (Kang *et al.*, 2012). Some believe that in certain cases the death or tragedy may be too recent to use for dark tourism purposes. This may be the most

prominent issue when looking at dark tourism in Northern Ireland. There is a significant reluctance among the public sector to market Northern Ireland as a hub for dark tourism sites (Simone-Charteris and Boyd, 2011). Many believe that as the Troubles are still relatively recent, using sites for dark tourism purposes intensifies sectarianism and generates division among the communities (Crooke, 2001). However, dark tourism within Northern Ireland can be considered as an approach to remember the past whilst educating the future generations.

### **Generational differences**

Having considered the ethical issues surrounding dark tourism and the different motivations that inspire visitors to visit dark sites, it is important to consider whether the predisposition and perceptions of people change from generation to generation. Wight (2006) explains that different groups of tourists can be identified when looking at dark tourism sites: the first group are 'survivors'; these individuals have raw emotions towards the dark tourism sites as their memories are vivid and undiluted. The older generations in Northern Ireland have lived through the entire thirty-year period of the Troubles; Crooke (2001) explains how the Troubles are undoubtedly a major part of Northern Irish history, and that some generations have known nothing else. It is unlikely to find an individual in this age range who was not directly or indirectly affected by the turmoil, mostly through the loss of a family member or friend (Cairns and Darby, 1998; Hewstone *et al.*, 2004). Consequently, not enough time may have passed for the older generations to accept the development of dark tourism sites. If these generations visit dark tourism sites, their main motivations will be remembrance and memorialisation.

In contrast, the second group identified by Wight (2006) who the author refers to as 'leisure' tourists, is represented by the younger generations in Northern Ireland; they grew up in the aftermath of the Troubles and therefore may be more accepting of the development of dark tourism. They will most likely see dark tourism sites as an educational opportunity, and an opportunity for political reflection, along with other war and conflict sites (Strange and Kempa, 2003). Smith (1998) explains that war and conflict are so deeply embedded in human memory that memorabilia of warfare creates the largest category of tourist attraction in the world. Furthermore, Stone (2010) suggests that dark sites offer the opportunity to document history and provide political interpretations of past events.

For years the Troubles have been an emotive topic in a sensitive environment for many residents of Northern Ireland and, as the past is an intimate part of the present, this sensitivity remains today (Brewer, 1990; Tam *et al.*, 2007) which only intensifies the curiosity of the younger generations. Stone (2010) believes that it is the different kinds of memory that generations have in relation to dark tourism that are important. First generation memory refers to the memory of those who witnessed and experienced events and second-generation memories are the memories passed down from one's parents. Walter (2009) agrees with Stone's (2010) view and adds that those who lived through a tragic event are reliving their memories by visiting dark tourism sites. It is the next generation, those who did not live through the event, who create

second hand remembrance. For these generations visiting dark tourism sites is less about remembrance, and more about educating themselves about history (Walter, 2009). Developing dark tourism sites to educate future generations can act as a reminder of the conflict and prevent the Troubles reoccurring. Bloomfield (1998) shares this view and states that 'above all, we have to persuade our children how costly and counter-productive it would be to pursue the animosities of the past' (p.23).

As concerns the Troubles in Northern Ireland, those who lived through the conflict have first generation memories. The generations who only heard about the Troubles from their parents have second hand memories and this will also be the case for future generations. It follows that those who experienced the Troubles might not be ready for dark tourism sites to be developed in Northern Ireland as the issue is still too sensitive for them. Enright's (1991) theory, however, states that the older the generation is, the more likely they are to forgive and move forward (Hewstone *et al.*, 2004). There is minimal scholarly literature on the different views of dark tourism based on generational differences and dark tourism in Northern Ireland, and the Troubles remain a delicate subject for many individuals.

## **Rationale**

The development of dark tourism generates much debate and remains a controversial subject, with many being opposed to the increase in the phenomenon stating that dark tourism or 'grief tourism' (Trotta, 2006, cited in White and Frew, 2013, p. 63) is narcissistic and a way for tourists to display false emotions. Other scholars suggest that dark tourism is insensitive and unethical as dark tourism sites may be developed too soon after the events occur. This may be the case in Northern Ireland and is the reason why the authors undertook a study to assess the views on dark tourism held by different generations in the Province and examine how these views may affect the growth of dark tourism.

## **Method Section**

### **Sample and procedure**

For this study, the researchers conducted focus group research with six groups, each comprising six people ( $n = 6$ ); with a total of thirty-six participants ( $n = 36$ ). The focus groups were religion and age balanced (see Table 1). Participants were recruited from amongst the university population at Ulster University. An internal electronic information and sign-up sheet was distributed amongst staff and students at the university to recruit participants and explain the purpose of the research.

**Table 1: Breakdown of focus groups by religious identity and age**

<b>Religious group</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Generation type</b>
Protestants	18–35	Young
Protestants	36–55	Middle-Aged
Protestants	56–75+	Older
Catholics	18–35	Young
Catholics	36–55	Middle-Aged
Catholics	56–75+	Older

Each focus group took place within an interview room, where participants could interact without distraction. The authors then gave a series of open-ended questions and allowed the focus group participants to discuss. The focus groups discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim, in preparation for valid interpretation.

### **Focus group questions**

Questions were formulated to realize the aims and objectives of the research. These questions covered participants' experiences with the Troubles, their understanding of dark tourism and their attitudes towards dark tourism in the context of Northern Ireland.

**Experiences with the Troubles:** Participants were asked to discuss several questions. Firstly, they were asked about their 'experiences of the Troubles' and if they thought 'that the Troubles were a thing of the past'.

**Understanding dark tourism:** After they were posed with the question 'Have you ever heard of dark tourism?' Post response, participants were provided with a definition of dark tourism along with an example of this form of niche tourism within the context of Northern Ireland. At this point, all participants would have an understanding of the term and its meaning within a Northern Ireland context.

**Attitudes towards dark tourism in Northern Ireland:** Several questions were asked to participants to ascertain their attitudes, feelings and opinions around dark tourism in Northern Ireland. Questions such as 'what is your view on the tours that visitors can take of the Maze prison or of the political tours of the Shankill and Falls Roads?', 'In your opinion, is it too soon to use the Troubles to attract dark tourists?' and 'Do you think that once more time has passed by, it will be more acceptable to promote dark tourism?' were asked to participants. Further questions were posed to participants to understand their views regarding whether dark tourism could disrupt the peace process or facilitate healing between Catholic and Protestant communities. Lastly, participants were asked if 'dark tourism benefits the economy and, therefore, the Northern Irish people.'



# Results and Discussion

## The participants' experiences of the Troubles

The first question was aimed at understanding how the Troubles affected the individuals in the focus groups, and whether belonging to a specific generation and religious background affected the participants' experiences. Most participants from the focus groups comprising of the younger generation, both Protestant and Catholic, stated that they had very little experience of the Troubles themselves. For example, one participant stated the following: 'I feel I have no experience of the Troubles, it was before my time...' (Protestant, 18–35). Some, however, stated that they had some experience of the conflict as illustrated by the following participant:

'I haven't really experienced the Troubles, there has been some bother in the likes of my town, but I think that's not really, that's more to gain a reaction than trying to start something again' (Catholic, 18-35).

The Troubles refer to a thirty-year time frame from the late 1960s to 1998, when the Belfast Good Friday Agreement was signed (McDowell, 2008). When the Agreement was signed, some participants of the younger generation were only four years old, so it is not surprising that they did not remember the Troubles very well and are less affected by them. The chronological distance between the younger generation, both Protestant and Catholic, and the Troubles might affect their predisposition towards dark tourism. If the participants had experienced traumatic events first-hand, their attitudes towards the dark history of Northern Ireland might have been more negative.

In contrast, the middle-aged participants affirmed that their lives were impacted by the conflict, either directly or indirectly. Some Protestant interviewees said that they worked in association with the police force or belonged to the force. For instance, a participant said:

'I was a member of the security forces and served in the most bombed police station in Europe for seven years' (Protestant, 36–55).

One participant's brother was a victim of an attack. This participant stated:

'I have a brother who was blown up by the IRA... he still to this day has problems from it' (Protestant, 36–55).

It is unsurprising that the participants involved in the police force were more affected by the Troubles. In his studies, Feldman discusses the massive police involvement during the Troubles, explaining that they were a major target for the IRA. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) at the time was viewed as a 'Loyalist paramilitary police force' (Feldman, 1991, p. 277) and therefore was a major part of the turmoil. Other middle-aged participants, however, were not impacted directly by the conflict; they remember the Troubles, the attacks, the police, and Ulster Defence Regiment's (UDR)

searches, however, they stated that the conflict was not a key part of their lives. One participant stated:

'I remember the odd bomb, bomb in Tempo police station, bomb in Fivemiletown, heard them but never had anything to do with us' (Catholic 36-55).

In respect to the older generation, they all stated that, in one way or another, they were impacted directly by the Troubles. Many focus group participants shared stories outlining their experience of the Troubles, most of which involved death and destruction, and highlighted the fear that these participants experienced. One participant stated the following:

'I was in the B- specials, aye I remember plenty of it, there was [name], he was in the UDR, lived with old [name] on the corner just opposite my Uncle's, he was in the UDR and his car was parked outside our house and they blew it up, the front door came into the kitchen' (Protestant, 56-75+)

Another older generation participant stated:

'Where I worked, it was shot into, there was three people shot, then some time later, the fella that worked with me, I let him out the door that night, he was going home, and he was shot dead' (Catholic, 56 -75+).

This supports the literature stating that during the Troubles most families were either directly or indirectly affected, mostly through the loss of a family member or friend (Cairns and Darby, 1998; Hewstone *et al.*, 2004).

It is evident that the experience of the Troubles varies throughout generations. The authors expected to find that the younger generation had minimal experience of the Troubles. It is surprising, however, that some individuals from the middle-aged generation did not experience the Troubles directly. This means that the impact of the Troubles on the residents of Northern Ireland was affected by where people lived. Hewstone *et al.* (2004) share this view and state that some regions in Northern Ireland suffered worse than others. Stone (2006) explains that dark tourism involves travelling to sites associated with 'death, suffering or the seemingly macabre' (p.146); from the various stories and first-hand accounts, it is obvious that Northern Ireland has many such sites that satisfy the increasing demand for dark tourism.

**The Troubles - a thing of the past:** Most of the participants from the younger generation believe that the conflict is over but that the Troubles are still a major part of the older generations' lives. One participant said:

'... the actual war itself is part of the past... but for the generations above us, I definitely think it's something they still think about every day and it would still be quite a sensitive subject' (Catholic, 18–35).

This supports the literature which states that in the past the Troubles were an emotive topic in a sensitive environment for many residents. Since the past is an intimate part of the present, this sensitivity remains today (Brewer, 1990; Tam *et al.*, 2007).

In contrast, the consensus among the middle-aged and the older generations from both religious backgrounds is that the Troubles are not a thing of the past; the conflicts are sparse now but there is still an underlying element that continues to cause trouble. One participant stated that:

'No, it's not a thing of the past at all, it's a thing of the past on paper, but it's not a thing of the past in real life, sure it's still going on, there's still bombs being found and people being shot, so no' (Protestant, 36–55).

Another participant explained that:

'... it sickens me, all of them on the news spouting about the peace, the peace! There's no such thing as peace, and there hasn't been, not from either side' (Protestant, 56–75+).

Segregation is another topic that was mentioned often by the middle-aged and older generation groups during the discussions. Participants stated that segregation is everywhere, within education and politics, and that this divide prevents the communities from moving forward. A participant said: '...with regards to education, there's still that segregation...' (Catholic, 36–55).

While another one stated:

'... I'm yet to hear one politician in the last three months saying that they're standing up for the working class people... it's either I'm standing for Protestants or I'm standing for Catholics' (Catholic, 56–75+).

The topic of segregation often emerges in literature, a crucial aspect of the Troubles is the degree in which the two communities were separated, and this segregation continues to stanch the peace process. Segregation sustains conflict by creating an environment of suspicion and ignorance (Gallagher, 1995; Cairns and Hewstone, 2002; Hewstone *et al.*, 2004).

Although the Good Friday Agreement was signed over 18 years ago, and the conflict has considerably calmed down, none of the participants believes the Troubles to be completely over. Segregation is still common, and there continues to be divide

amongst communities. This finding supports Crooke's view (2001) that the Troubles are still a recent occurrence, and therefore using sites for dark tourism benefits may intensify sectarianism and amplify the divide that the focus group participants referred to.

### **Attitudes towards using the Troubles to boost dark tourism**

The participants were asked to share their feelings about using the Troubles to boost tourism in Northern Ireland through sites such as the Maze Prison and the political murals on the Falls and Shankill Roads in Belfast. To begin with, most of the participants had not heard of dark tourism. Of the 36 participants, only 3 had a previous knowledge of what dark tourism is.

The findings revealed that the different generations have very different views in this regard. The participants from the younger generation stated that they believe that using the Troubles to boost tourism would be beneficial as they can learn about their history. One participant said:

'I know for myself, I didn't grow up with it, so I'm very interested in it, interested in my history... I do think it would be something that not only would attract international visitors but also local, because like, again our generation didn't grow up with it' (Catholic, 18–35).

This finding supports Boyd's (2000) view that there will always be a market for visitors who want to see such landmarks that reflect a turbulent past.

Some participants from the middle-aged generation said that it would all depend on the type of attraction. They stated that using the Maze Prison and the political murals on the Falls and Shankill Roads would be beneficial to tourism, however visiting sites where atrocities happened would not be right as they are too personal and too recent. One participant said:

'Well I think it would be alright boosting tourism if it's properly managed and if it's not doing any harm bringing tourism into the country, with the likes of the Maze, but I don't think it's right, using the sites of big atrocities, the likes of the monuments and stuff like that, I don't think that's just right' (Protestant, 36–55).

However, other participants from the middle-aged generation believe that dark tourism is a major part of their lives. One participant said:

'...it's a part of your history, it's a part of our history, there's no point hiding from it, and if there's benefits to be got from it then work away' (Catholic, 36–55).

As mentioned, the Troubles remain a sensitive topic (Brewer, 1990; Tam *et al.*, 2007). However, others see the potential for using the Troubles to boost tourism. This is in line with Crooke's (2001) research, which explains how the Troubles are undoubtedly a major part of Northern Irish history, and that some generations have known nothing else. Yet the Troubles get scant recognition in exhibitions and Northern Ireland's tourist attractions.

These opinions are opposed to those of the older generations who believed that Northern Ireland has more to offer than dark tourism. One participant said:

'No, they shouldn't use it, they have other [attractions], Fermanagh has lovely lakes and mountains and walks, use them. They shouldn't be glorifying the Troubles' (Protestant, 56–75+).

Another participant said:

'I think it's a wee bit sad if that's what they have to do... I think there's nicer things to focus on in Northern Ireland than the Troubles' (Catholic, 56–75+).

The findings show that each generation feels differently in relation to using dark sites for tourism purposes. Walter (2009) explains that the individuals who experience an event are the first generation; therefore, using dark sites as tourism attractions forces the older generations to relive memories that they might have removed or do not want to think about. The findings reveal that the older generation is more resistant to dark tourism and sometimes even holds less than favourable attitudes. Importantly, one participant, for example, had strong opinions about how the Troubles began, stating:

'The Fenians started it, with all their civil rights parades, not half enough of them were shot that day' (Protestant, 56–75+).

One possible reason for the strong opinions of some participants is that they knew what Northern Ireland was like before the Troubles, and they gradually saw their country deteriorate.

**Is it too soon to use the Troubles, or will it be more acceptable when more time has passed?** The overall opinion of the younger generation and the middle-aged generation is that it is not too soon to use the Troubles to boost tourism and that enough time has passed for it to be acceptable. For instance, a participant said:

'I think we've fuffed about enough, soon they'll be fighting over petty things, if they just use these sites for dark tourism and see money coming in, and benefiting the economy then maybe they'll realise it's time to move on' (Catholic, 36–55).

Another participant said:

*'... if it's not done now the way the country is going there will be a lot of it gone, you know the likes of the murals will be gone, I'd rather see a bit of history up there than some random drawing, no matter what side it is'* (Protestant, 36-55).

This supports Boyd's (2000) view; according to him, Northern Ireland would do well to consider the importance of maintaining certain symbols, icons, buildings, and places to reflect and commemorate the past. In contrast, participants from the older generation all felt as though it is too soon to use the Troubles to boost dark tourism and the overall consensus is that more time needs to pass by before it is acceptable. One participant said:

*'I think it's a bit early yet, at this stage, Troubles are only over the last twenty years, I don't think it's right yet, it's not history yet, it's still an everyday occurrence in some places'* (Catholic, 56-75+).

This conflicts with Enright's (1991) theory that the older generation are more likely to forgive and move forward than young adults and the younger generations (Hewstone *et al.*, 2004). The study found that the younger generation who had little experience of the Troubles and the middle-aged generations who had varied experience are ready to move on and think that boosting dark tourism can be beneficial for Northern Ireland. They add that there is a sense of urgency with regards to boosting dark tourism in Northern Ireland. In contrast the older generation feel as though the Troubles are still too recent, and that Northern Ireland has more to offer.

**Dark tourism disrupting the peace process or contributing to the healing process?** All participants from the younger and middle-aged generations stated that, if managed properly and handled carefully, dark tourism will not disrupt the peace process. One participant stated:

*'as long as you are respectful and considerate of the area then I don't see why there should be issues using sites like the Shankill and the Falls Roads'* (Protestant, 18-35).

One participant even stated that if managed effectively, dark tourism will enhance the peace process. According to the participant:

*'I think if there was proper facilities there for dark tourism it would probably enhance the peace process. You know, people from certain areas and people that want to start trouble will get less support when folks see the benefits and money and stuff coming in to the areas'* (Protestant, 36-55).

A theme that emerged often during the discussions is that the government will be the biggest issue at this point. One participant said:

'... the politicians want it, to disrupt the peace, they're playing political football, if something will annoy one side, the other side will latch on to it and vice versa ... unfortunately the government playing a game to torture each other will disrupt peace ever happening, and probably from the dark tourism sites from ever happening' (Catholic, 36–55).

In Northern Ireland there are strong links between dark tourism and political tourism. Strange and Kempa (2003) state that dark tourism sites provide opportunities for political reflection. A consistent theme that emerged throughout the focus groups, along with the mistrust of the government, is the importance of passing down accurate narratives to the younger generations. One participant stated that:

'I know my ones won't learn about the Troubles from the government, they'll hear about it from me, they'll not get the government's story they'll get my story, they'll get the truth' (Protestant, 36 –55).

According to Stone (2010), dark tourism sites offer the opportunity to document history and provide political interpretations of past events. Hence, in Northern Ireland, dark tourism provides the opportunity to record the Troubles so they can act as a reminder of what should never happen again. In support for the creation of memorials for the victims of the Troubles, Bloomfield (1998) states that 'above all, we have to persuade our children how costly and counter-productive it would be to pursue the animosities of the past' (p.23).

However, consensus among the older generations was that for now, the Troubles should be left alone. One participant stated that:

'The ones still talking about it all, on the television and on shows, it doesn't do any good I think, it makes people on either side more bigoted as to what did happen' (Catholic, 56–75+).

McDowell's (2008) research advocates this position and explains that many believe that the Troubles are still too recent and therefore there is a lot of controversy around the idea of capitalising on Northern Ireland's past for financial gain.

**Dark tourism benefiting the economy:** The participants were asked if they believe that dark tourism could benefit the economy and therefore the Northern Irish people. All participants agreed that yes, if dark tourism was to be developed it would benefit the economy:

'Definitely, especially where most of the dark tourism would be, the likes of Shankill Road and Free Derry corner are generally deprived areas of the cities. So it'll be good to bring money into there...' (Catholic, 36–55).

There are numerous benefits associated with dark tourism including economic benefits. Tarlow (2005) explains how dark tourism is an economic generator which may transform past tragedies into economic productivity.

## **Conclusion**

This research study was undertaken to investigate the difference in the level of support for dark tourism in Northern Ireland between the generations who lived through the Troubles and those who heard about them. Through qualitative data, which was obtained through carrying out six focus groups, the authors attempted to investigate this aim, and three main objectives.

The first objective was to investigate the views on dark tourism held by the generations who grew up experiencing the Troubles. Those who grew up experiencing the Troubles can be categorised into two generations, the middle-aged generation, consisting of those aged 36 – 55 and the older generation, consisting of those aged 56 – 75+. The responses to the questions provided by the two older generations were different. The middle-aged generation was very supportive of dark tourism in Northern Ireland. They believe that the benefits associated with boosting dark tourism may strengthen the peace process and facilitate the healing process. They also believe that enough time has passed for it to be acceptable to use the Troubles to boost dark tourism. In contrast, the older generation believes that Northern Ireland has more to offer tourists than its troubled history. Participants from the older generation state that the Troubles are still too recent and are not yet history as they still impact lives today.

The second objective was to investigate the views on dark tourism of the younger generation, who grew up in the aftermath of the Troubles. Interestingly, the younger generation and the middle-aged generation held similar viewpoints. They both agree that Northern Ireland is prepared for dark tourism, and that if the country continues to paint over murals and hide from the past, soon the dark history of Northern Ireland will be buried.

The final objective was to examine how these views can potentially affect the development of dark tourism in Northern Ireland. The findings show that the older generation are unsupportive of the development of dark tourism in Northern Ireland. Consequently, this could have a negative effect on the development and promotion of this tourism niche in the Province. Another key finding is that the majority of the



participants feels that the government is deterring the development of dark tourism. In short, the research found that participants from the younger generation felt that the Troubles should be utilised to boost tourism in Northern Ireland. This opinion was shared by those participants from the middle-aged generation, who believe that the Troubles should be utilised for dark tourism to educate future generations. In contrast the older generation believe that the Troubles are still too recent and that Northern Ireland has more to offer.

Though an opportunistic sample approach could be seen as a limitation to this study, this was overcome by meeting the criteria of age and religion, which were the main selection parameters. Future research could employ a quantitative methodological approach to investigate in more depth governmental support of dark tourism in Northern Ireland. As this qualitative approach provides the insights of both the generational and religious backgrounds, a survey approach would also enable a comparative analysis between these groupings.

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