

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

ANALYSIS OF WAR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT FACTORS USING AN EXPLORATORY MODEL

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1. INTRODUCTION

War tourism, a subtype of dark tourism, has become a phenomenon of growing interest to both researchers and visitors. This tourism modality focuses on visiting historical and contemporary sites related to armed conflicts, human tragedies, and war in general. Although at first glance it may appear to cater solely to morbid curiosity or sensationalism, war tourism serves significant cultural, educational, and economic purposes. From historic battlefields such as the beaches of Normandy to areas devastated by recent conflicts, like the city of Damascus in Syria, this practice connects tourists with a tangible past, offering opportunities for learning, reflection, and awareness.

Throughout history, war has been a driver of both forced and voluntary movements. Visits to battlefields, cemeteries, and commemorative monuments have a long tradition, combining human curiosity with the need to understand and remember. Since ancient times, people from various cultures have felt compelled to visit sites where decisive events for their communities or nations took place. Over time, this practice has evolved into a form of tourism that attracts not only history enthusiasts but also those seeking meaningful and emotionally impactful experiences.

War tourism can be classified into two main categories: historical and active. The historical dimension focuses on the preservation and promotion of sites related to past conflicts, such as the battlefields of Waterloo or Gettysburg and memorials like the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. This type of tourism emphasizes education and reflection, fostering a deeper understanding of historical events and their repercussions. Conversely, the active dimension involves visits to contemporary conflict zones, such as regions affected by recent or ongoing wars. Although more controversial, this approach appeals to those seeking intense emotions and experiences that bring them closer to the realities of war. Both dimensions, however, pose significant challenges in terms of sustainability, security,

and ethics, requiring careful management to balance tourists' expectations with respect for affected sites and communities.

2. OBJECTIVES

The study seeks to identify and analyze the factors driving the development of war tourism, its cultural, economic, and educational significance, and the challenges it faces in terms of sustainability and ethics. It aims to explore the interactions among key components such as heritage preservation, economic investment, tourist motivations, professional training, and infrastructure. Additionally, the study examines how different types of war tourism experiences—historical and active—can address diverse tourist profiles and expectations.

3. METODOLOGY

The study of war tourism has adopted advanced methodologies to understand the relationships between its various components. In this context, a particularly useful approach has been the use of structural equation models (PLS-SEM), which allow the analysis of interactions and mutual reinforcement among elements such as promotion, education, tourist motivations, and infrastructure.

Once the factors of tourism development have been explained and grouped in a convenient way, and once the characteristics of war tourism have been explained, both have been combined and sections have been generated (*Historical Burden, Motivations, Hobbies, Promotion and Training*), as proposed indicators to analyse through the PLS-SEM Model.

We will define the population and the sample, as well as the preference regarding the choice of subjects. Between 8 and 23 August 2022, 150 surveys were carried out anonymously on random individuals. The sample was selected by simple random convenience sampling. The survey was created using *Google Forms* and compressed into a link that was sent via mobile apps and email. We will then describe the process and design used to extract the data. The survey is an effective method for detecting ideas, preferences, needs, etc., so in some research, the design of a questionnaire that includes latent variables and indicators, we think the PLS-SEM model would be beneficial.

This model provides a clear perspective on how different factors influence the development of war tourism. For example, findings indicate that effective destination promotion is directly related to the quality of training for both tourists and industry professionals.

4. RESULTS

The findings identify five main factors driving the development of war tourism: heritage and culture, economy, services, tourists, and the environment.

Heritage and culture are fundamental to providing authentic and educational experiences, as the conservation of monuments, battlefields, military cemeteries, and museums ensures the sites' significance and value for visitors. These sites not only act as reminders

of significant historical events, but also become educational platforms that promote a greater understanding of the past. For example, the restoration of World War I trenches and bunkers in Europe has led to the creation of themed routes that attract thousands of tourists interested in military history. Economic investment in infrastructure, services, and promotion enhances destination accessibility and contributes to regional development. Public, private, and international funding plays a crucial role in supporting conservation and promotion projects, while marketing initiatives, such as themed travel packages, have proven effective in attracting a wider audience.

Economy is another key factor in the development of war tourism. Investment in infrastructure, services and promotion by public and private actors not only improves the accessibility and quality of destinations, but also contributes to regional development. Funds from public administrations, private companies and international organizations are essential to finance conservation and promotion projects. In addition, marketing initiatives, such as the creation of thematic tourism packages and international promotion campaigns, have proven to be effective in attracting a wider public. For example, in Normandy, tourism linked to the D-Day Landings represents a significant source of income for the region, generating employment and promoting local economic growth. In terms of services, the quality of the tourist experience depends to a large extent on the infrastructure available and the professionalism of the staff. Tour guides, for example, play a key role in contextualizing sites and providing detailed and accurate information. To fulfil this objective, it is essential that these professionals have specialized training in history, communication skills and cultural sensitivity. In addition, tourism facilities such as interpretation centers, museums and guided tours must be designed to offer an enriching and accessible experience for all audiences. In this sense, the implementation of interactive technologies, such as mobile apps and virtual tours, can significantly enhance the visitor experience.

The profile of the war tourist is diverse and reflects a wide range of motivations. Some visitors seek to learn about historical events and their consequences, while others are attracted by the emotional and symbolic charge of the sites. Among the main motivations are historical interest, curiosity, the desire to experience intense emotions and educational purposes. For example, tourists interested in military history may be attracted by the opportunity to explore historic battlefields, while others may be more interested in the symbolic and emotional charge of memorials. This diverse profile poses challenges for the sector, which must adapt its offer to meet the expectations of different types of visitors.

The results of the model also underline the importance of interactions between factors. For example, the training of professionals has been shown to have a significant impact on tourists' motivations and hobbies, as through activities such as guided tours, historical re-enactments and commemorative events, visitors can experience a deeper connection with the past. These interactions not only generate a lasting emotional impact, but also foster a greater appreciation of history and culture. Moreover, the possibility to actively participate in these experiences, such as battle re-enactments or educational workshops, broadens the appeal of destinations and allows war tourism to reach a more diverse audience. Investment in infrastructure also enhances the overall visitor experience. These relationships underline the need for a holistic approach to planning and promoting war tourism, where public-private partnerships are essential to maximize its potential.

On the other hand, the sustainability of war tourism depends on public policies that ensure heritage conservation and respect for local communities. Collaboration between authorities and communities is vital to prevent tourism from harming the environment or disrupting social dynamics. Involving local communities in the planning and management of war tourism not only ensures an authentic representation of historical events but also generates mutual benefits. This holistic approach underscores the importance of balancing educational, economic, and social factors to promote responsible tourism while preserving the cultural legacy of war-related sites.

5. CONCLUSIONS

War tourism is a multifaceted activity combining education, culture, and economic development. Despite challenges related to sustainability and ethics, it offers unique opportunities to preserve historical memory and promote learning.

Collaboration between public and private sectors, strategic investments, and appropriate training for professionals and tourists are essential for realizing the full potential of this tourism typology. By carefully balancing cultural, emotional, and economic dimensions, war tourism can contribute significantly to regional development and cultural awareness.

Ultimately, war tourism not only connects visitors with the past but also encourages reflection on the present and future, fostering a deeper understanding of the conflicts that have shaped our society.