Considering dark tourism as an opportunity to reflect on unsettling historical events. English for Tourism university students research on ethical dark tourism sites and tours

Alessandra Ficarra

Department of Culture, Education and Society of the University of Calabria, Via Pietro Bucci, 87036 Arcavacata, Rende CS, Italy
Corresponding author: alessandra.ficarra@unical.it

ABSTRACT

English for Tourism (EfT) university courses offer students the opportunities to enhance their English language learning specific skills to be used in the tourism industry. Communicative approach and authentic material contextualized to the professional field are the leading practices in EfT courses. However, not only is EfT a multi-subject field covering geography, history and economics: it may also be considered as a powerful means of meeting, exchange and education at international level. This article is a report of a teaching experience, where EfT course students have been invited to research on international dark tourism sites and to elaborate presentations to be given in class. The dark tourism debated in the class represented for the students a precious educational opportunity to hear about unsung heroes, develop meaningful connections with contemporary socio-economic dynamics and experience tourism, exceptionally, as an ethical act of unearthing pieces of unwritten history.

1.   Introduction - English for Tourism and its underestimated complexity

The recognised global power of English has led educational institutions –especially universities – to pay more attention to developing curricula and training their teaching staff in order to improve students' international work-related skills. 'Employability' has become a priority and key-concept in European universities, where the word itself has been embedded in their modern language curricula

(Fung, 2017). Universities are now reshaping their curricula to ensure that students acquire the practical, interpersonal and communication skills required in the world of work. Among these, international abilities such as the knowledge of modern language, intercultural skills and aptitude at addressing international audiences are being increasingly required by employers. Indeed, in this demand for languages and communication skills at the workplace, universities are again called into action as key-facilitators (Lehtonen & Sinikka, 2009).

An occupational area that in the last decades has increased the need for language and intercultural skills is tourism. The phenomena of international mobility, mass tourism and its equally worldwide counterpart niche tourism – together with the spread of international degree programmes– have contributed to the contemporary widespread perception that tourism is a multicultural event, where English rules as 'lingua franca'. Moreover, more and more universities are now offering English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programmes and courses. ESP can be defined as the teaching of English as a second or additional language, applying a syllabus, tasks and methodology tailored to a specific field (Garcia Laborda, 2011). According to recent research, ESP courses are usually designed for adult learners, and, more specifically, for adults who are experts in their own field in their mother tongue, but have weaknesses in English (Harding, 2007; Sifakis, 2003). Being adults the main addressees of ESP courses, and being these courses usually designed for work place situations, ESP teaching should not be restricted to an instructional setting, but rather delivered through modern and interactive teaching/learning methods, such as project work, cooperative learning, and self-study (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998;Ellis & Whalen, 1990). Despite EfT (English for Tourism, i.e.the teaching of English to future potential professionals in the field of tourism) constitutes a form of ESP itself, it continues to be neglected within the field of ESP, suffering from a weak presence in the research landscape on English Language Teaching (ELT) (Carbonell, 2000). During his studies, Ennis and Petrie have found the absence of a universally recognised discourse on EfT between institutions, regions and nations themselves, which has left teachers of the field without a common practice to follow (2020).

Today, more and more EfT university courses are widening and enhancing their academic programmes, offering students the opportunities to improve their English language learning specific skills through a communicative approach and authentic material contextualized to their professional field. However, scholars continue to note that social sciences and humanities have largely ignored tourism as a serious – and extremely fertile – field of study (Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005). The language used in tourism is specific, rich, persuasive; people, cultures and traditions can interact thanks to tourism, and tourism itself has become one of the most important businesses throughout the world (Dann, 1996). However, it remains a subject well represented only in anthropology, ethnography, and geography, without its language and discourse having received the same much-deserved attention and in-depth analysis (Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005). What if we stop thinking of EfT exclusively as a functional area of competence, and start considering it as a powerful means of meeting, exchange and education at an international level? EfT can create a myriad of communicative situations, enriched by historical knowledge, geographical diversity, and cultural uniqueness. This paper intends to answer this question by narrating the case study of a university teaching experience, where EfT students have been encouraged to explore the world around them and to make meaningful connections

between past and present, experiencing tourism as an opportunity not only for employment – but also for growth, dialogue, and encounter.

2.   Dark Tourism – An opportunity to unearth pieces of unwritten history

The tourism experience can be very varied: from domestic tourism, which is usually budget-friendly, to recreational tourism, which is ready to accommodate travellers' most demanding desires. For those who love to know the traditions of other peoples, there is cultural tourism, while more and more travellers today – especially young people – are opting for a form of sustainable tourism, whether it be the community, the voluntary or the ecological one (Fletcher et al., 2018). Another form of tourism is dark tourism, i.e. travelling to sites and places connected to death, disaster and suffering.

The term 'dark tourism' was first coined by Foley and Lennon (1996a, b) and is today a widespread phenomenon – yet its literature remains scattered and theoretically weak (Stone & Sharpley, 2008, p. 576). Stone identified the early examples of dark tourism in the arenas of the Roman gladiatorial games, and in the public executions of the medieval period. Other early forms of dark tourism are the morgue tours of the Victorian period or the visits to the 19th century correction houses, where flogging could be seen by paying a fee (2006, p. 147). Today, dark tourism still exists, and it has become more widespread and varied: from graveyards to celebrity death sites; from holocaust places to abandoned prisons; from battlefields of past bloody wars to lands that have witnessed genocides, dark tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon, of which many scholars have identified different sub-categories (Dann, 1998; Seaton, 1996). Seaton, for instance, suggested five categories of dark tourism by looking at the behavioural attitude of the traveller, who can be attracted by: 1) the public enactment of death – fortunately a practice that occurs in only few countries, which are difficult to access; 2) past individual or mass deaths – this category includes a large variety of places, from battlegrounds, to death camps, to genocide sites; 3) memorials, crypts, or graveyards; 4) the symbolic representation of death – e.g. through exhibitions representing specific events, or showcasing weapons; 5) the re-enactment or simulation of death itself – e.g. during traditional or religious festivals (Seaton, 1996, pp. 240-42).

Taking into account the classification proposed by Seaton, we cannot fail to notice a deep split in content between the first three categories and the last two: while the first three categories are mostly related to real events, and therefore more inclined to embrace historical accuracy and consequently likely to stimulate a more involved and conscious participation on the part of the visitor, the last two categories are more inclined towards the 'morbid fascination of death', and therefore towards a shading of dark tourism that ignores historical accuracy, and simply enjoys the voyeuristic pleasure of visiting sceneries of death and the adrenaline they trigger. Supporting this perception of different 'shades of darkness' in the various categories of dark tourism, Miles pointed out that there is a deep difference between places associated with death and suffering, and places that have been the direct location of death and suffering (2002, p. 1175).

Similarly, Sharpley recognised the existence of different shades of darkness by considering the purpose of the dark tourism site itself: a place which is intended to attract tourists only to satisfy their fascination with death is less dark than a site that was once the scene of real atrocities, and that has

today neither infrastructure nor the purpose of attracting tourists (2005). Sharpley's "Dark Tourism Spectrum" offers a comprehensive, visual representation of the possible shades of darkness: on a scale of six gradations – darkest, darker, dark, light, lighter, lightest – one can identify the darkest places as the "sites of death and suffering", which are education-oriented, history-centred, authentic in location and artefacts, and offer poor tourism infrastructures but have a high political influence and ideology. The lightest places, on the contrary, are the "sites associated with death and suffering", which are entertainment-oriented, commercial-centred, fictional in location and artefacts, and offer high tourism infrastructures but have a low political influence and ideology (Stone, 2006, p. 151). Hence the crucial dichotomy of the dark tourism experience, that can be aimed at commercialization, or at education: depending upon the social, cultural and political context of the dark tourism site, the experience on the part of the visitor can be voyeuristic and humorous, or deeply fascinating and profoundly educational (Stone & Sharpley, 2008, p. 585).

The literature exploring dark tourism consumption within a sociological framework is unfortunately still undeveloped, and it is beyond the scope of this paper. The aspect this paper wants to focus on instead, is the educational component of the dark tourism experience, i.e., the visiting of places *of* death and suffering, also identified by Stone as "Dark Conflict Sites" (2006, p. 156) – historically authentic and originally not aimed at attracting tourists – and the visiting of commemoration sites, created with the aim of narrating, making visible and keeping alive the memory of a page of history that would otherwise be forgotten. Having essentially an educational, commemorative, and ideological focus, these places are free from the morbid fascination of death and the voyeuristic component typical of 'light dark tourism'. Furthermore, having been the scenes of atrocities that really happened in the past, these places have witnessed serious violations of human rights – hence the visitors' experience as profound, involved and conscious, and the importance of the sites themselves as reminders not to repeat such atrocities. A great number of commemoration sites, in fact, exist because human rights violations occurred: the 1980s witnessed a boom in the construction of war memorials throughout Europe and North America.

In the same period, renewed controversies over a number of aspects of *World War II* emerged, including calls for apologies for Japanese treatment of prisoners of war, and for the American use of nuclear weapons; Holocaust memorials and museums were constructed too, forging, thus, collective memories around national identities based on ideas of hegemony, technological supremacy, or victimhood (Beier-de Haan, 2006, p. 105). Since both world wars and civil conflicts are associated with imperialism, nationalism, ethnicity – i.e., morally ambiguous concepts, which are correlated to the issues of racism, poverty, and inequality – dark conflict sites are far from being mere, disengaged tourist destinations. Furthermore, in present-day commemoration sites, a new conceptual approach is reflected in the display of individual experiences and memories: history is narrated through individual's recollections of traumatic events, pictures portraying the human body and autobiographical documents and videos reconstructed to testify personal experiences. All these new practices are most likely to be identified in contemporary commemoration sites, aiming at stimulating multiple interpretations, instead of a single imperative account of the past (Beier-de Haan, 2006, p. 106). This new process of 'rewriting history' depending on individual memories, multiple meanings and manifold points of view has been inspired by important questions such as: who owns the past? Who has

the authority to speak for a group's identity or authenticity? Who is included, and who is excluded? Which memories are privileged over others? And: how can one mediate between individual memory and the general interpretation of history? Dark conflict sites, in fact, find themselves in a delicate process of narrative production where facts and events are to be extrapolated both from individual memories and from a shared reminiscence of the past, i.e., history. The mechanisms of 'rewriting history' and 'silencing the past' – the omission of specific events in order to reduce their relevance –are found to be at work, even today, and even in influential institutions like museums and commemoration sites.

Trouillot reflected on the notion of history, developing a comprehensive frame on how history can be produced, and perceived. In his words, human beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators, and this dual participation is suggested also by the "inherent ambivalence" of the word itself (1995, p. 2): Trouillot illustrated how the word history, in many modern languages – including English – means both the facts themselves and the narrative of those facts, both what happened and what is said to have happened. The controversy of this issue occurs when the distinction between what happened and what is said to have happened is not clear: if history is merely the story told by those who won, how can it be believed as irrefutably plausible? Hence the history we know as a bundle of truths that are far from being incontrovertible: the winners chose what had to be written, and what had to be silenced, while the losers – penalized by their subordinate position, and by the material impossibility of leaving a trace – fell into the oblivion of unwritten history.

Furthermore, what in the past was seen as a country's achievement and a sign of national triumph, today may be seen as a reason for regret – this is what Macdonald called "mortifying memories" (Macdonald, 2009, p. 3). Let us consider colonialism: once the sign of national pride and domination, today it is a problematic and shameful heritage, with which national agendas have to come to terms. Over the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st, many nations have started to unearth the past, exhuming difficult heritages, i.e., a past that is recognised to be meaningful in the present, but contested for its shameful content. Plaques, information boards, monuments and museums are populating more and more cities, witnessing the darkness of an unsettling past, and many minority cultural groups once ignored or discriminated are now raising their voices to ensure that their identity and history are publicly and officially recognised. In remembering such a guilty and mortifying past, the social mission of the education-oriented dark tourism is ambitious and honourable: not only does it aim at the individualization of the perpetrators, the commemoration of the victims, and the creation of self-reflective visitors – it also has to generate a new "historical awareness, that might form the basis for a movement towards social justice" (Wallace, 2006, p. 65). All these facts and considerations have been successfully included and discussed in an EfT course, as narrated in the following case study.

3.   Including dark tourism in EfT teaching – A case study

3.1.   *Context and methodology*

Since 2017, I have been employed as contract professor of a forty-two-hour English for Tourism course for students enrolled in the bachelor's degree programme in Tourism at the University of

Calabria (UNICAL), Italy. The course aims to improve students' ability to read, write and communicate in English on tourism topics: the world of marketing and promotion, tour operators and travel agencies, the origins and the different types of tourism are studied and analysed, together with the specific vocabulary related to transport and accommodation, restaurant and food, heritage, nature and entertainment, and the airline industry. Text analysis, note-taking and synonyms practice are studied too, in order to improve students' writing and reading skills. Graphs are analysed and commented, trends are described, and students are invited to work individually on their Curriculum Vitae in English, in order to face mock job interviews in class, with their peers. To enhance their oral interaction skills, role-plays are constantly used, reproducing a variety of tourism-related situations. At the end of the course, students will be able to understand and interpret texts and graphs of touristic, historical and geographical nature. They can recognize and deal with situations typical of the manager-client interaction and will be able to deal with recurring tourism-related circumstances using specific vocabulary in a formal and semi-formal English. As final assessment, a written test measures the achievement of the specific skills required by the course. Once passed the written test, an oral test verifies students' speaking interaction and production skills, assessed on the basis of accuracy, consistency and fluency. To pass the final exam, students must confirm at least a B1 level (Council of Europe, 2001) already achieved during the general academic English language training course offered in their first year of degree in Tourism. When I started teaching the course in 2017, I soon realized that most of the students were extremely motivated and interested in learning about the dynamics of the world of tourism – especially about marketing – but they had a limited knowledge of history and geography.

Moreover, when we came across tourism-related written texts and videos which dealt – even indirectly – with specific cultures, human rights issues, or economic and social inequality matters, I could confirm their weak awareness of the world around them. For the following academic years, I therefore decided to include an optional activity on dark tourism to be undertaken in groups. My intention was to provoke important reflections on the role of tourism while acquiring a critical knowledge of unsettling historical events developing meaningful connections with contemporary social and economic dynamics. When I first launched the project in 2018, I organized an in-course interactive seminar, where I used videos, slides and pictures to approach students to the dark tourism origins, definitions and purposes. When we analysed Stone's scale of darkness gradations and talked about the education-oriented dark tourism as a neglected, but extremely significant aspect of the tourism profession, the response of the students was so enthusiastic, that they themselves proposed to call this type of tourism "Ethical Dark Tourism", to differentiate it from the voyeuristic and entertainment-oriented one. From that moment onwards, each academic year, I have proposed to the students the optional research activity on Ethical Dark Tourism. The in-course launching seminar usually takes place when half of the course programme has already been completed. The activity is proposed as optional and team-based (each research team must consist of a minimum of two and a maximum of four students – normally, UNICAL EfT attendees per academic year range between fifty and seventy students). Students are encouraged to carry out a real research project, using reliable sources.

During the launching seminar, the topics of historical silences and colonization of resources are addressed too: these crucial issues affect the students so much, that they often choose to research on unknown or less-known dark conflict places and commemoration sites. The main objective of the project, in fact, is to analyse well-known or unknown dark conflict sites as opportunities to unearth a piece of unwritten history, hear about unsung heroes and experience tourism as an ethical act of "transforming sites of human wrongs into centres for human rights" (Robinson, 2012, p.193). Before the launching seminar, and on the last day of the course, two short questionnaires are administered to the EfT class, in order to monitor any change in knowledge, expectation and perception towards the topic of dark tourism. The group-projects are presented in class during the last two weeks of the course. The teams can use whatever tool or application they whish (Power Point, Prezi, video editing, short films, etc.). Each group has twelve minutes for the presentation, plus three or more minutes to answer the audience's questions. The work is then assessed, according to the criteria below:

1) Consistency with the objective of the project, i.e. demonstrating how can tourism contributing to transform "places of human wrongs into places of human rights".

2) Content Cohesion (the threefold component history-tourism-legacy must be present).

3) Language Accuracy.

4) Readiness in answering the audience's questions.

An overall mark (from one to three points) is given to the project, and an individual mark (again from one to three points) is given to each student: the average is then added to the student's final exam mark.

3.2. The choice of cooperative learning

This team-work project on Ethical Dark Tourism fits perfectly within the ESP teaching methods, which should privilege authentic material, project work and cooperative learning (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Ellis & Whalen, 1990). Cooperative learning, in particular, is a teaching strategy where students are invited to work in small teams in order to participate in a variety of learning activities (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). Over the last decades, a new paradigm of teaching has positioned the learners at the centre of the teaching and learning process: the students, once considered as "passive vessels to be filled by faculty's knowledge", are now recognized as "active constructors, discoverers and transformers of their own knowledge" (Johnson et al., 1998, p. 5). Cooperative learning emphasizes the opportunity for students to learn by themselves and from their peers: inside the same team, different talents, various intellectual competencies, and diverse strategies of learning and problem-solving can converge. Moreover, by working in teams, students are more likely to share their own personal experiences and justify their beliefs and opinions (Lotan, 2003, pp. 72-73).

The effectiveness of cooperative learning can also be read as being influenced by Piaget's social interaction theory, which is now well-established, and which viewed learning as a social activity in which people learn by listening and talking to others – Piaget, in addition, claimed that the most

effective interactions are between peers, as they are on equal basis and challenge each other's thinking skills (Piaget, 1979). The cooperative learning strategy adopted during the Ethical Dark Tourism project falls under what Johnson and Johnson called "formal cooperative learning", i.e. students work together, for periods which may range from one class period to a series of lessons over several weeks, in order to achieve specific learning goals, such as writing a report, conducting a survey or an experiment, or reading a book and answering questions (Johnson & Johnson, 1998, p. 99).

According to Johnson and Johnson, the most successful cooperative learning strategies share five essential components: positive interdependence, individual accountability (i.e., personal responsibility), face-to face promotive interaction, interpersonal and social skills (including decision-making, conflict-management and trust-building skills), and group processing (i.e., a specific time the team's members need to discuss how well they are achieving their goal) (Johnson et al., 1998, p. 7). Although all these five basic elements were implemented and monitored during the Ethical Dark Tourism project, the aspects of positive interdependence and face-to-face promotive interaction deserve a specific attention. The face-to-face promotive interaction implies that students promote each other's productivity by helping and encouraging each other through constant dialogue: I was pleasantly surprised to register that, even during the semesters when the EfT course was held online because of the Covid-19 emergency, this interaction between students did not fail – on the contrary, it appeared to be reinforced, perhaps due to the possibility of meeting the other members of the team remotely, thus facilitating the otherwise demanding necessity to arrange a time and a place suitable for all. With regard to positive interdependence – i.e. the perception that a team's member is linked with others, so she/he cannot succeed unless the others do and vice versa (Johnson et al., 1998) – the teams working on the Ethical Dark Tourism project built this positive interrelationship thanks to the application of one of the methods contemplated by Johnson and Johnson, i.e. the establishing of a mutual goal and a joint reward (Johnson & Johnson, 1998, p. 96): as mentioned above, once the team's members working on Ethical Dark Tourism achieve the project's goal, they receive bonus points. Because the students worked in groups, they were implicitly required to discuss not only the topic of the research, but also their personal opinions, motivating their points of view in order to reach a compromise to complete the task.

All these successful interrelational dynamics have been confirmed by many studies conducted on cooperative learning, which demonstrated that this teaching/learning strategy affects positively several important outcomes, such as social skills development and higher academic achievements (Cummins, 2000; Marzano et al., 2001; Slavin, 1996). In particular, Kagan noticed how English language learners benefit from cooperative learning since it is able to create an atmosphere of community, dialogue and achievement (2001). Within a cooperative learning experience, in fact, students learning English are more likely to acquire new vocabulary from each other, discover new strategies of problem-solving, and observe how their peers deal with and use a second language. The students are actually – and unconsciously – teaching each other, in a relaxed and informal atmosphere which increases motivation, reduces anxiety and promotes self-esteem (Crandall, 1999).

4. Results and discussion – UNICAL EfT students research on Ethical Dark Tourism sites

4.1. Students present their research projects

During the last two weeks of the EfT course, UNICAL students presented their research projects – the presentations were shared during lesson times, so that the whole class could listen to the class-mates and participate in the final debates. During the academic year 2020-2021, twelve teams took part in the project: their workswere presented remotely – mostly using Power Point, Prezi and video-editing programmes – through the collaboration platform Microsoft Teams, adopted by UNICAL during the Covid-19 emergency. The original titles of the group-assignments submitted by the students, their content, and some of the most significant aspects that emerged during their presentations are listed below. To ensure anonymity, only the initials of the students' names are given.

- *The Rwandan Genocide: 100 days of suffering* (presented by A.A., E.D., D.M. and A.R.). The team compared two commemoration sites: the Kigali Genocide Memorial and the Nyamata Genocide Memorial, analysing their differences in objects display, impact, and narrative. The presentation of this team was very emotional, and comprehensive: they managed to bring together the histori-cal, tourist and human rights components. Very interesting was also the reference the students made to popular culture, showing the titles and posters of artistic, written and cinematographic works narrating the Rwandan genocide. In particular, the group revealed to the class how the origin of the famous song *Papaoutai*, by Stromae, was also linked to the Rwandan genocide, further capturing the interest, attention, and curiosity of the class. All four students admitted that they had not known anything about the history of the Rwandan genocide before starting this project. D.M. wondered why she had not studied this important piece of history at school. The whole team said they watched the famous film *Hotel Rwanda* together, for the first time. The group concluded their presentation with a reference to contemporary history, telling the class about the recent arrest of Paul Rusesabagina, who saved hundreds of Rwandans during the geno-cide and is now accused of rebellion. A.A. shared with the class, more than once, a quote from Felicien Ntagengwa, which he came across during the research work: "If you knew me, and you really knew yourself, you would not have killed me".

- *How the bomb transformed Hiroshima* (presented by F. C., M. G., R. M. and M. T.). The team recalled the tragedy of Hiroshima by presenting the *Genbaku Bungaku*, i.e., a Japanese literature genre used to describe the narration of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through the techniques of: evoking ruins, reaching a distant perspective and expanding time and space. As reference to the contemporary history, the team projected a short video of Obama as the first American President visiting Hiroshima. The students ended the presentation by defining dark tourism as an "expression of life itself".

- *Guantanamo Bay Naval Base* (presented by A. R. C. and D. G.). Both team members, of Cuban origin, chose to talk about this place to send an urgent message: Guantanamo Bay Naval Base is not open to visitors, and it is still one of the bloodiest and most expensive prisons in the world, a place where human rights are continuously – and silently – violated. D. G. recounted how, in Italy, she realised that many people are not aware of the existence of the Naval Base. The students

concluded their presentation by justifying their choice: the location they decided to talk about it is not a dark tourism destination, but they hope it will soon be, as a future commemoration site.
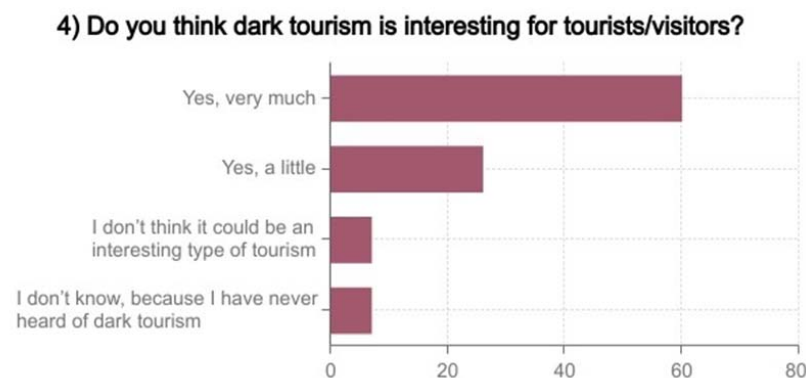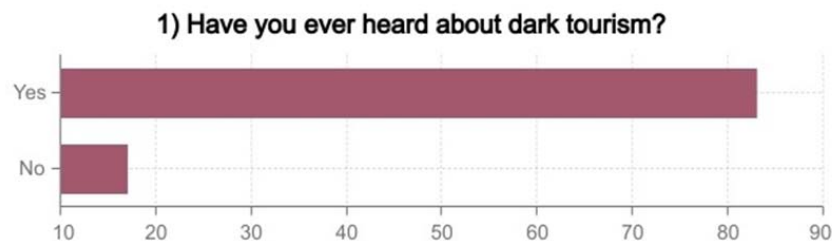
- *The endless tragedy* (presented by R. D. B. and I. V.). This group brought to light a historical fact almost unknown to the whole class: the gas tragedy which occurred in Bhopal, India, in 1984, when a MIC gas (methyl isocyanate) spilt out from *Union Carbide India Ltd*(UCIL), a pesticide factory, turning the city of Bhopal into a colossal gas chamber. The gas killed more than 15,000 people, and its effects are still visible today, with more and more second and third generation children being born with severe disabilities. The team explained how the Bhopal tragedy remains the world's worst industrial disaster, while the Indian city represents one of the darkest tourist destinations, since tourists can walk in places not yet decontaminated, and listen to the touching testimonies of local people, thus raising their awareness about the importance of industrial safety, which is too often taken for granted in the western world.

- *Ferramonti di Tarsia: from pain to hope* (presented by M. F. F. and A. R.). This group described a local commemoration site: the formerly *Ferramonti* concentration camp is in fact located in Calabria, not so far from UNICAL. It was an internment camp during *World War II*, for dissident and ethnic minorities. However, the team explained how, unlike the Nazi concentration camps, it was not a forced labour camp: prisoners could have access to a nursery, a library, a school, a theatre, and a synagogue. Several couples got married and many children were born. The two students – one Italian, one Brazilian – explained their choice of talking about the camp as an example of hope. Originally conceived as a place of sorrow, in fact, it then became a place of interracial and interreligious respect.

- *Berlin: a trip down memory lane* (presented by G. E., F. M. and G. Z.). The group retraced the atrocities of the holocaust through a virtual tour of the commemoration sites in the city of Berlin. In particular, the students focused on the *#WeRemember* campaign, quoting the most famous and touching phrases of Elie Wiesel (Romanian-born American *writer*, professor, political activist, Nobel laureate, and Holocaust survivor) and Colette Avital (Romanian-Israeli diplomat and politician, Chairperson of the Centre Organizations of Holocaust Survivors in Israel). The team closed the presentation with the Wiesel powerful quote: "Without memory, there is no culture. Without memory, there would be no civilization, no society, no future".

- *Poveglia, the island of pain: from torture to death and ghosts* (presented by A. A., A. G. and F. M. S.). The team presented a potential dark tourism place: visiting the island of Poveglia is in fact prohibited. This small Italian island, located between Venice and Lido, was used for a hundred years as a quarantine station for people suffering from plague and other diseases, while in its mental hospital lobotomy was practised on the patients. The island has been uninhabited since 1968, when the mental hospital closed. Because of its dark past, it is said that paranormal phenomena occur, and that the screams and moans of psychiatric patients can still be heard. The team motivated their choice to talk about Poveglia as a potential dark tourism place to raise awareness about the importance of mental health, and of the right to the inviolability of the body, shedding light on not-so-past inhumane practices such as lobotomy.

- *Ellis Island, an island of tears* (presented by S. F., D. F. and L. L.). The team chose to research an American commemoration site: the island of Ellis has welcomed more than twelve million immigrants to the American shore, and now houses the National Immigration Museum. Personal memories of endless journeys, fatigue and sacrifice, humiliating medical inspections, detention and separation from families are narrated through touching written accounts and black and white photographs. A huge collection of arrivals records can be consulted by the visitors, to possibly retrace their family's origins. L.L. motivated the choice to talk about Ellis Island as being due to the fact that it is a powerful commemoration site, which can stimulate an important reflection regarding the current situation of innumerable migrants who, from Mexico or North Africa, face a long and dangerous journey in the hope of landing in a new world. The humiliating conditions to which these people are subjected today are no different from those suffered by the migrants captured in the pictures exhibited on Ellis Island.

- *Majdanek: from us for you as future reminder* (presented by M. G. F., N. A. G., A. M. and S. G. V.). The team chose to talk about a less known concentration camp, the Majdanek one, in Poland. Conceived as an extermination camp, it had seven gas chambers, operating from 1941 to 1944. The team talked about the history of the camp, but also about the tourist facilities and the legacy of this dark conflict site: an important reflection, in fact, was raised about school visits to concentration camps. M. G. F., who is of German origin, recalled how visiting the camp as a German pupil was a strong yet constructive experience for her. On the other hand, as she now lives in Italy and has a daughter who attends an Italian school, she noticed how Italian school teachers talk too little to their students about civic, political and ideological issues.

- *Mandela: a shiny light in a dark world* (presented by E. A., V. G., G. M. and S. S.). The team gave a very comprehensive account of the history of Apartheid and the figure of Nelson Mandela, also describing in detail the tour visitors can experience on Robben Island, once a political prison and now a legally protected and UNESCO recognised National Heritage Site. To close the presentation, the team projected a colourful slide reporting all existing film posters, book covers, monuments and celebrative dates commemorating Nelson Mandela throughout the world. An important debate followed, as to why the figure of Nelson Mandela who, unlike other equally strong personalities, established himself as an internationally recognised political activist for the defence of civil rights.

- *The Cambodian Killing Fields* (presented by C. C., E. L. P. and C. P.). The team recounted, in detail, the bloody history of the Cambodian genocide, explaining Pol Pot's political strategy and describing the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. Very strong black and white photographs were projected and commented on by the students, who admitted that they did not know about this genocide before starting their research. A touching part of the project was the description of the use of child soldiers, and of the abominable tortures perpetrated in Tuol Sleng – a high school transformed by the Khmer Rouge into the Security Office S-21 –, today the National Genocide Museum. C. P., who admitted she had underestimated the Ethical Dark Tourism project, was very impressed by what she discovered about the Cambodian genocide, and she left a strong message saying that "no system, no religion, no man is better than the other, yet our faith often depends on the country of our origins".
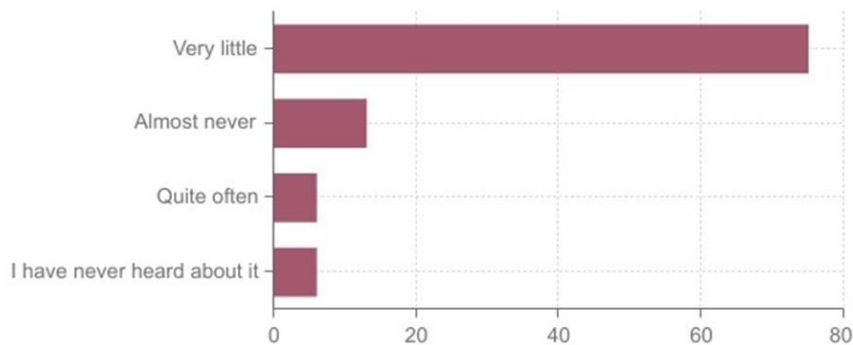
- *Dark Tourism Attractions in Egypt* (presented by B. S., M. K., M. O. and R. A.). The last group, which consisted of students of Egyptian origin, chose to talk about unfamiliar destinations in Egypt, i.e. places of past civil wars and forgotten battles, and sites of paranormal fame. Through a presentation of suggestive images and colourful pictures, the class could hear, for the first time, about evocative destinations such as the mortuary temple of Ramesses III, the Zuwayla Gate and the Al-azab gate – where criminals were executed –, the site haunted by King Akhenaton's ghost and the Baron Empire Palace, claimed to be haunted by ghosts too. At the end of the presentation, the team specified how dark tourism in Egypt does not focus on human rights, but mainly on the narration of national history, cultural traditions, and ghostly landscapes.

4.2. Before and after the project – Reading the change

Before the launching seminar of the Ethical Dark Tourism project, I administered a short survey to the EfT class in order to collect data about the existing knowledge on the subject of dark tourism and to identify students' expectations about the project. The questionnaire, of only six multiple-choice questions, was developed with Google Form, and launched to the class through the platform Microsoft Teams on exactly the same day of the launching seminar, before it started. Finally, on the very last day of the course, another questionnaire was administered to the students, in order to measure any change of perception towards dark tourism and to collect their feedback. The whole class was invited to answer both questionnaires, including the students who participated in the project simply as auditors. Fifty-four students answered the initial questionnaire. The answers to the first questionnaire, entitled "*Dark Tourism – Does it matter?*" are graphically listed below.

1) Have you ever heard about dark tourism?

4) Do you think dark tourism is interesting for tourists/visitors?

2) How often have you heard about it?

The final questionnaire comprised eight multiple-choice questions, and a final open-ended question, to gather students' comments, impressions and feelings. Here below are graphically listed the answers, with their percentages, to the follow-up questionnaire – to which fifty students responded – entitled "*Dark Tourism – What do I think now?*".
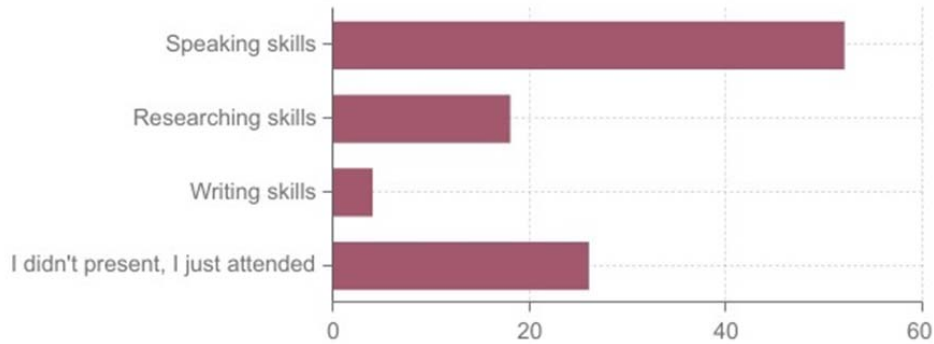
6) Select the adjectives you would use to describe dark tourism, even if you have never heard of it.
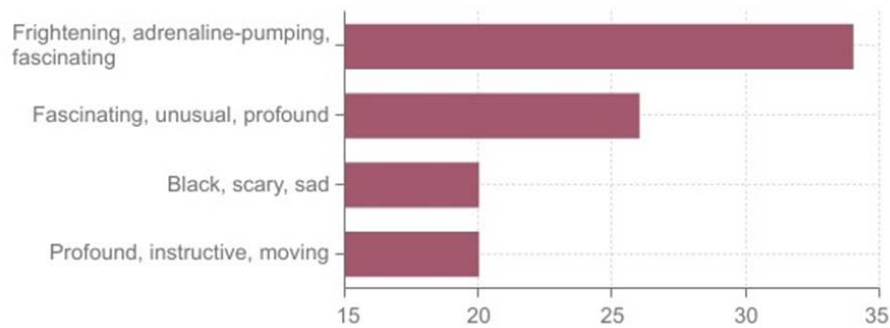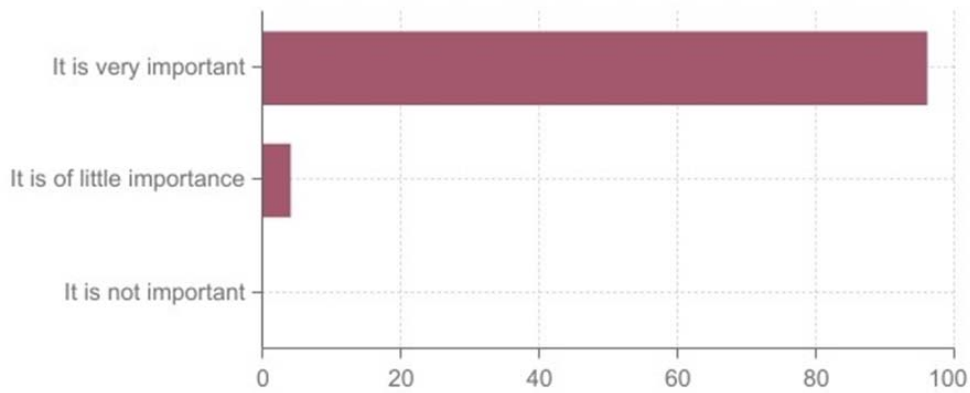

5) How much do you think dark tourism is taken into account in the tourism sector?
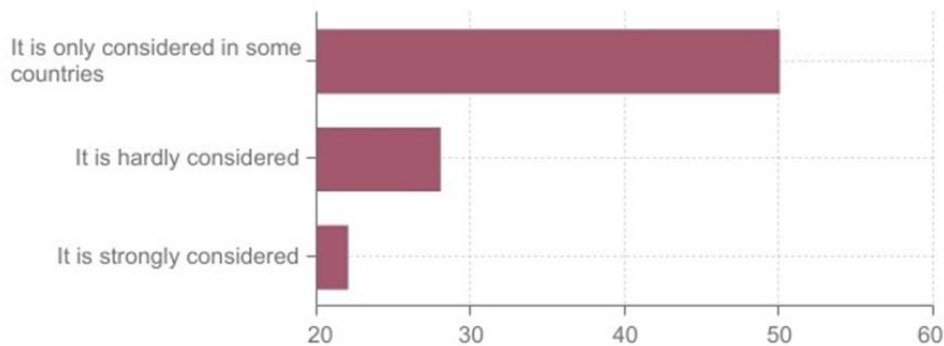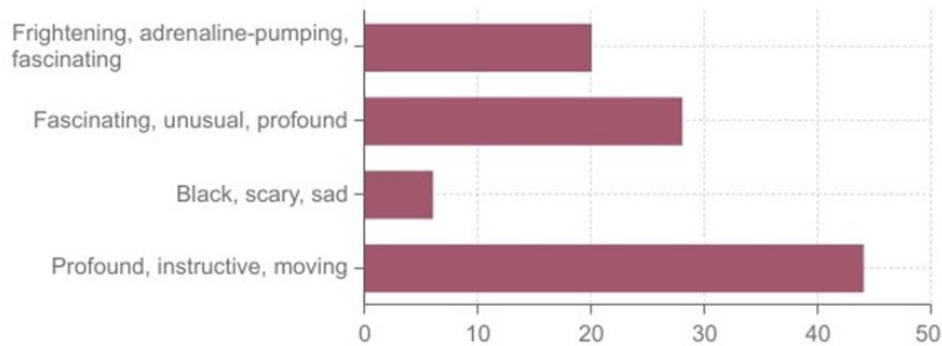
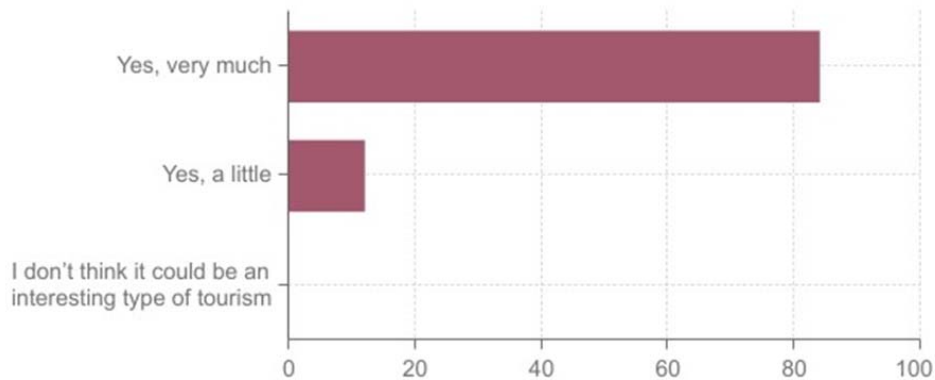## 4) If you presented, which skills do you think you have acquired/ improved?

7) How important do you think dark tourism is?

8) Select the adjectives that now you would use to describe dark tourism.

6) Do you think dark tourism is interesting for tourists/visitors?

At the end of the follow-up questionnaire, a blank space was left, asking the students to freely leave a comment, a quote they remember, or a thought, related to the experience. Here are some of the most significant comments, anonymous and non-edited:

"For us tourism students, it was really important to learn more about this branch of tourism, which is often little known, yet in my opinion one of the most interesting."
"Listening all these stories about these places, made me feel lucky to live in a society where human rights are respected."
"I think the awareness of what humans are capable of is really important, and remembering is the only thing that could save us from repeating our horrible previous mistakes. Here's a quote from*Se questo è un uomo* by Primo Levi, that I think resumes really well what I mean: *Meditate che questo è stato: vi comando queste parole. Scolpitele nel vostro cuore, stando in casa andando per via, coricandovi alzandovi; ripetetele ai vostri figli.*[1]"
"Dark Tourism changes people's world view. It is a great opportunity of knowledge." "It was a good experience. I learned so many things that will help me in the future."
"I think it was a fantastic project and I was very interested. Thank you teacher for this experience."
"*Without memory, there is no future*, Elie Wiesel."
"I was motivated to undertake a visit by a desire to experience the reality behind the media and improve speaking skills."

---

[1] Translation: "Never forget that this has happened: remember these words. Engrave them in your hearts, when at home or in the street, when lying down, when getting up; repeat them to your children." From "Shemà" in *If this is a Man*, Primo Levi, Auschwitz survivor.

"Dark tourism is a bridge to understand the pain."
"It's incredible/touching to visit (even only by surfing the web) places where unjustified crimes against innocent people were committed in the past years. This experience helped me to look at those places with a different eye."
"It was a very moving experience."
"*Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it*, George Santayana."
"I didn't present, but listening to my colleagues and discovering new things was very interesting. I was very impressed by the first group who presented the project on the Rwandan genocide, I was not aware that the singer Stromae had focused his song on that episode where he lost his father. It was very instructive and moving for me."
"The thing that impressed me the most is how Dark Tourism can transform sites of human wrongs into centres of Human Rights."
"A quote I liked was in the presentation about the Rwandan genocide: *If you knew who you are, and if you knew who I am, you wouldn't have killed me.*"
"The Dark Tourism was a great discovery. I didn't know it before but I was really glad to have taken part in the research. I think everyone should be aware of this phenomenon."
"It was, against my expectations, one of the most interesting and constructive projects I have done so far in my university career."

5. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates how it is possible to reconsider the potential enormous complexity of English for Tourism, going beyond its purely technical and professional nature and broadening its sphere of competence to deeper and more constructive issues. The team-projects presented by the EfT UNICAL students, together with the double collection of data, before and after the project, stimulated an interesting reflection on the success of the Ethical Dark Tourism activity. In addition to the final comments left by the students, which revealed a very general positive feedback on the experience, by reading the answers of the questionnaires one can clearly see a change of perspective on dark tourism: considered by most of the students before the project as purely "frightening, adrenaline-pumping and fascinating", it then became a "profound, instructive and moving" experience. The same shift in perception can be read by comparing the answers given to questions n. 4 and n. 5 of the first questionnaire to the answers given to questions n. 6 and n. 7 of the final questionnaire, which show a 30% increase in the number of students who consider dark tourism to be interesting and

important. As regards language skills, it was a pleasure to discover that most of the students appreciated the possibility to present a topic in English. The opportunity to improve their oral interaction was fully achieved, as were all the expected benefits of cooperative learning: students clearly demonstrated, through their answers and comments, to have acquired a higher level of critical thinking, fostered better communication skills, and developed positive social relationships (Johnson, Johnson, &Holubec, 1998).Furthermore, the students who took part in the research project were also the students who performed best in the final exam, especially in the oral part – without considering the extra-points they gained– confirming, thus, the opportunity to achieve higher academic standards thanks to cooperative learning (Cummins, 2000; Marzano et al., 2001; Slavin, 1996). The potential of dark tourism as a means of "transforming sites of human wrongs into centres of human rights" (Robinson, 2012, p. 193) has been fully considered, analysed and confirmed by the whole class, who maintained a very serious behaviour and respectful attitude during all presentations. The important role of technology has been implicitly and explicitly recognized too, both when it was used for the project presentations held remotely, and when we discussed with the students the enormous potential it can represent today for commemoration places: according to many students who expressed their opinions during the final debates, unknown dark conflict sites should consider virtually delivering their content to physically unreachable visitors, in order to build bridges of knowledge and lay the foundations for an internationally-recognised social justice. The case study, although carried out on a small scale, has now been proposed for four years, and has always received very positive feedback from students, who have confirmed the acquisition of new socio-historical knowledge as well as the achievement or strengthening of specific linguistic skills. It can therefore be concluded that even the most specific and professionally-oriented subjects – such as English for Tourism, or English for Specific Purposes in general – can become an opportunity for interdisciplinary educational experience: teachers can respond creatively and sensitively to the specific needs of the class, ad   ding a strong human approach to their teaching practice. In this way, they will contribute not only to educate tomorrow's 'professionals', but also responsible and aware 'citizens of the world'.

6.   References

Beier-de Haan, R. (2006). Re-staging histories and identities. In S. Macdonald (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (pp. 186-197). Oxford: Blackwell.

Carbonell, M. (2000). Tourism: The problems of the definition of a new ESP: A study of the didactic implications of this characterisation. *Proceedings from III Congrés International sobreLlengües per a Finalitats Específiques: Ease Seminar* (pp. 11-15). Barcelona, Spain: University of Barcelona.

Council of Europe(2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crandall, J. A. (1999). Cooperative language learning and affective factors. In J. Arnold (Ed.), *Affective factors in language learning* (pp. 226-245). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Dann, G. M. S. (1996). *The language of tourism: A sociolinguistic perspective*. Oxon: CAB International.

Dann, G. M. S.(1998) *The Dark Side of Tourism*. Aix-en-Provence: International Center for Research and Studies in Tourism.

Dudley-Evans, T. & St. John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ellis, S., & Whalen, S. (1990). *Cooperative learning*. New York: Scholastic.

Ennis, M. J. & Petrie, G. M. (2020). Introduction. A response to disparate/desperate circumstances. In M.J. Ennis & G. M. Petrie (Eds.), *Teaching English for Tourism. Bridging Research and Praxis* (pp. 1-6). London: Routledge.

Fletcher, J., Fyall, A., Gilbert, A., & Wanhill S. (2018). *Tourism: Principles and practice*. Harlow: Pearson.

Foley, M. & Lennon, J. (1996a). Editorial: Heart of darkness. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2.4, 195-197.

Foley, M. & Lennon, J. (1996b). JFK and Dark Tourism: A fascination with assassination. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2.4, 198-211.

Fung, D. (2017). Connecting academic learning with workplace learning. *Connected Curriculum for Higher Education*. London: UCL Press, 84-100.

Garcia Laborda, J. (2011). Revisiting materials for teaching languages for specific purposes. *Language, Linguistics and Literature*, 17.1, 102-112.

Harding, K. (2007). *English for Specific Purposes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jaworski, A.& Pritchard, A. (2005). *Discourse, communication and tourism.* Buffalo and Toronto: Channel View Publications.

Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, R. T. (1998). *Learning together and alone: Cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T, &Holubec, E. J. (1998). *Cooperation in the classroom* (7th Edition). Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T. & Smith, K. A. (1998). *Active learning: Cooperation in the college classroom*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Kagan, M. (2001). *Logic Line-Ups. Higher-level thinking activities.* San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing.

Lehtonen, T.& Sinikka, K. (2009). Workplace language needs and university language education – Do they meet? *European Journal of Education*, 44.3, 411-420.

Lotan, R. A. (2003). Group-worthy tasks. *Educational Leadership*, 60.6, 72-75.

Macdonald, S. (2009). *Difficult heritage: Negotiating the Nazi past in Nuremberg and beyond*. London: Routledge.

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Miles, W. F. S. (2002). Auschwitz: Museum interpretation and darker tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29.4, 1175-1178.

Piaget, J. (1979). *Science of education and the psychology of the child*. New York: Penguin Books.

Robinson, A. (2012). Transforming sites of human wrongs into centres for human rights: The Birth of the campaigning museum. In F. Dellarosa, *Slavery: History, Fictions, Memory 1760-2007*, (pp. 193-222). Naples: Liguori.

Seaton, A. V. (1996). Guided by the dark: From Thanatopsis to Thana tourism. *Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2.4,234-244.

Sharpley, R. (2005). Travels to the edge of darkness: towards a typology of dark tourism. In C. Ryan, S. Page & M. Aicken (Eds.).*Taking Tourism to the Limits: Issues, Concepts and Managerial Perspectives*(pp. 215-226). Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Sifakis, N. C. (2003). Applying the adult education framework to ESP curriculum development: an integrative model. *Science Direct, English for Specific Purposes*, 22.2, 195-211.

Slavin, R. E. (1996). Research on cooperative learning and achievement: What we know, what we need to know. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 21.1, 43-69.

Stone, P. (2006). A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions. *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal*, 54.2, 145-160.

Stone, P.& Sharpley, R. (2008). Consuming dark tourism: a Thanatological perspective. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35.2, 574-595.

Trouillot, M.R. (1995). *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Wallace, E. K. (2006). *The British slave trade and public memory*. New York: Columbia University Press.