

DARK TOURISM IN COLOMBIA: MOTIVATION OF TRAVELLERS AND COMMUNITY PRACTICES

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Abstract: Based on the infamous case of the natural disaster of the Armero volcano eruption, this study aims to analyze the perception of the local community towards the development of dark tourism. In particular, the main central question to be addressed in this article is to examine the motivation of tourists and the perception of local residents towards the tourism activity related to this event. To this end, a qualitative methodology was adopted through observation and interview. Our results show that the main motivation of tourists visiting the Armero region is the curiosity to see other people's deaths. However, his feelings change after visiting this region, as curiosity turns to sadness at seeing the suffering of so many people. On the other hand, some locals are not pleased that their history and heritage revolve around tragedy and the dead. This study highlights the lack of awareness of this type of tourism. It is therefore necessary that governments and competent authorities implement measures to encourage the development of this type of tourism. In this way, the cultural impact of black tourism in Colombia can be improved.

Key words: tourism, dark tourism, disaster, Colombia, Armero

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INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism plays an important role in the development of tourism in Colombia, where the sector's activity has been heavily marked by drugs, crime, and terrorism. For this reason, it is particularly important to promote positive aspects of Colombian tourism to improve the resilience of tourists. Dark tourism is considered an activity that is performed in places related to death, such as genocides, wars, catastrophes, natural disasters, man-made disasters, or the death of a representative character, among others (Cohen, 2018; Van Broeck and López López, 2018). Since the 1990s, there has been a growing interest in studying the supply and demand of this type of tourism (Lennon, 2017). As a result, several studies have analyzed cases related to dark tourism in Australia (Kim and Butler, 2015), New Zealand (Jordan and Prayag, 2021), France (Dehoorne and Jolliffe, 2013), and Canada (Bird, 2013), among others.

However, no study analyses the impacts of this type of tourism in Colombia. Our study is based on the natural disaster caused by the eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in the town of Armero (Colombia) in 1985. This tragedy left a dark history and cultural heritage of the population of Armero, which awakened the interest of tourists to travel to this place. Although this tragedy has been previously analyzed by several researchers (Neira, 2006; Ospina Enciso, 2013; Suárez Guava, 2009), empirical studies published so far do not provide clarity on the perspectives of visitors and residents of the Armero region. The municipality of Armero Guayabal is located north of the department of Tolima, the header is 95 kilometres from Ibagué, this being the capital of the department. The limits of Armero Guayabal are established according to Decree 670 of May 29, 1950 and are approved according to Decree 2441 of 1950.

This municipality has a total area of 440.12 square kilometres, among which 4.44% is composed of urban area, and 95.56% is rural territory. The urban area is composed of 27 neighbourhoods and the rural area is divided into 18 villages, 4 population centres, and 3 townships. Its average temperature is 26 degrees Celsius, and the distance from Bogotá is 169 kilometres. The main objective of this research is to explore the tourism experiences in dark tourism in Armero, and the ethical issues in the profit-making and participation of the inhabitants of this region caused by the development of this type of tourism. Therefore, this study aims to provide a conceptual theoretical framework based on the relationship between the local community of Armero and dark tourism, through analysing the perceptions of visitors and local residents on the impact of dark tourism. Three general research questions guide this study: How did residents cognitively evaluate their experiences at dark tourism sites in their community, what emotions did residents experience during their visits to dark

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tourism sites in their community, and what coping strategies did residents implement after their visits to dark tourism sites in their community? What coping strategies did residents implement after their visits to dark tourism sites in their community? To answer these questions, a qualitative research method based on the development of semi-structured interviews was carried out. After this introductory section, Section 2 gives the development of the theoretical framework. Section 3 presents the methodological aspects. Section 4 shows the results, while Section 5 presents the main conclusions.

Theoretical framework

The field of dark tourism has been studied for more than 20 years (Sun and Lv, 2021). Recent empirical evidence in tourism suggests that there is a growing interest in the study of tourism destinations whose cultural heritage is related to the dark events of the past (Magee and Gilmore, 2015). Thus, in recent years, dark tourism has been written about, causing it to gain recognition within tourism research, therefore, it has the potential to feed their curiosity, exposing places and stories about death (Isaac, 2021). Dark tourism is related to places with a gloomy character as institutions of punishment like decommissioned prisons, or sites associated with massacre or crime scenes, such as Dachau, a former concentration camp in Germany (Seraphin and Korstanje, 2021). These destinations do not involve the death of ordinary people from natural causes (Pratt et al., 2019), but are often associated with a dark history related to cruelty, evil or disaster, resulting in a growing demand from visitors wishing to experience this cultural heritage (Sharpley and Wright, 2018).

This type of tourism is widely known as black tourism (Lv et al., 2022). It is defined as a recreational activity that consists of travelling to places related to death, such as genocides, wars, catastrophes, natural disasters, man-made disasters, or the death of a representative figure, among others (Cohen, 2018; Rodríguez Amórtegui and Mora Forero, 2021). Despite the great relevance of tourism today, it is not an emerging issue as the interest in studying this type of tourism started in the 1990s (Sharpley and Wright, 2018). This is because death and suffering have been linked to tourism since ancient Rome, where audiences attended gladiatorial combats and public executions, which made places more attractive (Sharpley and Wright, 2018; Van Broeck and López López, 2018). There are numerous areas in the globe where there have been deaths, atrocities, and disasters (Jordan and Prayag, 2022). Dark tourism takes place in places where a certain degree of danger can be perceived, such as those that have experienced natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, or volcanic eruptions (Tang, 2018). Other authors have highlighted cemeteries or certain cities where celebrities have died of sudden deaths as preferred settings for dark tourism (Kunwar and Karki, 2019). In this context, we can highlight sites such as Chernobyl, where the worst radioactive accident in history occurred, leaving numerous deaths in its wake, and which even today still harbours a certain degree of radioactivity in its atmosphere (Stone, 2018).

Similarly, we can highlight the Jewish Holocaust in Germany as a place marked by the extermination, genocide, and atrocities of a large number of Jews, which generates shocking emotions for visitors (Sharpley and Wright, 2018). Although death is intrinsic to human beings, contemplating the death of others generates a morbid curiosity that has become a form of tourism (Cohen, 2018). These catastrophes can alter a publication's tourist industry to the point that the black history around its cultural assets becomes its principal draw (Lv et al., 2022; Shondell Miller, 2008). Thus, dark tourism represents a very important source of income if it can be exploited. For this reason, places that have a bad reputation due to war, misfortune or calamity seek to improve their image by transforming this violent past into a tourist attraction (Lisle, 2000).

Certain regions produce tangible items that allude to these catastrophes, which tourists bought as souvenirs (Jureniene and Radzevicius, 2022; Seaton, 1996). In addition, these regions also produce scripts about their own history, in order to attract more interest from tourists (Bunten, 2008). While dark tourism can make a significant contribution to the economy, it can also be an important (Burns and Figueroa, 2007), it can also generate controversy and damage the reputation of the place (Wight, 2006). For this reason, there are governments that prefer to keep secret or keep very discreet any event related to death in their country (Heidelberg, 2015). In addition, another disadvantage of this type of tourism is in the area of social interaction, as it can generate moral conflicts between communities and visitors (Chen and Xu, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article is based on a descriptive analysis with a mixed approach. Figure 1 shows the steps executed in the elaboration of this research. The choice of this type of qualitative methodology was due to the fact that it allows the interviewee and the interviewer to be free to discuss relevant issues in order to obtain the required information (Salmons, 2014). Finally, the classification of the information obtained from the interviews was carried out using an inductive method (Zamora et al., 2018).

The information was collected during the first semester of the year 2021, through a questionnaire with closed questions that facilitate the management, tabulation, data analysis, the response of

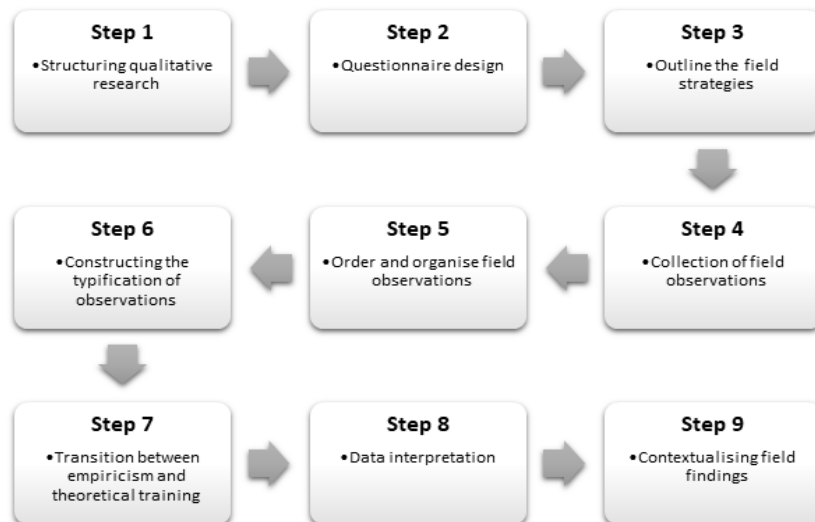


Figure 1. Methodology steps (Source: Own elaboration based on De Souza Minayo, 2012)

the respondents and make these responses reliable (Dibra and Oelfke, 2013). It was structured in two phases: the initial phase corresponds to an introductory section consisting of 6 items, which allow us to know the perception of community-based tourism. Subsequently, the next phase is developed with a total of 10 attitudinal statements on the perception of the tourist towards the development of this type of tourism.

It was taken as a sample 2 local tour operators, and 20 tourists, who were interviewed through semi-structured dialogues. Due to the sample taken, the generalized perception of the entire population could have some variations, but with the instruments designed we tried to obtain the data in the most objective way possible.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of fieldwork in Armero Tolima, after interviewing tourists visiting the municipality. These data show the perception that tourists have of the involvement of community-based tourism in this region characterised by the development of black tourism.

The following are the interview responses of the tourists after completing their trip to the ruins of Armero. These surveys provide qualitative data on tourism demand in the municipality, visitors' motivation and experience.

Table 1. Community Interviewers

Participation of the community in the tourist activity.	Tour operators try to provide the greatest possible participation to the community, through different tasks such as tourist guidance and the acquisition of products and services necessary in the tourist activity reflected in food, drink, clothing etc.
Contributions of tourism to the local community.	With each of the tourist visits, the community benefits as sales in their businesses increase, and opportunities for them to market products and services to tourists increase.
Tourism initiatives in the community.	The community strives to preserve the memory of Armero both before and after the tragedy, there are initiatives to support the Armerita community, support for the preservation of the holy field, and education so that the descendants are the ones who continue with the history.
Profile of the tourist visiting Armero.	Currently there are many kinds of tourists. Some come to the municipality for educational and research purposes, others are people who want to know the history of the place, there are also people who are interested in paranormal phenomena and are sensitive and curious, and the municipality receives visits from relatives or employees of the Armero existing before the tragedy.
Perception of the community in front of its current heritage and history.	Some members of the community do not welcome the fact that their history, and their heritage revolve around the tragedy that occurred and the thousands of victims it claimed, but the vast majority of people who lived this tragedy in their own flesh, enjoy telling their story and being heard; they recognize that for every tourist who listens to them and knows the history of the municipality, the information will multiply and this will contribute to preserve their memory.
Motivation of tourists.	As in the case of the typology of the tourist, there are diverse motivations among which can be found, culture, religion, education, research, memory, family encounters, history, paranormal phenomena, and even some families that still do not find forgiveness.

DISCUSSION

Although authors such as Stone (2018) affirm that one of the main attitudes of tourists, when they visit places that have been the scene of death, is to see that death as something distant in order to feel a certain degree of superiority, the results obtained show that what prevails is the desire to know the history, and to visit all those places where important things happened. Likewise, visitors affirm that knowing the facts makes them develop a certain degree of solidarity with the victims, and with the territory, as well as wanting to contribute so that no more catastrophes like this one happen (Lv et al., 2022).

Another motivation for tourists to visit this place is to have a paranormal experience; a close encounter with death, as Cohen(2018) explains in his conceptualization of Thanatourism, with which he intends to explain and expand the subject a little more. However, nowadays the concepts Thanatorism and Dark Tourism are used as interchangeable qualifiers, to refer to the practice of tourism in places related to death events due to the lack of knowledge that those who talk about the subject have (Chen and Xu, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

Being Armero a place that suffered a great catastrophe for which tourists come to visit it, it fulfills the particularities exposed by Lennon (2017), about the dark places where dark tourism is practiced. Likewise, this tragedy changed the original conditions of the territory and brought with it a dark heritage, which is exposed and studied by Stone (2018), and highlighted by Ashworth and Isaac (2015), while Magee and Gilmore (2015) see it as a resource that must be managed, in a responsible manner that allows attracting more and more tourists, creating new tourism products and services, and obtaining income to preserve this heritage and improve the conditions of the territory.

Table 2. Interviews with tourists

Origin of tourists.	Most of the tourists interviewed were from Bogotá, and the others from neighboring municipalities in Cundinamarca. This, because it is very easy to reach the municipality of Armero from these places, because the roads are in excellent condition, and the public transport service is also quite affordable. In addition to this, many of those arriving from the capital are university students, who seek to collect information for academic and research purposes.
Range of ages in which tourists are.	Among the visitors, people were found who barely reached the age of majority, until a more adult age. However, even though there was no person over the age of 36 between the interviews, locals say visitors of all ages are usually seen. Even some families go with their minor children, so that they learn the history of Armero from a young age and visit a place different from traditional tourism. Therefore, it would be pertinent to affirm that people from their majority are attracted to visit this type of place and be part of the dark tourism.

<p>Civil status of visitors</p>	<p>Most of the interviewees are single, and only a small portion are married. This is because for those who are single, it is easier to travel to this place, and they have fewer commitments that prevent them from leaving their usual city or municipality. By the theories studied, although tourism always aims to guarantee the safety of tourists, this type of activity that according to Cohen means having a close or symbolic encounter related to death, could generate some fear in married people and with a conformed family. This is because there are different myths about souls in pain, and walking spirits that could radiate negative energy, which would affect sensitive people.</p>
<p>Motivation in the face of the pain and suffering of the victims.</p>	<p>A little more than half of the interviewees say they feel motivated to know the pain and suffering that was experienced in the tragedy of Armero, in the year of 1985. This is one of the motivations that Cohen exposes in his studies, where morbidity and the rugged predominate within the thought and feeling of people. On the other hand, it also fits into what Stone described, that the human being tends to see the suffering of others as something far from his own reality, and makes him feel superior for not having suffered the same misfortunes. Similarly, although with some fear, he feels that his death will be very different. The other percentage of the interviewees develop feelings of sadness and much more respect for, imagining how difficult it could have been for the victims and their families, to go through this misfortune. Far from wanting to know the smallest detail of pain and suffering, it is obvious to them the emotional consequences that this brought, and they prefer to opt for silence and prayer to ask for the eternal rest of all those who perished and for the tranquility of their families.</p>
<p>Interest of visitors to know places that are related to acts of death.</p>	<p>All the interviewees say they are curious to know places where natural disasters, catastrophes or events related to death have occurred. Lennon and Foley were the first to study the relationship between death and tourism, calling it dark tourism, and emphasizing those places that have been scenes of misfortunes such as those mentioned above. At this point, the answers obtained ratify Magee and Gilmore's assertion about the growing desire of people today to visit places related to death. At this point you can see several motivations, among which are the places exposed by Lennon and Foley, knowing stories of tragedy and generating remembrance as seaton claims, and having symbolic contact with death as proposed by Cohen. As in one of the previous points, there is evidence of a progressive interest of people to want to visit this type of places as magee and Gilmore affirm.</p> <p>Another of the very common motivations these days is the one expressed by Podoshen, about consuming products and services that generate interest and admiration in society, either for their high value, for their exclusivity or because not everyone dares to take them. This is what happens with dark tourism, since currently social networks allow sharing content in real time, to show others the activities and consumption that is being carried out. Getting involved in dark tourism activities is something very striking, and admiration for others, so making a selfie or a live broadcast have many likes and comments, can also be a motivation to be a consumer of this type of tourism, considering that many of the tourists as evidenced in one of the first points, they are Millennials and Centenials.</p>
<p>Places related to the tragedy most visited by tourists</p>	<p>The most visited places are the memorial to the victims of Armero, the Immense Stone, and the Tomb of Omaira Sánchez. This is because these attractions are located within the territory called the holy field, and it is a touristic route. The park the founders is also located there, but tourists do not identify it very well, since it is not very distinguishable from the holy field. On the other hand, the central park of Armero Guayabal is a little further away from the ruins, and not all tourists visit it. All these tourist attractions are what Magee and Gilmore call the dark heritage of the territory, and the community that faced calamity; in Armero, all that remained was dark heritage since its entire history revolves around the tragedy, and the deaths that occurred there.</p>
<p>Motivation regarding religion and pilgrimage.</p>	<p>None of the tourists interviewed showed interests in visiting the municipality for religious purposes, or to make pilgrimage; this was regardless of their religious beliefs, since even though some were Catholics, or Christians, they did not base their visit on issues related to religion. This motivation could depend a lot on the place you are visiting. In the case of Armero, only one event links religion to the tragedy which is the visit of Pope John Paul II.</p> <p>The interviewees express great interest in visiting the statue of the pope and kneeling right in the place where the Pope did, touching the statue while raising a prayer to heaven, but not so much as a pilgrimage, but as an honor of being able to step on the same ground as his holiness. This situation could vary greatly if in the place there was talk of a possible appearance of a saint, or of a miracle that occurred; The safest thing is that if in one of the places scenarios of misfortunes related to death, any of these phenomena occurred, people would feel motivated to make pilgrimage and moved by their faith, to visit them for religious purposes.</p>
<p>Feelings developed by knowing the facts of death.</p>	<p>Some of the interviewees expressed a motivation to contemplate the death, and to know the details of the tragedy, but most did not believe so. That is, most people feel a demotivation for their daily lives, when contemplating acts of death and knowing the details why they generate sadness. This statement differs from what Stone proposed where he affirms that the human being comes to feel a certain degree of superiority and relief, when contemplating the pain and suffering of others, seeing it as something distant from themselves. Not only do this group of people not feel motivated to see what others suffered and they didn't, but they seem to have developed a certain degree of solidarity with the victims, and they don't want something like this to be repeated anywhere else.</p>
<p>Motivation in the face of the history of the place.</p>	<p>All the interviewees said that their main motivation for visiting Armero, was to know the details of the tragedy that occurred in this place. They are very curious to know the history of the place and resolve doubts about the event. Cohen within his research works attributes this motivation to that of knowing the history of the place, without focusing so much on death, but rather on the way in which the events happened, the why, the how, and the when.</p>
<p>Interest in preserving memory and territory.</p>	<p>Most of the interviewees express their special interest in visiting Armero, in order to commemorate the tragedy through memory, while contributing to the recovery and regeneration of this place through the consumption of the goods and services available in the territory. Seaton speaks of the memory of these places as something to be preserved, and Cohen of memory as the traveler's motivation. This is evidenced in the answers obtained at this point. Likewise, the contribution to the recovery and regeneration of the place has been studied by Ashworth and Isaac from a perspective of urban development that can reach the territory, through good income management.</p>

CONCLUSION

Dark tourism is an issue of great relevance today. Despite its recent scope, it is a topic that has been little addressed in Colombia. In this country, the natural disaster that occurred on 13 November 1985 in Armero allowed the development of this type of tourism. For this reason, the main central question to be addressed in this article is to examine the motivation of tourists and the perception of local residents towards the tourism activity related to this event. Our results show that tourists who visit Armero, feel great attraction for places related to death, where tragedies, catastrophes, and disasters have occurred. However, his main motivation is in the fact of knowing the story, due to how shocking and macabre it can be. On the other hand, they feel that after knowing the facts, visiting the place, and learning some details they did not know, they take a series of mixed feelings as a travel experience. On the one hand, there is a feeling of sadness for so many deaths, and stories that the place houses, mainly the suffering of Omaira Sánchez, while touring the municipality converted into an immense cemetery called Campo Santo. On the other hand, there remains a feeling of helplessness, and resentment against the government, knowing that the tragedy could have been avoided.

For some the experience begins as a journey of fun, and ends in silence and melancholy, while others already know previously or arrive with a clearer idea of what they are going to find. At a general level, visitors seek to satisfy their curiosity to be in a place where so many people died, to know in detail what happened, and to experience energies that come from an unknown plane, but they also show great interest in contributing to the local community, and interacting with it, in search of stories that come directly from a survivor, family member or inhabitant who has experienced the tragedy in their own flesh. The local community actively participates in tourism and obtains economic benefits every time tourists arrive in the municipality; Locals perceive an increase in the sale of their products and the commercialization of their already established services, at the same time that other members of the community see new market opportunities. Some locals do not see with good eyes that their history and heritage, revolve around the tragedy and the dead, but most have accepted it well and are passionate about telling the history of their municipality, with the aim of having greater scope while preserving their identity, and the memory of the place.

Finally, this study is not without limitations that can be taken as future lines of research. The sample size is small. The limitation in the number of interviews does not capture the variety of experiences, full range of ratings and emotions of tourists and resident of the region. Therefore, future studies could increase the number of interviews. In addition, the increase in sample size will lead to greater complexity and multidisciplinary in the qualitative approach, so that different techniques and methodologies would need to be applied. Finally, future studies could analyse these perceptions from a quantitative point of view, for example by applying structural or differential equations.

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