ABSTRACT

In the light of the exponential growth of tourism activity in the city of Lisbon, which is evidenced by several indicators, we face ourselves with a scenario of concentration in the city, not benefiting the whole region of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA). On the other hand, a unique opportunity of innovation of tourism supply emerges, seizing an increasing and plural demand. The chapter intends to explore the potential of dark immersive theatre experiences (DITE) as a tourism product. By doing so, it is suggested that DITE can innovate the tourism supply of the LMA, contributing to the deconcentration and diversification of tourism, on a themed and territorial perspective, as well as to the mitigation of the impacts of over tourism.


LITERATURE REVIEW

Seeking Darkness: From the Origin to the Establishment of Dark Tourism

There are two lines of thought regarding the interest in subjects such as death, the macabre or tragedy. On one hand, authors such as Rojek (1993) or Foley and Lennon (1996) argue that dark tourism is a post-modern phenomenon due to its emphasis on experience, simulation and reproduction, materialised through entertainment.

This type of cultural tourism (…) is an intrinsic part of the post-modern world. The simulation of experiences, the critical importance of reproduction and duplication and the centrality of media and technology are characteristically present in any examination of these [dark] locations. Thus, the contemporary context for dark tourism is that of post-modernism (Foley & Lennon, 1996, p. 199).

On the other hand, Seaton (1996) rejects this notion, referring to De Quincey’s ‘On murder considered as one of the fine arts’ (1827) to argue that this essay developed a premise that closely resembles that which underlies dark tourism: “that an act or event which might be deplorable or repugnant from a moral point of view could have considerable attraction as a spectator experience” (Seaton, 1996, p. 234). By doing so, the essay recognizes the longstanding cultural tradition of darkness in all societies. As such, the interest in subjects associated to darkness is seen in the late Middle Ages (e.g. Dance of Death), gradually increasing up until today, resisting to business assumptions (e.g. Chamber of Horrors, in Madame Tussaud).

In spite of dark tourism’s practice being as ancient as tourism activity itself, it is only recently that idea was introduced into the field of tourism studies (Foley & Lennon, 2000; Sharpley, 2005).

The impact of the idea was greater because up until then tourism had been almost universally viewed as, at the very least, a light-hearted, even trivial, but essentially harmless activity (…) The suggestion that it could have dark attributes and that this darkness could be actively sought was thus both novel and shocking (Ashworth & Isaac, 2015, p. 316).

The idea of dark tourism was novelty and shocking since the empirical evidence of dark elements in tourism contradicted the dominant paradigm of entertainment (Wang, 2000). By seeking darkness, it was suggested a desire for self-confrontation with themes socially avoided, such as death, the macabre or tragedy, which clearly shocked with the pleasure-seeking perspective universally associated to tourism activity (Dale & Robinson, 2011; Williams & Baláž, 2016). Therefore, as Cohen (2009, pp. 183-184) noted, “in the popular imagination, death and tourism belong to utterly different spheres of life”. Blackshaw (2017) was one of the authors who addressed the meaning of darkness:

In most if not all cultures, ‘darkness’ means abnormality of the normal state of human affairs. To this extent ‘abnormality’ signifies those kinds of leisure activities and interests which are condemned by the ‘value consensus’ as ‘wrong’, while implying that they also need to be censured or socially controlled (Blackshaw, 2017, p. 2).