

## **Economic Impacts of Dark Tourism on Local Communities: A Qualitative Synthesis of Community Perceptions, Development Mechanisms, and Evidence Gaps.**

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### **Abstract**

We can state that the quantitative economic effects of dark tourism on locals are not evident from the material studied, but it can be said that there seems to be widespread awareness of dark tourism's economic benefits in terms of the tourism-products (development, infrastructure, investment, and business activity) whereas there are some economic costs related to this trend which are context and administration dependent. None of the considered studies presents figures for local income, employment, visitor spending, business receipts, price level, return on investments or for economic leakage. People in communities have attitudes which are generally positive. In Beichuan County, China, locals mostly feel positively about the further development of earthquake related dark tourism and residents in communities in Cyprus are largely positive about more development whereas dark tourism has little impact on the destinations' tourism industries in Cyprus. The most conclusive evidence relates to perceptual issues not economic outcomes; it includes a survey of 516 Beichuan residents; and qualitative research with residents, tourism actors, tourists and heritage professionals. The proposed mechanisms for achieving positive economic development are packaging dark sites as attractive tourist products and generating demand through interpretation and narrative; with supporting infrastructure investment attracting development; however, these mechanisms have not been tested via spending studies, longitudinal observation, business records or causal studies. The literature allows a cautious conclusion that dark tourism development may promote local economic development, if community approval, management and markets exist, but the scale of impact and its distribution and potential leakage have not been empirically verified. Research should focus on measuring local impacts and allocating benefits to residents, businesses, public sector bodies, external businesses and individual entrepreneurs separately.

**Keywords:** Dark, Tourism, Economic, Impact, Local, Communities, Livelihood, Employment

### **1.0 Introduction**

Broadly defined as travel to sites of death, suffering, sorrow, catastrophe, punishment, imprisonment, mourning or traumatic heritage. Dark tourism can refer to disaster sites, memorials, cemeteries, battlefields, prisons, museums, areas of mass death and sites steeped in folklore or the supernatural and varies in form rather than being a unified concept. Prisons have been re-imagined as museums and heritage attractions while cemeteries, disaster areas and memorial parks can also comprise of remembrance, leisure, learning and sight-seeing alongside of commercial tourism (Fabros et al., 2023; Lushchik, 2022; Strange & Kempa, 2003).

Local development in association with developing dark tourism One significant questions related to dark tourism pertains to the impacts of development in a particular region. The tourism associated with dark history have the potential to diversify the products offered at a destination and at the same time create a clientele, sustain guiding services, tourism related support industries, facilitate investment, promote cultural and /or entertainment activity. Infrastructure development for the proposed destination can include specialist infrastructure, museums, dark leisure establishments, quiz rooms, Festivals and structured Tours (Lushchik, 2022).

Development has been considered to have both benefits and the costs involved. Unequal distribution of earnings and benefits, excessive reliance on external stakeholders to market and to operationalize operations will be the key

risk to profitability and benefit accrual in a destination. The benefits of tourism however are strongly contingent upon low community stakeholder support and poorly aligned, over monetizing the tragedy and the poor infrastructure (Dolenec & Vodeb, 2021). These processes operate at the community level. Residents' perceptions can support or obstruct development and expansion of dark sites. Favorable attitudes will foster development of the dark site, while residents' potential opposition due to social, cultural, environmental or ethical implications will curtail development. Nevertheless, most of the dark tourism literature has primarily examined visitor motivations, site interpretation, the interpretation of memory and the tourist experience rather than the economic impacts on the community. Moreover, even literature examining resident responses often measured perceived impacts rather than objective increases in income, jobs, business or public revenues (Panayidou et al., 2024; Wang & Luo, 2017).

Therefore, the main research question is not whether dark tourism is successful or not, but under which conditions and in which circumstances it provides local communities with meaningful and local embedded economic gains. This review will investigate the literature available on dark tourism and local communities, with regard to the impacts, the perceived benefits and drawbacks, community attitudes, proposed development mechanisms and the limitation of available research methods.

## 2.0 Methods

### 2.1 Search Strategy

The search executed covers academic papers. The search strategy is based on hybrid semantic and keyword-based retrieval to enhance coverage.

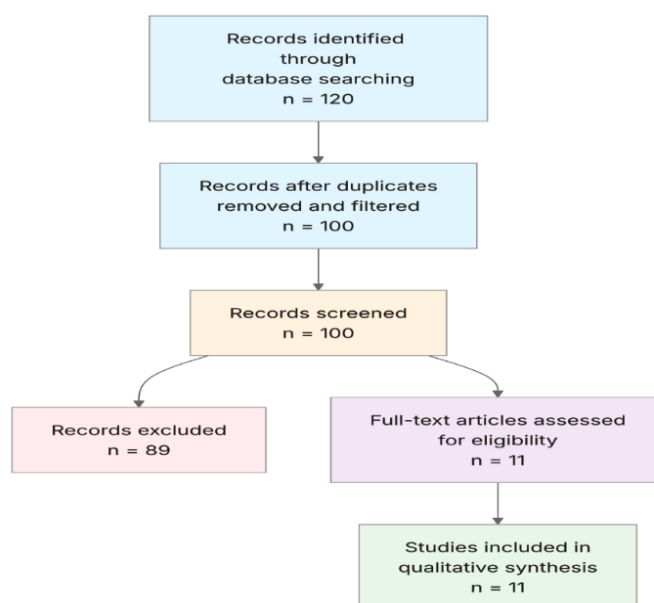
#### Search Queries Included:

- The role of dark tourism in the generation of employment and local revenue in a community;
- The impact of Thanotourism on local people to find employment and develop businesses in the areas;
- Effects of local community spending prices infrastructure dark tourism on.

### 2.2 Study Selection

Following initial searching of databases 120 records were yielded. The full titles/abstracts were read and deduplicated and an initial filtering done for relevancy resulting in 100 articles then screening using criteria for eligibility. The 89 other articles were rejected. This was leaving 11 articles then ready for the qualitative analysis.

**Figure-1: PRISMA Flow Diagram**



Sources: Primary Data

**Eligibility Criteria Included:**

- **Human Study:** Does the study investigate people-tourists, locals, entrepreneurs, residents, or stakeholders- and not just Destination Marketing Association (DMA) communications or concepts and theory? Dark tourism: Does the study examine dark tourism, thanatourism, a specific type of thanatourism, or a dark heritage site (e.g., memorial, disaster site, prison, war zone, holocaust site, or ghost tour). The study should not analyze the cultural heritage from an era which is merely not yet “past.”
- **Economic Outcome:** Did the study measure one or more of the following to gauge and understand the economic result? revenue, sales, expenditure by visitors and businesses, cost and pricing, profitability, employment, wages, business expansion, new business development, infrastructure costs and investment, visitor-spending to the local economy, local taxation, economic leakages.
- **Local Community:** Did the study explicitly explore the potential implications or actual impacts upon local residents, local businesses, a particular local community, the “host economy,” “local entrepreneurship,” “community capacity,” or the “host society”?
- **Empirical Evidence:** Does the study employ empirical data (surveys, interviews, field observation, statistics, case studies) instead of just a conceptual approach? The study doesn’t use empirical data. However, it mentions that in depth research was done but is never explicit that those empirical data support its main claim.
- **Direct Impact:** Has the study analysed direct local impacts of dark tourism development (i.e. Beyond generic impacts of tourism development? The analysis focuses on direct and locally mediated economic effects and therefore fulfills that requirement.
- **Stakeholder Detail:** Has the study looked at various stakeholders (residents, businesses, governments, site managers? The study has addressed, to various degrees, different key stakeholders.
- **Mechanisms:** Has the study shown mechanisms through which dark tourism causes economic changes (i.e. Flow of spend, job creation, investment on facilities)? The study explains economic impacts based on mechanisms such as visitor spending patterns, development of jobs and employment in site services and surrounding areas as well as tourism accommodation and food and beverage sectors of the tourist town.

Multiple studies are included that do not perfectly meet the economic-impact and direct-impact criteria because they provide useful data about the perceptions and conditions of community members, community opinions, visitor needs and interests, potential economic drivers, or the broader picture of tourism, and there is little another applicable research. Specifically, in cases of studies regarding communities' perceived impacts of tourism and community support, no objective economic measure is recorded (Panayidou et al., 2024; Wang & Luo, 2017), in the China attitudes study the perceived positive economic impacts of tourism, not community change, is tested (Xingshuai, 2012), several studies focusing on supply or demand, as well as explanation or visitor motivators at sites are kept that do not use economic impact measures at the community level (Fabros et al., 2023; Farmaki, 2013; Podoshen, 2013; Strange & Kempa, 2003), one study looks at general host communities but not specifically at dark tourism (Ogorelc et al., 2013), and a policy paper is included that did not look at dark tourism at all, nor provided any empirical results (Pickett et al., 2025). This decision is made to supplement other analyses since direct economic data is so sparse.

**2.3 Data Extraction and Synthesis****Data extraction focused on the following variables:**

- **Economic Effects:** Select the primary economic effect on the community of a locally located attraction as evidenced in the study-e.g., income, employment, business activity, revenue, prices, investment, or leakage- and indicate the direction of the impact (positive/negative).
- **Tourism Type:** Identify the manner in which the paper conceptually frames dark tourism or thanatourism and the specific destination or practice examined.

- **Community Setting:** Identify the setting or type of community studied: location, community or region, site type.
- **Methods:** Record details of the study design used to assess economic impact, including data sources (e.g. Interviews, surveys, case study, econometric analysis, secondary statistics).
- **Stakeholders:** Record local stakeholders or groups described in the analysis (e.g. Locals, small firms, the public, operators and the heritage sector).
- **Key Mechanisms:** Record those pathways through which dark tourism affects economic performance (e.g. Visitor expenditure, employment, investment in infrastructure, seasonality).
- **Limitations:** Record any mentioned limitations of the findings that relate to the assessment of the economic impact.

To detect patterns and synthesize across study results thematic analysis approach was used. Study strength considered based on consistency between studies, population relevance, outcome relevance and methodological quality of studies.

### 3.0 Results

#### 3.1 Characteristics of Included Studies

**Table-1: Economic Outcomes or Key Focus**

| Study and Year          | Study Type                         | Population/Stakeholders                                  | Setting                                      | Method                                                | Economic Outcome or Key Focus                                      |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Panayidou et al., 2024  | Exploratory qualitative case study | Local communities and policy stakeholders                | Dark Sites in Cyprus, a leisure destination  | Interviews with three study groups; thematic analysis | Community perceptions and support; no quantified economic outcomes |
| Dolenec and Vodeb, 2021 | Literature analysis                | Local communities, managers, wider community             | Cross-context darktourism settings           | Analysis of scientific literature from 2013–2019      | Economic advantages and disadvantages; no quantified outcomes      |
| Wang and Luo, 2017      | Quantitative case study            | 516 residents and younger family members                 | Beichuan County, China; 2008 Earthquake site | On-site and web questionnaires; ANOVAs                | Perceived economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts       |
| Farmaki, 2013           | Exploratory qualitative study      | Supply-side stakeholders and local and foreign visitors  | Two dark heritages sites in Cyprus           | 12 interviews and two focus groups                    | Supply, demand, interpretation, and visitor attraction             |
| Strange and Kempa, 2003 | Interpretive multisource study     | Tourists, museum staff, memory managers, external groups | Alcatraz and Robben Island                   | Policy documents, observations, surveys, interviews   | Penal-history marketing and interpretation                         |

|                      |                                |                                                                         |                                                                  |                                                                            |                                                                |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Podoshen, 2013       | Qualitative interpretive study | Black metal tourists and “backpackers”                                  | Europe and the United States                                     | Participant observation, nethnography, content analysis                    | Visitor motivations; no local economic outcomes                |
| Lushchyk, 2022       | Descriptive global analysis    | Tourism authorities, enterprises, operators, tourists                   | Global sites across dark-tourism categories                      | Literature, statistics, Internet materials, mapping, monitoring            | Proposed product development, infrastructure, and investment   |
| Fabros et al., 2023  | Exploratory qualitative study  | Historians, tourism officers, church leaders, tourists, guides, faculty | Cemeteries, memorials, parks, and heritage sites in Metro Manila | Interviews, focus groups, observation, Photo elicitation, content analysis | Site attributes, motivations, planning, and promotion          |
| Xingshuai, 2012      | Attitude study                 | Tourists and darktourism project developers                             | China; unspecified projects                                      | Design and sample not reported                                             | Perceived positive economic impacts as an attitude determinant |
| Ogorelc et al., 2013 | Host-community tourism study   | Residents employed in tourism and other residents                       | Location unspecified                                             | Comparative Resident perception study                                      | Perceived positive and negative tourism impacts                |
| Pickett et al., 2025 | Policy-oriented paper          | Government, local communities, local businesses                         | Location unspecified                                             | Method not reported                                                        | Local economic growth and resilience as policy goals           |

Sources: Primary Data

The literature is methodologically diverse, with a preponderance of exploratory qualitative research, perception research, theoretical explanations and descriptive mapping. Only the Beichuan report specifies the residents who were sampled. The sample size was 516. The economic consequences tend to appear as perception, possibilities or policy wishes rather than actual changes in local economic outcomes across the literature. These contexts vary from disaster-stricken communities to cemeteries, prisons, memorials, heritage sites and international tourist attractions.

### 3.2 Thematic Findings

#### 3.2.1 Positive Economic Potential Is Widely Proposed but Rarely Measured

This isn't even an economic outcome but, again, the ‘expectancy’ that dark tourism can offer some benefit to economy (Lushchyk, 2022). The study suggests that benefits include a wide array of new product, an increase in tourism activity in the region, a requirement for specialised tourism infrastructure, the addition of cultural festivals, tours, and investment, among many others (Lushchyk, 2022). Similar to this broad literary base, even benefits of this sector were discussed – ‘economic benefits or disadvantages. Yet, as discussed by Dolenc and Vodeb (2021), these are contingent on factors such as the place and form of its management, community benefits.

The attitudes of residents and visitor seem to be in line with this optimistic expectation. Beichuan residents held positive attitude toward the development of dark tourism development; Cyprus community found the citizens holds overall positive joint perception which would stimulate them to take part in the development of dark tourism (Panayidou et al., 2024; Wang & Luo, 2017). But both the researches did not examine the actual impact of the support: e.g. Employment opportunities, revenue of the business or the government. Cyprus result is more conservative due to the lack of evidence indicating that the dark tourism has already become a major sector in the country's tourism (Panayidou et al., 2024).

Thus, the economic direction is potentially positive at the level of felt opportunity, but unclear at the level of the perceived impact on local development. Confidence: limited, since positive findings mostly rely on felt opinions and potential claims instead of measurable evidence.

### 3.2.2 Community Acceptance Functions as a Development Condition, Not Evidence of Economic Benefit

It suggests a sequence where support as enabling condition of continued dark-tourism development. Thus, favorable attitudes may result in good alignment with policy, an expanded site, good management, cooperation and positive interactions among participants, while opposition could obstruct development of dark-tourism sites (Dolenec & Vodeb, 2021; Panayidou et al., 2024).

The Beichuan study offered the strongest evidence at the resident-level as it surveys responses from the 516 interviewees in addition to comparing how residents with various levels of suffering or economic damage perceived development. It also showed no differences in perceived development or attitudes based on degree of suffering or financial loss, demonstrating that direct personal experience of disaster suffering or loss did not result in clear differentiations in support for development in the reported analysis (Wang & Luo, 2017). This complicated the assumption that residents who suffered more loss do not want tourism developed; similarly, this also challenged that those who gain more economic profit necessarily want tourism developed.

In the studies in Beichuan and Cyprus, population was highly relevant to the question posed. Conversely, the attitude study in China concerns tourist perceptions of positive effects, rather than what effect is actually experienced by the local population.

***As tourists are also the subject of a study, with a partial overlap with the local community question population. The findings must be interpreted through this distinction.***

The finding that perceived positive economic effects influenced perceptions toward it was not about what actually happened with economic development (Xingshuai, 2012), but concerning perceived legitimacy. Confidence: Moderate, on the importance of local development condition acceptance, rather than actual local economic development.

### 3.2.3 Visitor Demand and Site Presentation Are Proposed Economic Transmission Mechanisms

Some research suggest mechanisms (demand of tourist and site presentation) could spur local economic development. Dark-tourism consumption is Supply-led and Attraction-based; i.e. How sites were developed, interpreted and projected had an impact in affecting the visitation, meaning-making by tourists (Farmaki, 2013). In Metro Manila, history, authenticity, stories telling, and experience are found to be significant site indicators whereas education, remember, sightseeing, recreation, family bond, curiosities and events used are discovered to be important tourist motivations (Fabros et al, 2023). Penal site has further illustrated interpretation by memory manager, by tourists and by the outsiders are not detached (Strange & Kempa, 2003).

Several works report site presentation and visitor demand as possible mechanisms for inducing local economic activity. Dark-tourism consumption has been conceptualized as being demand-oriented and attraction-oriented, and that how site is produced, narrated and constructed leads to tourist visitations and tourist sense-making processes (Farmaki, 2013). Important determinants on a site level and visitor motivations in Metro Manila, identified in the study (Farmaki, 2013) relate to history, authenticity, storytelling, and experience on a site-level, and education, remembrance, sight-seeing, recreation, family bonding, curiosity and event-visiting on the visitor-level (Fabros et al., 2023). Penal sites also indicate that the production of interpretation is affected by memory managers, visitor-expectations, as well as outside interest groups (Strange & Kempa, 2003).

These processes could conceivably generate new demand for guided experiences, museums, transport, accommodations, restaurants, event activities, and associated activities, however, none of the empirical articles describe spending with the above categories. The mapping study posited that the combined packaging of 57 likely attractive sites into tour packages, guided tours/ excursions, festivals, educational/training modules and thematic activities would lure investment, and generate the growth of tourism businesses (Lushchyk, 2022). It is however, an argument based on inventor ability and planning as compared with realized economic benefit. For instance, the study on black metal tourism indicated that stimulation, the emotional contagion process and the analysis of topographic comparison compel a special group of travellers, however, it did not report on the economic returns host communities could gain from this new tourism.

***Also considering the black metal study addressed both black metal tourists and backpackers, partially overlapping with target population of local communities should allow its findings to be tempered*** (Podoshen, 2013).

Evidence on the logic pathway between demand and local development clear, between development and local income clear, between development and the scale, positive correlation with local economic size and population size; do not find sufficient evidence on impact for local development on income, employment, or business revenue. Faith/ Confidence level- limited-moderate.

### 3.2.4 Economic Benefits and Costs Are Context-Dependent and Potentially Unevenly Distributed

The literature does not point to a definitively positive or negative economic outcome. The cross-context synthesis presents arguments for and against, and specifically suggests that there are outcomes and consequences influenced by context and the strategy employed (Dolenec & Vodeb, 2021). It is mentioned in the global analysis that a narrow range of available products among tour operators in Ukraine can limit tourism interest and corresponding benefits (Lushchik, 2022). Therefore, it is not just the existence of dark resources that can foster economic growth. While the question of redistribution is mostly unanswered within the literature, researchers have recognized tour enterprises, tour guides, museums, tour organizers/developers, planners, and outside interest groups as potential stakeholders, yet seldom define what stakeholders actually realize the economic benefit (Lushchik, 2022; Strange & Kempa, 2003).

A general host community study differentiates between local people who work in tourism, and residents whom do not, when evaluating residents' attitudes regarding the economic, as well as the social, and cultural impact of the development of tourism, yet fails to specify a time and place, how it is measured, or on what scale the differences are evaluated (Ogorelc et al., 2013). Another study addresses the general communities impacted by tourism, not solely those who are affected by dark tourism sites which is again only a partial fit in what has been asked for (local communities impacted by dark tourism) – be aware of this distinction when considering these results.

So, the probably economic impacts of are distributed unevenly, even if in aggregate terms there is gain from opportunity. Confidence; Moderate for context specificity, based on converging conceptual and empirical understandings; Insufficient to comment on inequality, leakage, or in-country retention since none of these variables were measured.

### 3.2.5 The Evidence Base Measures Perceptions More Often Than Economic Performance

There is a key methodological theme that is the discrepancy between the research question posed and the outputs actually measured: the Beichuan research evaluates perceived economic impacts but includes this along with socio-cultural and physical parameters and actually produces no output data on income, employment, businesses, profits, investment, or leakage (Wang and Luo, 2017), the Cyprus community evaluation uses interview and thematic analysis method and measures support for development, but no economic data could be gathered (Panayidou et al., 2024), further studies also evaluate site interpretation, motivation, destination classification and attitudes in the host communities (Fabros et al., 2023; Farmaki, 2013; Xingshuai, 2012).

There is no documented quantified change in local income, employment, visitor expenditure, business turnover, prices, taxation, investment or economic leakage, in the included literature, as a direct result of visiting or exploring a dark destination. Thus, there is no literature supporting information on effect size, causality, time lag, seasonality, multiplier effects or local spending retention from tourism revenue. Certainty: Strong in the assumption of missing data in this regard due to the universality of this deficiency across all the searched sources.

**Table-2: Opportunities, Findings, Applicability, Effect and its Direction, Confidence Level, Supporting Studies**

| Economic Opportunity   | Key Finding                                                                                                                                                                              | Population Applicability                                                                                   | Effect Direction                    | Confidence Level | Supporting Studies                        |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Economic Opportunity   | Positive economic potential is proposed through tourism products, infrastructure, enterprises, and investment, but no income, employment, expenditure, or revenue estimates are reported | Local communities, tourism enterprises, planners, and operators; partly aligned with the target population | Positive potential, unmeasured      | Limited          | Lushchik, 2022<br>Dolenec and Vodeb, 2021 |
| Development Legitimacy | Cyprus communities broadly supported development, although dark tourism appeared to have little current role in the tourism industry                                                     | Directly relevant to local communities in a leisure destination                                            | Positive but limited current effect | Limited          | Panayidou et al., 2024                    |

|                          |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                 |                                          |              |                                                               |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Distribution and Leakage | The literature identifies relevant businesses and external actors but provides no measurements of local retention, leakage, prices, or distribution | Local economies and stakeholders; evidence is incomplete        | Unknown                                  | Insufficient | Strange and Kempa, 2003<br>Lushchik, 2022                     |
| Community Support        | Beichuan residents generally expressed positive attitudes; the sample included 516 respondents, but no objective economic outcomes were reported    | Directly relevant to residents in a disaster affected community | Positive perceived support               | Moderate     | Wang and Luo, 2017                                            |
| Context Dependence       | Economic advantages and disadvantages vary according to context, management, and community benefits                                                 | Broad cross-context local-community relevance                   | Mixed                                    | Moderate     | Dolenec and Vodeb, 2021                                       |
| Measurement Gap          | No included study provides quantified causal estimates of local economic change attributable to dark tourism                                        | Directly concerns the research question                         | Null evidence, not evidence of no effect | Strong       | Wang and Luo, 2017<br>Panayidou et al., 2024<br>Farmaki, 2013 |

Sources: Primary Data

## 4.0 Discussion

### 4.1 Principal Findings and Their Interpretation

Thus, the first main observation is that the economic impact from dark tourism is a potential prospect, not an evidenced local phenomenon. Examining the findings reveals, over and again, the following chain: “Dark sites are perceived, interpreted and branded; interpretative frameworks encourage the generation of visitor interest towards a site, and local engagement contributes to the development and perpetuation of tourism products/infrastructure”. Links in the chain receive support in the literature concerning the phenomenon, especially from, inter alia, the perspectives of ‘supply and demand’, ‘storytelling’, ‘authenticity’, ‘local support’ (Farmaki, 2013; Panayidou et al., 2024). However, the local economic outcomes, end-products in the proposed chain of events, do not gain traction in the literature examined.

This matters for the reason that positive attitudes and positive livelihoods are not interchangeable. Local inhabitants might agree to development for potential future gain, for enhancing memory and recognition, or because real and perceived negative consequences are tolerated. Tourism operators' appreciation of the economic outcomes also fails to determine if revenue will truly benefit the households, or to end up with operators rather than villagers. We can therefore trust the institutional and perceptual conditions for development with greater confidence than the economic outcomes.

Our analysis also shows that not all forms of dark tourism can be subsumed under a generic economic model of this tourism. Sites of disaster (Beichuan), disused prisons (Alcatraz, Robben Island), Metro Manila's cemeteries and “black metal tourist destinations” (Fabros et al., 2023; Podoshen, 2013; Strange & Kempa, 2003; Wang & Luo, 2017) will differ in terms of motives for visitor, arrangements of governance, perceived morality and economic opportunity. These may have differential implications for recurring demand and local services provision, as well as appropriateness of commodification, though these implications have not been quantitatively addressed for any forms of dark tourism. Hence, it is impossible to claim the existence of a universal dark-tourism multiplier. There are no reported biological or physiological mechanisms in the literature.

The mechanisms concerned are social, cultural, interpretive and market-oriented: Community support, presentation, tourist motivation, packaging, and management, in rather than biological ones. Hence, we have the strongest confidence in the economic impact being underestimated and community support being important, the weakest confidence on dark tourism positively impacts on livelihoods at present, due to the lacking of economic measurements and causal designs, respectively.

#### 4.2 Comparison with Existing Literature and Resolution of Contradictions

The overall positive sentiments expressed in communities like Beichuan and Cyprus are in line with findings in related literature which attest that without local reception, dark tourism development cannot succeed in an area (e.g., Dolenec & Vodeb, 2021; Panayidou et al., 2024; Wang & Luo, 2017). It is especially useful to note this divergence because the cases present different contexts; Beichuan is suffering from a disaster-affected community while Cyprus represents a mainstream recreation destination which houses dark sites within the context of a holiday economy; nonetheless, this correspondence points out that community residents does not generally accept dark sites when suffering or hardship prevails or takes center stage at the sites themselves.

The contradiction perceived may appear to be in the positive attitudes of Cypriots to the concept of developing, without there being a clear indications that it has a significant economic presence yet; but according to Panayidou et al (2024), "at the current stage, we found insufficient proof that dark tourism activities have had a significant impact on overall tourism activities on both Islands (both at individual level or overall country)", there can be the perception that such 'apparent' contradiction comes from time; that in the moment they see positively, the concept.

At the moment it might be perceived that at the moment it represents a value and not an issue, even though the capacity of qualitative design can't help to determine whether they would stick to their opinion when visitor numbers will rise, and price of the service will change, or when commercialization may alter sites to its present meaning.

Another tension arose over evidence showing no differences between Beichuan earthquake survivors by level of pain or loss (Wang & Luo, 2017). This could suggest that personal suffering did not predict support straightforwardly, yet without information on the explanatory factor it would be impossible to distinguish between other causes. For one, sampling across past employees not all local could have led to variation in proximity, and the collection of reported perspectives may have overlooked local benefits generated for the whole household. A possible explanation could also be that attitudes in fact were uniform across the community, yet the case offers no support for this interpretation either.

This pattern could be due, in part, to publication and selection bias. Those articles focusing on successful development, favorable attitudes, or tourism potential are more inclined to make it into the available literature than articles focusing on unsuccessful attempts, community opposition or economic loss. Even if these trends in methodology continue to improve; the newer articles all still tend to focus on qualitative accounts and perceptions rather than robust economic measurements. These papers do not therefore provide justification for positive net economic returns based on the optimistic tome.

#### 4.3 Practical Implications

Clearly, there are grounds for local and tourism authorities to proceed with community-led approaches to planning prior to further developing dark-tourism destinations. Residents should also play a role in decisions on interpretations, visitors and commercial partnerships, and tourism incomes as a successful presence of local communities appears to be prerequisite for a sustainable development of these destinations (Dolenec & Vodeb, 2021; Panayidou et al., 2024), especially in communities hit by a disaster and in cases of functioning memorial, funeral or sacred use of site. The opportunities for local businesses through development are provision of local guiding, culture, learning tours, accommodation, transport and additional attractions. Nevertheless, the opportunities themselves are still opportunities and not proof of delivery. Therefore, local authorities should monitor participation of local business, local purchasing, employment, visitor spend and revenue retained in community. An increase in tourism numbers will not always result in increased benefits for everyone.

For Heritage Managers and Tourism Marketers, the keys are storytelling, authenticity, history and the quality of experience. The marketing of a destination however needs to go hand in hand with interpretations held by locals and be ethically sensitive (Fabros et al.2023; Farmaki 2013). There is therefore a lack of a case for offering a generic endorsement of expanding the market of dark tourism. In the context of Cyprus, this approach is associated with community support but it does not demonstrate widespread impact for existing industry operators (Panayidou et al.2024) perhaps more is need for some selective development piloting, testing and community consultation. The threshold question is irrelevant in the standard exposure-policy meaning; we have no literature reporting a quantifiable dose-response relationship or suggesting a visitor level, below which either the economic and social problems are eradicated. Policy makers therefore should not presuppose either the inevitability of positive outcomes to visitors' numbers or a universally safe level. This will necessitate the use of tailored monitoring to the situation of benefits, costs and distributional effects.

#### 4.4 Strengths and Limitations

This review's strengths include robust search strategy, clear extraction of economic mechanisms and community context, and thematic synthesis drawing on resident, visitor, manager and policy stakeholders. It differentiates the

observed and perceived economic impacts; it does not treat projections of impacts to come as quantified impacts. The available literature has a number of important limitations. The vast majority of papers are based on explorative-qualitative approach, survey about attitude/perception, literature review or spatial mapping to achieve a descriptive goal. It has come to our attention that in many of these works the size of sample/selection method of sample/methods of analysis/key of evaluation are not mentioned. Even the selected Beichuan survey (with N=516) assesses attitude instead of real value or economic performance (Wang & Luo, 2017).

The locations where the study is done as well as subject population are very different. Finally, there is a lack of case studies on local communities instead focus on visitors or professionals (tourists, industry professionals), or the entire tourism activities rather than local inhabitants. Therefore, our literature lacks causal, over-time based, accounting based, cost-income or expenses-employment based, government income and the resulting outcomes as well as prices and economic loss.

The review is also restricted in that it relies only on the data in the provided paper (data points extracted from description, often including abstracts). A formal risk-of-bias assessment was not undertaken and the evidence base does include papers retained as there are relevant to mechanisms or community acceptance although they might not make the most direct-impact evidence. This review thus presents a synthesis of the evidence-landscape as opposed to offering a measure of the net economic impact of dark tourism.

### 5.0 Gaps and Future Directions

Perhaps the greatest void is that of actually measuring how the economy changes at the local, community level. There is a need for studies focusing on specific dark tourism destinations, which incorporate longitudinal designs examining resident surveys along with business turnover and employment, household income, visitor spending and tax receipts, investment, and prices, clearly differentiating between locally held income and external ownership, and quantifying leakage clearly.

The Beichuan example, in which only attitudes were considered (measured through a survey of 516 residents), but the objective impact of dark tourism was never reported (Wang & Luo, 2017), exemplifies the gap in residents' attitudes being studied in relation to household and business indicators.

More comparative studies are also required across disaster sites, prisons, cemeteries, memorials, and leisure destinations, as the current literature suggests strong contextuality (Dolenec & Vodeb, 2021). Economic definitions need to be standardized, and evidence sought on whether benefits differ between tourism-employed residents and other locals. Business owners, public bodies, heritage stakeholders and third sector entrepreneurs continue to be significantly under-represented in economic evaluation.

Finally, future research should test the proposed pathway from interpretation and visitor motivation to expenditure, jobs and investment, rather than "storytelling," "authenticity" or "product presentation" as proof of economic success; studies of failing, contested and 'unpopular' attractions should be encouraged to counter a potentially selective presentation of promising potential.

### 6.0 Conclusion

On the basis of the existing evidence, we can only tentatively assume that dark tourism offers economic development opportunities for local communities but fails to show it empirically. Potential positive impacts come from new tourism products, infrastructure, investment, guide services, events and corresponding business activities, and community support.

A survey in Beichuan County (N=516) shows generally positive attitude from local communities to earthquake tourism and on another hand, the communities in Cyprus have support for the development; however, none of the two surveys quantitatively measured local income, employment, business income, visitor expenditure, public income and leakage (Panayidou et al., 2024; Wang & Luo, 2017).

The research therefore is only a partially-congruent fit to the research question. Local populations and host communities feature directly in a number of studies, but others are from the perspectives of tourists, tourism operators, site managers, broad populations of tourists, or from globally descriptive overviews. These indirect proxies allow insights into demands and management practices but fail to demonstrate if positive economic gains flow to local households or businesses.

Consequently, the strongest assertion we are left to make is that the economic impacts of dark tourism are plausible, contingent and significantly under-estimated, rather than proven. The central question remains whether an increase in dark tourism brings tangible and lingering local economic gains and through what management forms any benefits from its use outstrip the associated economic and social costs.

Answering this question calls for longitudinal studies at a destination level, linking visitor demand to employment, firm performance, household livelihoods, investment and leakage. What this has implications for is that making decisions to capitalize on places of death and suffering could change the shape of both local economies and collective memories. Sustainable place making and inclusive, accountable development provide the best hope of this form of tourism contributing to, rather than undermining, local resilience, and it can no longer be assumed that growth in visitors or visitors demand will translate to prosperity for all.

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