

***NECROTOURISM AS A TOURISM PRODUCT AT THE SAN JOSÉ CEMETERY OF  
CIUDAD JUÁREZ: A PROPOSAL TO PROMOTE THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE  
DESTINATION***

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This work deals with the development of tourism products based on the cultural value of cemeteries, a trend linked to dark tourism, and its field of application is framed in the case of the San José pantheon in Ciudad Juárez. To prepare the diagnosis, the attractions of the cemetery were inventoried, the community of Juarez was surveyed, and interviews were conducted to obtain the opinion of different specialists on the subject. It was found that there is a lack of knowledge regarding these products and the pantheon itself, and it was also confirmed that half of the tombstones in the cemetery are in poor condition. Therefore, the proposal of a new tourist product for the site was developed, which will contribute to improving its state of conservation and will favorably impact the knowledge of the culture and history of the Juarenses community.

The problem situation in which this research is framed is based on the fact that cemeteries offer the opportunity to have a tourist use, since these represent an important way to understand the history, culture and heritage of a destination, through the characters there lie, the tombstones and monuments representative of funerary art and architecture, the legends, their traditions or curiosities (Chávez and Fernández, 2017). However, despite the Mexican tradition of visiting the pantheons on day of the dead, the tourism value they have is barely recognized, since dark tourism is still not very well explored in Mexico.

Cemeteries are not only forgotten from a tourist point of view in Ciudad Juarez, but the San José Pantheon, which is located at the back of the mission with which it shares a name. In 2014 it only had one visitor, Eduardo Samaniego, who is the great-grandson of

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former governor of the State of Chihuahua and is buried in the churchyard (Castañón, 2014). On the other hand, the lack of care and maintenance has caused its poor state of preservation; of the 150 to 175 graves it has had in the past, there are around 30 left, some of them broken (De Dios, 2015). The small necropolis has suffered due to inclement weather such as in 2008 by the rains of Hurricane Dolly, and in 2013 storms flooded and damaged the area. For this reason, attempts have been made to contact institutions for its reconstruction, but the project is incomplete and the structure damaged (Cortez, 2017; Gómez, 2013).

Taking into account the systematized background, this study was carried out with the general objective of proposing a tourist product for the San José pantheon, in order to promote knowledge and conservation of the historical and cultural heritage it contains. Based on the general objective, the following specific goals are formulated: 1). To diagnose the historical-cultural heritage of the San José pantheon in its potential for tourism use. 2). To identify the state of opinion of the residents in Juárez and different specialists regarding the tourism use of the San José funerary site and its use as a tourism product. 3). To design a guided tour in the churchyard as a way to understand its history and culture.

For the development of this research, the deductive approach was used, since it started from the general study of necrotourism and was applied to the particular case of a cemetery in Ciudad Juárez. The study was qualitative-quantitative and explanatory, since it was based on the analysis of causal relationships related to the tourism use of the San José pantheon. The field work was carried out between the months of August 2018 and May 2019; mixed sources of information were used in this study. The territorial unit corresponding to the existing cemeteries in Ciudad Juárez was considered, resulting in a total number of ten. The San José Pantheon was selected as the sample because it includes the necessary characteristics, even when it is no longer in use, it was taken into consideration that it is the oldest in the city, and that in its extension there are characters of interest for the route to be projected.

Fifty surveys were carried out with the local community under a randomized simple random type sampling, in order to know the opinion about necrotourism and its implementation in the city. In addition, surveys with specialists on the subject of necrotourism and the funeral branch were carried out, as well as the analysis of three case studies that present tours in other cemeteries. This was done with the aim of learning lessons.

The context in which the investigation is registered corresponds to the San José Cemetery in Ciudad Juárez, which is located at the back of the San José Mission. Currently, it is no longer possible to use the cemetery for new graves, since it lost its functional value, while only preserving a few of them (Castañón, 2014; De Dios, 2015), several of them in poor condition, with broken headstones and covered by natural foliage. The Ochoa family is the most named on the headstones, and the mission continues to be used by the Catholic community, and Sunday mass continues to be celebrated in this temple.

Based on the fieldwork carried out, an inventory of the cemetery's attractions was developed to identify its tourist potential. This site has twenty-eight gravestones, of which fourteen have the deceased's name on the inscription, six of those belong to the Ochoa family, five to the Samaniego family, and the remaining to other families. There are no family monuments, all graves are individual. Only 20% are in good condition, 20% have fractures or incomplete parts in what refers to them as semi-destroyed, and 29% are completely destroyed. The tombstone that is in the best condition is that of Mr. Inocencio Ochoa, since it is possible to easily visualize his inscriptions and he keeps his original rivet. The oldest tombstone dates from 1866 and the most recent is from 1913. Regarding the material used in the construction of the tombs, marble and granite are predominant.

The opinion of the residents in Juarez regarding the tourist use of the churchyard and the possible demand for the tourist product shows that only 20% of those surveyed have any knowledge on the subject of necrotourism, 48% consider activities in a cemetery attractive, and 40% are not in favor. The 22% of the respondents have had some previous experience in this type of activity, of the affirmative answers, four experiences have taken place in cemeteries of the State of Chihuahua, four in other places of the Mexican Republic such as Jalisco, Hidalgo and in the State of Mexico, and the remaining three experiences were originated in France and the United States of America. Only 28% of respondents know the cemetery and 70% ignore its existence.

Regarding their willingness to participate in a tour for the San José pantheon, 26% answered that they were not willing, while 44% answered affirmatively. Among the affirmative answers, the main reason given is because it represents a new experience for them, followed by the curiosity it provokes and because the pantheon is a place with a lot of history and culture. On the other hand, among those who responded negatively, they expose the fact that they consider the tourist visit a lack of respect to the deceased. According to the opinion of the respondents, it is widely considered that the route to be proposed would promote the historical and cultural heritage of the San José pantheon, and that it would contribute favorably to tourism in Ciudad Juárez.

According to the detected problems, the following strategies were proposed, which are based on the principles of alternative tourism, not massive and low-scale: training and education; investment and maintenance; strengthening of institutional relationship; development and positioning of new tourism products; promotion of information, research and dissemination on the subject; study of the impacts of tourism use on the heritage of the cemetery; government support and tourism service providers.

In response to the above strategies, and considering the results of the diagnosis made, the design and validation of an itinerary was made and a script of the tour to visit the San Jose Pantheon was elaborated, as well as the procedures for its implementation. The conceptualization of the product assumes the realization of a guided tour of the pantheon, which will take into consideration a minimum load capacity; this tour will promote a learning experience based on the history of the enclosure, from its construction to the present day. As part of it, its importance for the history and culture of Ciudad Juárez will be exposed. In addition, the knowledge of the personalities whose graves are in the cemetery will be promoted, as well as the events and scenarios that surrounded them, thereby strengthening the promotion of the history and culture of the town.

For this proposal, a deployment of clients and their requirements was carried out, as well as the design of the product with its tour program (Borroto, 2014; Osés, 2014). The script includes the presentation, development, conclusion of the tour, and farewell. For the description of the methodology to be followed, the definition of the retail price, strategic positioning, communication & distribution channels, and feedback were considered. The proposal includes options for different market segments, since there is no unique profile for visitors, since tourists interested in this type of product have very varied characteristics. For this reason, the public can vary from a classroom of primary students, to older adult couples or a group of young university students, there are also other cases in which the tour must have a minimum age because it is content of darker and mystery character.

Although necrotourism or funeral tourism is a branch of dark tourism, in the case of this research it is more inclined to cultural tourism, since the theme of the tourism product presented is of a historical-cultural nature. The tours and tourist products in general that are made in cemeteries can be found all over the world with different themes, but for the most part the main objective is to present the heritage of the destinations.

The used methodology in the research project was convenient to achieve the objectives formulated, since it made it possible to conveniently inventory the tourist attractions of the pantheon and assess the state in which they are located, analyze and

interpret the results of the opinion poll of the residents in Juarez, and interviews to obtain opinion from different specialists.

Two fundamental problems were identified as a result of the diagnosis; the first is the poor state of the pantheon, which is reflected in its high deterioration, and the second is the opinion of the Juarenses community, which showed great ignorance about the site and a lack of information and training on tourism products that can be offered in cemeteries. The proposal of the designed tourism product can be integrated into the restoration plan of the San José Steering Committee, so it is expected that it will positively impact the community and improve the state of the pantheon, in addition promoting research on necrotourism, and especially generating interest in favor of the San José enclosure according its history and heritage.

For the development of this research, time was a limitation, since the restoration of the site is under development, as is the book with its history, so it would be advisable to integrate this proposal to the work carried out by other institutions. For the continuity of the investigation, the committee in charge of the restoration can make use of the results and the tourism product, in addition evaluating the impact of this and making modifications or improvements if necessary as a timely way for the transfer of knowledge.

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