

The concept of “dark tourism” came into being in the late 1990s, and I am really pleased that J. John Lennon, co-creator of the term and a pioneer researcher in the area, is the theme editor of this issue. I would like to thank him and the writing team for providing a fascinating blend of academic and practitioner insight on a facet of tourism that is based on quite specific travel and site visit motives. Given the number of on-going conflicts around the world, this aspect of tourism has become closely associated with respect and the act of remembrance and a decade on, this issue explores contemporary thinking and development.

*Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT)* aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development, and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a *WHATT* theme editor, do please contact me.

**Richard Teare**

*Managing Editor, WHATT*

## **Dark tourism – visitation, understanding and education; a reconciliation of theory and practice?**

The field of Dark Tourism research was catalysed approximately two decades ago in 1996 with the publication of a special edition of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (Lennon and Foley, 1996) focussed on the designation – *Dark Tourism*. Twenty years on, it is an appropriate time to review some of the emergent issues and to link academic research to practice, interpretation and education at a range of sites.

Dark tourism is now established as a term to designate those sites and locations of genocide, holocaust, assassination, crime or incarceration that serve to attract visitors. The phenomenon exists across a range of global destinations and demonstrates commonality and differentiation across a range of societies and political regimes. The interpretation of these sites can of course be the product of ideology and dominant belief systems, and they act as the meeting place for education, history and visitation where questions of authenticity and fact are juxtaposed with tourist visitation and education needs. This theme issue opens with articles about German contexts. Colin Philpott presents the massive legacy of the Nazi regime and the debates concerning conservation, whilst practitioner inputs from Hans-Christian Jasch, Alex Driscoll and Wolfgang Aschauer provides reflection on the challenging contexts of education and visitation.

What is celebrated, interpreted and developed is often selective and dilemmas of commemoration of the unacceptable and acceptable are reflected in the politicisation of these sites as the Cypriot context explored by Anna Farmaki and Katerina Antoniou demonstrates. The contemporary context of our increasingly unstable world plagued by terrorist incidents and disasters suggests limitations of the phenomena (see the contribution of Hugues Séraphin) and the possibility of regeneration as explored by DeMond Miller, Christopher Gonzalez and Mark Hutter.

The changing context of a digitally connected world where tourist experiences are photographed, filmed and recorded, uploaded and shared, is also explored (see J. John Lennon), and finally some of the early researchers of the dark tourism examine evidence relating to progress in the field (J. John Lennon, A.V. Seaton and A.C. Wight).



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It is clear that dark tourism locations are high-demand sites but that they also provide commemoration and education resources, along with historical reference points and narrative legacies. However, some sites have been politicised and/or subject to ideological influences, they exist as critical commemorative elements of victims and (in some cases) their testimonies. In such cases, this content and its narrative interpretation and educative elements maintains a vital role in understanding our shared past.

**J. John Lennon**  
*Theme Editor*

### Reference

Lennon, J. and Foley, M. (1996), "Special issue: dark tourism editorial", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 1.

### About the Theme Editor

J. John Lennon PhD, MPhil and BSc (Hons), is Professor and Assistant Vice Principal, Business Development, responsible for external income generation at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). His remit also includes GCU's London and New York campus operations. He has previously undertaken duties as Dean and Head of Department and remains the Director of the Moffat Centre for Travel and Tourism, Business Development, [www.moffatcentre.com](http://www.moffatcentre.com), an industry endowed research and consultancy centre that funds students' scholarships with its operating surpluses. To date more than £750,000 of scholarships have been awarded to students wishing to study and research tourism. In 1996, he identified the phenomena and provided the designation "dark tourism" along with a colleague Malcolm Foley. He continues to research in this area.