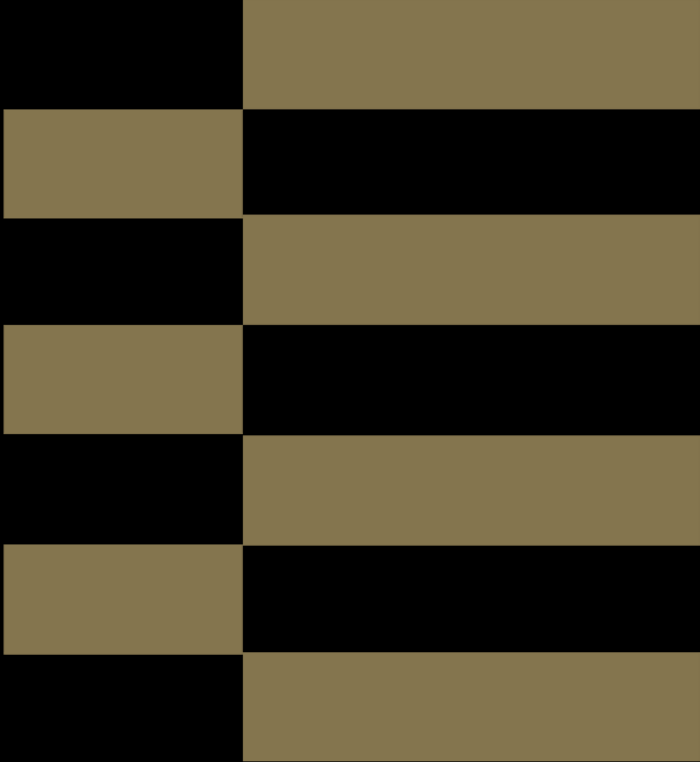
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Brand activation in thanatourism: A comparative study of the Bram Stoker Festival and the Whitby Goth Weekend

(Mrs. Luisa Golz, Department of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure)

Background

The life and work of Dubliner *Bram Stoker* influenced a niche tourism product popularly consumed today - gothic festivals. Gothic or “dark tourism” (thanatourism) festivals attract high spending tourists, usually in off-season, with implications for heritage conservation, night time economy and the cultural tourism experience. This thesis explores the promotion of these festivals using an experiential marketing framework.

What is thanatourism?

Thanatourism or “dark tourism” refers to the **activity of travelling to sites** which are associated with tragedy, disaster or the macabre

Sites of mass murder with locational authenticity and commemoration focus

Sites that are mainly focused on entertainment, which often display a high degree of tourism infrastructure



(Adapted from Stone “A dark tourism spectrum”, 2006)

Dark tourism can also refer to the **activity of attending festivals** that have a death-related, dark and/or Gothic theme

Aims and objectives

Aim: To develop academic theory and a framework for marketing professionals to assist with the process of brand activation.

- **Objective 1:** To analyse how emotional involvement is achieved at dark tourism festivals, utilising case study sites of the Bram Stoker Festival in Dublin and the Whitby Goth Weekend in the UK.
- **Objective 2:** To explore the festival organisers’ planning and implementation of the brand activation phase as part of an experiential marketing mix.
- **Objective 3:** To critique the (lack of) celebration of Bram Stoker in the Irish tourism industry.

Methodology and methods

The study is discovery-orientated, inductive and qualitative in nature, underpinned by an interpretivist philosophy. Data collection from festival participants and festival management takes place at two sites:

- 1) the Whitby Goth Weekend (UK)
- 2) the Bram Stoker Festival (Dublin)

Two main methodological tools will be utilised:

- 1) participant observation, drawing on ethnographic principles
- 2) semi-structured interviews with professionals in the festival industry; policy makers and tourism management organisations; externally contracted branding agencies; locals; festival participants.

To supplement the data, data from online forums and social media sites of the festivals will be analysed using thematic analysis techniques and NVIVO.

Two case studies

- **Bram Stoker Festival**
- Established to increase the awareness around Bram Stoker–Dublin connection
- Takes place each Halloween since 2012
- Last festival took place in 2019
- **Whitby Goth Weekend, UK**
- Takes place in April & October since 1994
- Alternative music and Goth festival
- Last festival took place in October 2021



Progress to date

- Completion of draft literature review
- Data collection Whitby in late October 2021 including interviews with participants, locals, the author of a Dracula related book, as well as the main organiser of the Whitby Goth Weekend.
- Peer reviewed article accepted for publication in *Journal of Dracula Studies*
- Further journal articles in preparation
- Conference presentation abstracts submitted
- Core and elective credits complete for Y1 and Y2
- of a “sharing economy” and actively co-create the festival experience together with the organisers;
- Dark tourism festivals can extend the traditional tourism season into the off-season, creating a more sustainable tourism economy.

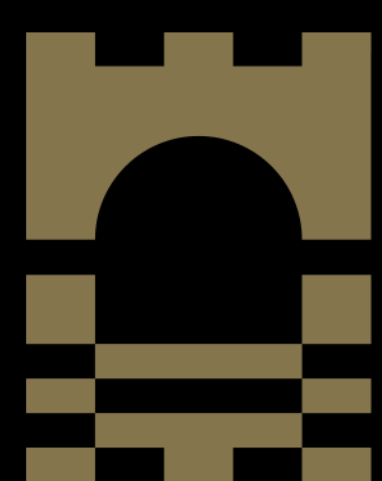
Next steps

- Field work at Whitby Goth Weekend in April; Bram Stoker Festival, Púca Festival and Derry Halloween Celebrations in October
- Further interviews with policy makers such as members of Fáilte Ireland, Dublin City Council, Derry City Council and Scarborough Borough Council
- Research and development of the methodology chapter
- Co-authoring book chapter on “The Future of Dark Tourism - Dark Tourism Festival Development Future Scenarios”
- Conference Attendance at the International Conference of Tourism Research in Porto; at Dublin’s “Festivals, Public Space and Inclusion in the Post-Pandemic city” conference and at Edinburgh’s Dark Tourism Symposium

Preliminary findings

- Inclusivity and authenticity are suggested to be crucial elements of the festival experience
- The staging of dark tourism festivals facilitates forms of alternative tourism experience development
- The use of creative practices at dark tourism festivals influences performance and assists with co-creation of experiences;
- Festival participants form part

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