

Tourism and the Construction of Visual Culture in Northern Ireland  
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This paper analyzes the impact of tourism upon the conservation, destruction, and framing of political murals in Northern Ireland. An increase in tourism within Northern Ireland during the past five years has changed how these images convey meaning. The contemporary example indicates how the recent global trend of dark tourism affects the construction of heritage and place-making in areas recovering from conflict.

During the Troubles, Loyalists and Republicans painted thousands of murals for communicative, propagandist, political, and commemorative purposes. The most propagated images are paramilitary murals designed to intimidate and lay claims to territories within the segregated cities of Northern Ireland.

After the IRA ceasefire (2005), an active debate about the murals' future has risen: some call for their destruction claiming they perpetuate violence, while others call for their preservation on historic grounds. I analyze the role of tourism in this debate and how these murals are being presented as markers of history to tourists. This paper argues a semiological shift in meaning has occurred, which characterizes these images as commemorative sites of collective heritage. Further, it argues that tourists often believe in a still present danger, which provides them with a vicarious thrill. The tourism industry often markets the murals to satisfy the tourists' expectations.

The argument is both a theoretical investigation into how tourism can affect the reading and meaning of images, as well as an empirical investigation into the policies, finances, politics, and individual events that have been influencing the preservation and/or destruction of this public art.