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Educational Travel – Expanding Horizons, Tallinn 19-21 August 2011

Conference Report

Graham Busby, University of Plymouth

Bravo to William Feighery for going ahead with this, the Second ETF conference, despite a disappointing number of registrations. Others loss, very much our gain. Indeed, with less than forty delegates, it is possible to secure real interaction with paper presenters – there was only one parallel session.

Figure 1: Old Town, Tallinn, from Toompea Hill. The university is in the middle distance.



Source: Author photo.

Keynote speaker Philip Stone spoke on 'Dark Tourism, Ethics and Education – towards a construction of secular morality'. He has visited Ground Zero, New York, every year since the tragedy and provided a knowledgeable, qualitative insight. One aspect of his presentation was the sheer range of dark tourism sites, from World War military graves in northern France, to tsunami-impacted Sri Lanka. Philip argued that the media creates dark tourism in many cases. Food for thought.

Rather impressively, Donald Sinclair (Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization) presented live via video link from Brasilia – at something like 04.00 local time. He spoke to the paper 'Mass suicide as tourist narrative – Jonestown and the catharsis of Dark Tourism'. Amongst a number of interesting points, he identified motivations for dark tourism and made the following recommendations for communicating the horror of Jonestown: partial

reconstruction of the temple site, a dignified display of remaining memorabilia of the victims, books and other texts should be produced about the settlement, audio tapes of the final ceremony should be available, and a suitable ambience needed to be created.

Figure 2: Donald Sinclair live from Brazil: several time zones behind Tallinn



Source: Author photo

Figure 3: Philip Stone (UCLAN), Liu Danqing (Tianjin University and Florida International University) and William Feighery (Educational Travel Foundation)



Source: Author Photo

On a similar theme, Andrea de Antoni (Kyoto University) spoke to the paper 'Visiting ghosts from the distance – construction and consumption of haunted places through social networks

in contemporary Kyoto'. Distinctly, unrelated, the Head of Department of Leisure Sciences, at Tallinn University, Mart Reimann, delivered a presentation addressing local community and tourism interface in Estonian national parks, based on lifelong experience. To view some of the papers presented, visit

<http://www.edutf.org/conference.html>

The First BITCO – Belgrade International Tourism Conference – Belgrade, 22-24 March 2012 – Conference Report

Graham Busby, University of Plymouth

It's usually good to be in at the start of something (I remember the very first World Travel Market, in London) and that's the feeling this reviewer had with BITCO. The first Belgrade International Tourism Conference was hosted by the long-established College of Tourism; indeed, this institution is celebrating its forty-fifth anniversary and is said to be the premier training facility for tourism in the Balkans.

Director Dr Milan Skakun and his team made all of the delegates feel most welcome; this began with a reception at the Hotel Zlatnik in Zemun, once a separate, historic, town and now part of greater Belgrade.

Figure 1: Professor Christian Maurer, University of Applied Sciences, Krems



Source: Author photo

Keynote speakers Christian Maurer, Amelia Tomašević, José Filipe Torres, Terence Clifford-Amos, Russell Arthur Smith, Graham Busby and Tadeja Jere Lazanski spoke to a wide range of topics in tourism. Of particular note here must be José's presentation; as founder of Bloom Consulting he overran the allocated time but what an interesting presentation:

'Country Branding Current Challenges or, essentially, how to change the image of Poland (see

http://countrybrandingwiki.org/index.php/Country_Branding#Bloom_Consulting_Country_Branding_Ranking).

Not surprisingly, there was a wealth of papers from the Balkan countries. Dragan Bulatović, President of the country's mountaineering club, discussed the possibility of sustainable development in protected areas of Montenegro, clearly a topic close to his heart. From Serbia, Branislav Radošević reviewed the tomb as tourist attraction, specifically *The House of Flowers*, in Belgrade, associated with former leader Tito – arguably a form of dark tourism. Zoran Dražić, from Novi Sad, presented a much more scientifically-orientated paper, addressing how the flora and fauna of the island Ada Ciganlija has been affected by tourism.

Figure 2: The inspirational Jose Felipe Torres, Bloom Consulting, Madrid



Source: Author photo

Figure 3: St Sava Church, Belgrade, still under construction: last stop on the delegate tour



Source: Author photo

As usual, only a handful of conference papers can be mentioned. One of especial interest to this reviewer came from Sylwia Kucharska (Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities) entitled 'European Union funds as an opportunity to promote film tourism'. Adapting the Italian *Don Matteo* series, featuring a detective priest, Baltmedia Film Group have produced a Polish version. *Father Mateusz* was first filmed in 2008 in the town of Sandomierz which, according to Kucharska, is one of the oldest and historically most important Polish settlements. Using quality heritage certainly helps for the average viewing figure was given as 6.65 million with a very large market share. Tourism to Sandomierz rose by approximately 20 per cent although it was argued that this could have been higher had additional promotion been undertaken. In 2010, Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship created a Film Fund using EU Structural Funds and this has supported the cost of additional promotion during the fourth and fifth seasons of the television series. This was argued to be a pioneering initiative even on a European scale. It will be interesting to see whether a sustainable effect can be created given that some television and film outputs, such as *The Sound of Music*, have had decade's long impact.

Figure 4: Many of the delegates and students at BITCO



Source: Author photo

**Dark Tourism Symposium – UCLAN Westleigh Conference Centre,
Preston –
24 April 2012 – Report**

Graham Busby, Plymouth University

It's usually good to be in at the start of something. For the second time in this issue, the statement is being made: for it is certainly true of the University of Central Lancashire's symposium on Dark Tourism and the official launch of the Institute for Dark Tourism Research. This received extensive media coverage, including the BBC and CNN, largely due to Dr Philip Stone's skills, I suspect. Around eighty delegates made it for the day, coming from Canada, Israel, Spain, Netherlands, Portugal, Austria, Germany, and Belgium besides the home contingent. There were familiar faces besides young researchers new to the field; to illustrate this, one of the reviewers discussed dark tourism in the form of serial murderers' house-visiting with Maloe Snieker (Erasmus University, Rotterdam). This was over coffee. Her research has examined the houses of Belgian Marc Dutroux and how neighbouring residents, municipal authorities, and visitors have engaged with the various properties he owned. She has also researched the homes of Austrian Josef Fritzl and the English couple Fred and Rosemary West.

Figure 1: Professor Richard Sharpley and Dr Philip Stone at the launch of the Institute, Westleigh Conference Centre, UCLAN, Preston



Source: Author photo

The Symposium provided a platform for six speakers. To launch the day, Professor Richard Sharpley gave the audience a review of the key points of dark tourism research thus far, keeping the audience rapt for almost one hour. He argued that attention has mostly been given to supply-side analysis; “we need to develop a consumption perspective on dark tourism”, he stated and asked “are we becoming more fascinated by death?”. Emeritus Professor Tony Seaton (University of Bedfordshire) gave, as usual, a truly thought-provoking presentation in which he stressed that there was “too much emphasis on theory and not enough on the individual” and asserted that dark tourism is “not a single concept”. Intriguingly, this reviewer immediately thought of well-known novelists, when Tony made the statement that nearly all that he has published has been based on personal biography or “play”.

A key point from Tony was that whilst dark tourism and thanatourism are, clearly, linked conceptually by death, there is a danger in ‘naming’. He drew on Marshall’s Dictionary of Sociology to illustrate that by ‘naming’ (in this case terming a phenomenon ‘dark tourism’), there is a danger of reification. He argued that we need 1) less theory, 2) more comparative observations, and 3) meanings and differentiated motive identification. Returning to the coffee-time conversation with Maloe Snieker and her murderers’ property research, the reviewer immediately thought of her comparative observations across three countries when Tony raised this need.

Having heard Philip Stone at a conference in Tallinn, last August, it was interesting to see how he has developed his views into a model of mortality mediation. Without the structure of religion, he argues that there are mediating institutions which offer (re)presentations of death; he drew on a range of examples including his annual visit to Ground Zero, New York. Dr Tony Johnston (Kings College, London) spoke to a paper entitled 'The dominion of the Dead: Thanatourism and (other) world encounters'. He proposed a new term – thanagazing – derived, not surprisingly, from John Urry's work and that of a few others. Tony Johnston argued that there is no single gaze on death (not a surprising conclusion) and that the tourist-deathscape relationship is comprised of a number of facets of landscape, semiotic features, personal characteristics, and such like.

Dr Gilly Carr (University of Cambridge) presented her research on the German occupation of the Channel Islands in the paper 'Self and Other: neglected dark legacies and accepted dark heritage in the Channel Islands'. At least two listeners felt that this paper became progressively more interesting. Gilly announced that she was emotionally involved because many of her family had been imprisoned or deported during the period. Several hundred bunkers remain and act as a permanent reminder although there is only one plaque identifying one of the slave labour/concentration camps. Most have been allowed to decay or been built over. Surprisingly, the role of slave labour in the creation of the bunkers is marginalised, other narratives have been given prominence. So, there is no shortage of dark 'legacies' in the Channel Islands; "the very darkest have been destroyed, become overgrown, or marginalised". There is no mention of Todt Organisation labourers' stories. On the other hand, for residents, long familiarity means the reminders of the Occupation are not perceived as dark, argues Carr. This reviewer had expected at least a passing reference to the best-selling fictional work *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (Shaffer & Barrows 2008), soon to be a movie – http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nc1_3JXpXyU and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-guernsey-16709291> and publisher's site <http://www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/guernsey/authors/>

The last presentation of the day came from Major and Mrs Holt, founders of the eponymous Battlefield Tours tour operation. Mrs Holt explained how they had set up their business, the pitfalls and pleasures. For example, an initial mistake was to mix different periods of military history. Distribution at the start of the day, on tour, of a period newspaper helped cultivate the right atmosphere. On occasion, they found the scale of operations much larger than expected: on the fortieth anniversary of D Day, they had 1,200 clients staying in Normandy. In the second part of the presentation, Major Holt discussed the importance of battlefield guidebooks, illustrating how their own work had morphed between first and current edition.

The key point here is that by writing these guidebooks, they have “codified” the battlefield tour and permitted others to guide. A number of destinations have “smartened” up what the visitor can see, making more of what might have been hidden (à la destination-based cultural capital – see Busby & Meethan 2008); it seems some areas, such as the Somme, are now completely reliant on this form of tourism for the economy.

Based on attendance at many conferences over the years, it was interesting to note that all the speakers were what has to be termed passionate about their particular facets of dark tourism. Reflecting on the day, this reviewer was reminded of a book chapter by David Uzzell (1989) which emphasised the temporal dimension of visitor motivation for dark tourism site-visiting, i.e. there may well be a continuum whereby visitors shortly after the event are paying homage, achieving catharsis, to becoming general interest tourists as the decades pass. Clearly, this does not apply to all sites/sights but certainly has validity with many.

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