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Dark tourism and thanatourism: Distinct tourism typologies or simple analytical tools?

Abstract

Auschwitz-Birkenau is the main example provided by researchers whenever dark tourism and thanatourism are used as principal analytical concepts. Theoretically, this example is considered one of the darkest tourism sites. Focusing on this kind of places, as well as on other places with different degrees of authenticity, macabre, emotions and tourism motivation, this study aims to research whether dark tourism and thanatourism are a distinct type of tourism or they only represent analytical tools. Starting with a quick look at the history of the concept that leads to some theoretical aspects (terminology, definitions, classification, spectrums and controversies), conceptual research meant to explain the typology/instrument dilemma has been done. The results of the research reveal that this domain is still very new, with many theoretical controversies and obstacles, and dark tourism and thanatourism are only analytical tools which help us understand the evolution of the current patrimonial and cultural tourism. Moreover, our data shows that dark tourism includes thanatourism, but it does not create a distinct, clearly defined form of tourism. The usefulness of this analytical tool is not the ultimate assertion of a distinct form of tourism, but to adapt existing and future sites to the needs and motivations of tourists.

Key words: dark tourism; thanatourism; forms of tourism; analytical tools

Introduction

Visiting the Săpânţa Merry Cemetery (Romania), the cemetery in the Dutch city of Groningen with its multiple problems caused by space organization (van Steen & Pellenbarg, 2006a) - a phenomenon called *geography of death* (van Steen & Pellenbarg, 2006b) - as well as Bellu cemetery in Bucharest, where well-known Romanian people are buried, gave rise to issues related to the possibility of "resurrecting" *death* by means of tourism, a phenomenon that is now related to various terminologies. Some of the best organized and adapted tourist sites in this regard that I have visited are the 1815 Memorial, the Lion's Mound, and the Battlefield of Waterloo. Historically speaking, SS Morro Castle is one of the famous examples of the *tragedy* of a cruise ship which linked New York to Havana (Cuba) and which, after almost complete burning, became a true tourist attraction (Sharpley & Stone, 2009) . The strong wind carried its wreck, with the 137 victims on board, to Asbury Park, New Jersey, and the intense media coverage of the event turned it into a social frenzy. Nearly a quarter of a million people, even from Philadelphia and New York, came to see the wreck. Far from being the first one, this example is one of the oldest types of dark tourism, a concept that now includes a heterogeneous casuistry.

The tourism – death relation has become a *favorite* topic for researchers within scientific conferences (Light, 2017). Outside the academic environment, dark tourism also enjoys special attention in media (newspaper articles, promotional magazines and even TV programs). In December 2016, the same author noticed that by simply typing "dark tourism" on Google revealed four million links, while for

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"thanatourism" only 18,600 links were found. Nowadays, the search for the same key words shows the highest interest in this domain. The data displayed by the search engine refer to: information in encyclopedias, guide books related to dark tourism places and destinations, blogs, commentaries about dark tourism, holidays by theme and others.

This article is meant to analyse dark tourism and thanatourism, base on the premise that these two concepts have distinct characteristics, leading not only to the creation of a separate domain (with well-defined causality, phenomenology and characteristics), but also to formation of a tourism typology which is independent from other tourism types. On closer analysis, researching the domain literature in detail, has made me think of another conceptual issue, namely whether dark tourism and thanatourism are nothing but simple analytical instruments that help researchers identify and understand the sites, their classification, the emotions they can create and, especially, what motivates the visitors to travel to places that are related to death, suffering, sadness, disasters and atrocities, which means the most evil elements coming from the dark side of *thymos* that Fukuyama (2006, p. 163) defined as "that part of the human personality which represents the main source of pride, anger and shame".

In order to validate or deny these hypotheses I had to structure and synthesize the wide literature and to establish several stages of analysis. Starting from the best-known articles and books on *Google Scholar* and *Google Books,* I have tried to find the origin of the concepts and this fact has introduced me in a lot of methodologies that are used. I dedicated a special section to terminology and I did the same with the definitions and the specter of dark tourism. Literature has shown me that thanatourism does not have a specter, as it is a narrow, concise concept according to other authors (Seaton, 1996; Light, 2017). Classifying dark tourism and thanatourism according to authenticity, perception of the macabre and the quality and intensity of emotions has led to the creation of a natural connection between concepts and sites, depending on the previously mentioned specter. However, such a connection does not cancel the debate that has existed since the appearance of the two terms that I have approached in a separate section, whether dark tourism is part of the heritage tourism or the cultural one and what it is exactly? Or, even more important, whether commodification of death and pulling the macabre out of this are ethical and moral? (Dann, 1998)

The research data reveal that it would be rash to conclude that either real or symbolic death related to dark tourism and thanatourism could be the oldest type of tourism. Despite the fact that pilgrimages and most historical sites visited by tourists are related to death as many people lost their lives to create them, this is far from being the first or a well-defined type of tourism. Some researchers strongly disagree to these terms and chose to use them more as an analytical instrument and less as a tourism type. Thus, the domain of dark tourism and thanatourism remains eclectic and fragile theoretically speaking.

The theoretic frame

The origin and history of concepts

Death is the only inheritance everybody shares and, consequently, it is the oldest tourism aspect as compared to any other form of patrimony (Seaton, 1996). According to Lennon and Foley (2000), a few commentators see pilgrimages as one of the oldest death-related forms of tourism. Within the Judeo-Christianity, death is to be found in special sites and it is commemorated by headstones, which is ideological and religious behavior. Whoever wants to remember those who have died can come to the headstone in order to remember. A whole industry has been developed around this practice, especially in those areas where people believe in the separation of the soul from the body.

Dark tourism and thanatourism are products of the circumstances and/or economic, social, political and technological factors nowadays, that can influence selection and interpretation of sites and events which later became tourism products. The main debate in the domain literature is focused on the question *what is important (?)* for dark tourism/thanatourism historically and functionally speaking (Wight, 2006). The level of darkness that can make dark tourism a historical phenomenon is still a debatable topic, agrees Wight (2006).

Two decades have passed since the two twin-concepts have been proposed (Light, 2017). Stone and Sharpley (2008) were among the first who noticed that dark tourism had caught the academics' attention, in spite of the long history and the recent increase in evidence about the visits to places related to death and sufferance. According to the previously mentioned authors, the commentators' origins and the academic interest for dark tourism may have emerged from the work of Tunbridge and Ashworth (1952).

On the other hand, Tunbridge and Ashworth (2017), whom Wight (2006) placed among the predecessors of this concept, said that the notion of dark tourism had been actually introduced by Lennon and Folley, in 2000, in their book *Dark Tourism. The Attraction of Death and Disaster.* The notion was applied to tourism sites and resources having bleak features with an eclectic variety of typological cases: massacres, assassination, disasters, accidents and other similar events. Although the book is one of the cornerstones within the field, it was also largely criticized. Lennon and Folley's research appeared while another researcher, Seaton (1996), was launching the concept of *thanatourism*, the word being related with Thanatos (Cismaru, 2011), the god who represented death in ancient Greece (Brown, 1960).

According to Light (2017), the interest for this kind of concepts has increased a lot since 2011. Dark tourism, both as an analytical instrument and as a potential tourism typology, has developed in high speed during the last two decades. Further research was due to curiosity related to tourism sites in and around Eastern Europe (Hooper, 2017). For instance, the two, concepts undoubtedly belong to the contemporary phenomenology which is postmodern according to some authors (Lennon & Foley, 2000, p. 3; Blom, 2000), but, considering the epistemological-diachronic line drawn by Light (2017), thanatourism seems to have deeper roots than the other concept.

Terminology

As for terminology, the field of dark tourism seems to be endless. Most of the terminology, which is various, functioning as an *umbrella* term (Light, 2017), is contextualized, such as: penal/prison tourism (Strange & Kempa, 2003); fright tourism (Bristow & Newman, 2005); genocide tourism (Beech, 2009); grief tourism (O'Neill, 2002; Trotta, 2006); disaster tourism (Van, Wallis, Docrat & De, 2010; Miller, 2008); pagan tourism (Laws, 2013); suicide tourism (Dyer, 2003); atomic tourism (Tufnell, 2012); conflict heritage tourism (Mansfeld & Korman, 2015); difficult heritage tourism (Logan & Reeves, 2011); and dystopian dark tourism (Podoshen, Venkatesh, Wallin, Andrzejewski & Jin, 2015).

Moreover, other terms have been associated with dark tourism, for example: favela tourism, poverty tourism, gothic tourism, trauma tourism, all of them referring to negative aspects of the life, the history and places that are visited.

On the other hand, from the thanatological point of view, this type of tourism has been given several names, which are rather semantic: thanatourism (Seaton, 1996; 1999; Dann & Seaton, 2001; Slade, 2003; Knudsen, 2011; Hartmann, 2014); morbid (Blom, 2000, 2007); black-spot (Rojek, 1993); and milking the macabre (Dann, 1998, p. 35).

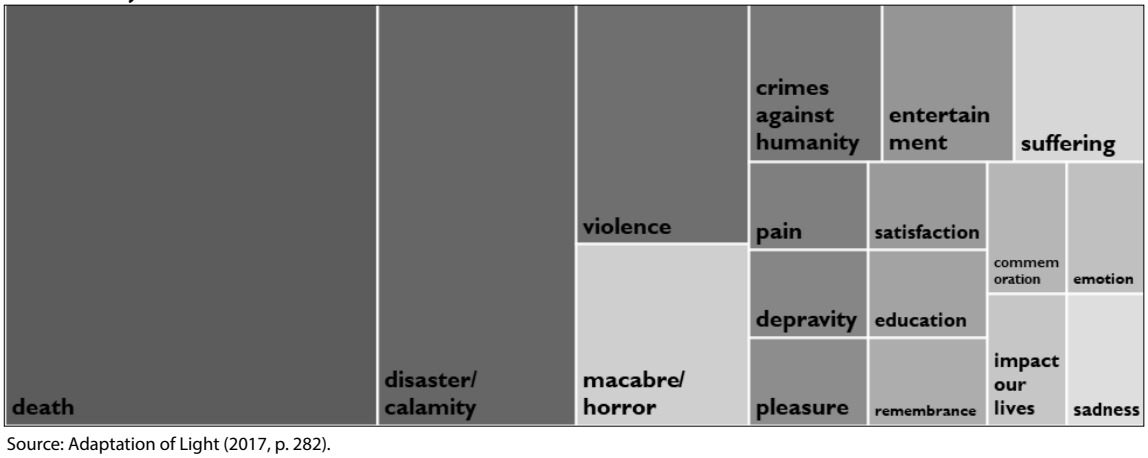
Dark tourism, the main conceptual terminology, has been strongly criticized. The fact that this tourism type is described as "dark" makes it different from "light". This has led to researchers' increased interest in a spectrum of dark tourism that is approached in detail in a separate section. It is well-known that mass-media – Straton (2016) called this activity "paid masochism" – described dark tourism as an abnormal, worrying activity and even a source of moral panic, not to mention authors like Sharpely and Stone (2009, p. 249) who considered that adding "dark" to "tourism" formed an intriguing, useless combination. Labeling certain dark sites like this has not been agreed by their management. As a result, this construction is transgressive, morally doubtable and even pathological, says Seaton (2012, p. 525). A detailed analysis of the morality of dark tourism is necessary, as we will notice.

Definitions: Conceptual convergences and divergences

The article *Guided by the Dark: from Thanatopsis to Thanatourism,* in which Seaton proposes the term of *thanatourism*, analyses the historical development of thanatological elements (*thanatopsis* – contemplation of death) in tourism, showing how dark tourism can be spotted and defined. Thus, Seaton (1996, p. 240) defines it more as a certain journey "to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death". The close connection with death, as the author tried to define thanatourism, proves that this concept is more restrictive than dark tourism.

According to Light (2017), there are several substantial differences between dark tourism and thanatourism. Dark tourism tends to be used as an umbrella term for any form of tourism that in one way or another is related to death, suffering, atrocities, tragedies or crimes, a concept that has its origins in the twentieth century. On the other hand, thanatourism is a more concise concept, which refers to travel practices motivated by the specific desire to meet death. However, it is almost impossible to analyse a concept without taking the other into account. The same author makes an accounting and classification, making a list of the most important definitions in the literature, concluding that they can be grouped into five categories depending on: (1) tourism practices, (2) tourism activity in certain types of places, (3) motivations, (4) experience and (5) patrimony. So, most of the definitions are contextual. Starting from Light's (2017) analysis, we drew a graph showing the frequency of the most common keywords in the definitions, and the results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The main keywords used in the literature to define dark tourism and thanatourism



Source: Adaptation of Light (2017, p. 282).

According to the figure above, dark tourism and thanatourism represent *the activity that makes the tourist face death (including crimes against humanity), disasters and violence, involving a larger or smaller dose of macabre, pain and suffering with an emotional impact on the lives of individuals, whether for recreational purposes or for commemoration and education.* Agreeing to the previous definition, Stone and Sharpley (2008) consider the consumption of dark tourism to be of great help to individuals as it causes them to face some issues of personal importance. The aspects of dark tourism as suggested by the mentioned authors show that:

- it is possible to bring death back into the public sphere and public discourse, functioning as a barrier that allows absent death to be present;
- may contribute to the social neutralization of death for the individual, implicitly or explicitly, reducing the potential of fear induced by the inevitability and certainty of death, thereby making it possible to acquire ontological security through a new *social institution* (in this case, dark tourism); and
- allows the reconstruction of a value system for the individual facing reflexivity, desacralization and institutional sequestration of death, making it possible to confront and, at the same time, contemplate "dead moments" from a certain perceptual distance (and a different environment).

The last aspect of dark tourism, the authors say, immunizes and reassures the individual that death and the macabre induced by it exist in reality, but this tourist social institution only induces the idea of death and macabre. Consequently, *dark tourism may have more to do with life and living, than death and dying*. For example, dark tourism in the Japanese space has an educational, commemorative and awareness-raising role in the sensitivity of peace-war relations (Yoshida, Bui & Lee, 2016) and less of leisure.

Classification and spectrum of dark tourism

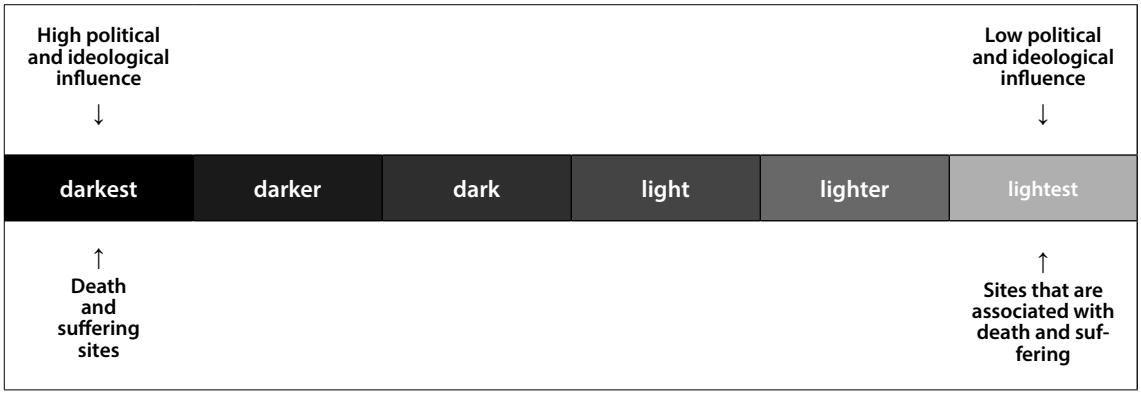
According to authenticity

Making a comparison to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, an institution that interprets and reproduces elements and events associated with death, disasters and deprivation, Miles (2002) appreciates that the Auschwitz museum is a place of death, disaster and deprivation, because some atrocities and macabre events happened there. Therefore, the latter place is more important than the former because it is authentic and therefore "much darker" (Miles, 2002, p. 1175). In this way, the author proposes to differentiate dark places according to their level of authenticity, arguing in favor of a value spectrum as dark, darker, darkest. Under certain circumstances, the high degree of political involvement in the design and interpretation of some sites dilutes authenticity (Shackley, 2001).

According to how macabre is perceived

While Miles proposed a differentiation of dark tourist sites according to a spectrum of authenticity, Stone (2006), by taking over and developing this idea, proposes a spectrum of six value groups (Figure 2). The degrees of darkness proposed by Stone focus on the perceived level of the macabre. The spectrum goes from the darkest to the lightest dark tourism product. The lightest dark tourism products are dominated by infrastructure especially designed for education or for commercial purposes. This second category includes the sites that are marked by a low political influence of presentation and interpretation are included.

Figure 2
Dark tourism spectrum according to Stone (2006, p. 151)



This typology should make it much easier to purchase a trip that involves visiting places marked by or associated with death or disasters. The same as Miles, Stone (2006) sets the essence of the spectrum and the degree of technical adaptation for tourism and recreation. Knowing these aspects, the tourist offer can be ranked according to the six nuances, and tourists can choose what to visit, depending on the level of interes in contact with death and suffering. Putting together those who want to visit the concentration camps together with those who want to experience "intense feelings" on Halloween, booking rooms at "Dracula Castle" Hotel or to make an itinerary starting from the famous Schindler's List (Dunkley, 2008) would be a mistake because "dark tourism products are multifaceted, complex in design and purpose, and diverse in nature; it is perhaps clear that the universal term 'dark' as applied to tourism is too broad and does not readily expose the multilayer of dark tourism supply". (Stone, 2006, p. 150)

Looking at the shades of dark tourism, based on factors such as product features, characteristics and perception, is a sign of prudence that we must take into account (Stone, 2006). The production of dark tourism is influenced by consumer preferences, which are often guided by mass-media and marketing campaigns commissioned by the supplier, and it is also subject to changes in the political and cultural climate. As geographers, anthropologists and historians can confirm, tourists themselves can be very different and complicated if we look at them as a group (Hooper, 2017). As a consequence, according to Rojek and Urry (1997), as new events (wars, terrorist attacks, dissolution of authoritarian and oppressive regimes) appear or, on the contrary, new "presentation cards" (cinematic, memories and other) that give new moral senses to macabre or dead sites are created, the nuances of darkness can change.

According to the quality/intensity of the experiences

The recommendations of Tunbridge and Ashworth (2017) say that the approach and classification of dark sites should be made taking into account the quality/intensity of the experiences. Contemporary analyses in the field emphasize, according to Wight (2006), the motivation and interpretation of tourists when visiting these places. Sites can have variable visitor intensity: light/dark, weak/strong, and duration is very difficult to quantify. Also, the response of tourists can also be varied. It may take the form of horror, disgust or an unusual fascination, eventually leading to the question: how can we classify our experiences? Consequently, because it is almost impossible to quantify and classify feelings, their intensity, and so on, Tunbridge and Ashworth (2017) argue that any tourist experience can be regarded as being darkened by a person at a time. Therefore, the two authors note, the problem is about the nuance of darkness, intensity and duration of experiences that can clarify the concept of dark tourism, otherwise it can be concluded that all tourism is somewhat dark.

Dark/thanatourism sites and the spectrum

A conclusion that bluntly affirms that tourism is dark is contradicted by Light's (2017) research. Following recent studies, which had as an explanatory tool the dark tourism and thanatourism, it draws up a long list of places that are the subject of visits to death, disasters and atrocities, and which does not involve, for example, amusement parks and art museums, to list only a few of the many cases, but to exemplify sites such as:

- the places associated with war/conflict (like battlefields and war cemeteries);
- Holocaust-related places (concentration camps, transit and memorials);
- incarceration/prisons (including detention centers and prisons);
- spaces marked by Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Cambodia end other);
- slavery-related spaces and slave-transatlantic trade (Western Africa, the United States and Europe);
- places currently marked by war/dangerous places;
- places affected by natural disasters;
- cemeteries/places of worship (not including cemeteries of war);
- places of individual or mass offenses (in the context of non-war);
- areas marked by communism in Central-Eastern Europe and the legacy of communism;
- Ground Zero, New York, the place of terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001;
- Chernobyl, the site of the nuclear disaster of April 26, 1986;
- places where famous personalities passed away;
- tours marked by ghosts or strange, unexplained phenomena;
- "Body World" exhibitions;
- places based on dark tourism as a means of recreation; and
- other places in the dark but complex tourism in their nature.

Including many of the above places as tourism offer and starting from the theoretical framework outlined in Figure *2*, Stone (2006) proposes to group the supply of dark tourism providers – explicitly recognizing that the typology has certain limitations – in seven classes:

- Dark Fun Factories, [*lightest*];
- Dark Exhibitions, [*lighter*];
- Dark Dungeons, [*light*];
- Dark Resting Places or cemeteries, [*dark, light*];
- Dark shrines, [*darker, dark*]. There are places where some personalities died (e.g. the place of the death of Princess Diana of Great Britain) and which are commodified. Places can be marked by formal or informal construction;
- Dark Conflict Sites, such as battlefields, [*darker*]; and
- Dark Camps of Genocide, [*darkest*].

Methodology

Wight (2006) notices that most of the studies that have been made so far are methodologically qualitative and based on the conceptual-sociological aspects. The most frequent qualitative methods are: interviews, the observation-interview mix, the interpretation of meaning, participant observation (Light, 2017). In addition, Wight (2006) notices that qualitative research belongs to the postmodern school and (to a small extent) to the Marxist one. On the other hand, quantitative research has been mainly based on questionnaires in order to obtain information. Occasionally, a few researchers have used other methods such as analysing the web content and travel blogs related to the topic.

A mix of qualitative instruments is used as the analytical method in this article. The analysis of the scientific literature has been the main instrument. As most of the scientific studies are case studies, I synthesized the theoretical aspects and the result is a theoretical matrix which will be more easily applicable to the future studies. The content of certain web-sites has also been analysed, especially in order to see which examples were provided when the two related concepts were used and which places are parts of the dark tourism according to visitors. Meanwhile, as the introduction shows it, auto-ethnography has also been useful to me as I have provided theoretical explanations and practical examples also taking into account my own experience. I filtered the information by making personal remarks while researching in order to provide a critical point of view regarding the sources I have analysed.

What motivates the tourists?

The most attractive sites when it comes to motivation are the authentic ones. Here we are dealing with the axis of the offer of dark tourism proposed by Stone (2006). Starting from the most authentic places (those in which death and suffering events occurred) wich are those darker, the axis moves to the light side of the spectrum. In this respect, Miles (2002) makes a comparison between the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the Holocaust Museum in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The first is a reproduction and has not been affected by the Holocaust, death and suffering, while the second is authentic, meaning a space marked by death and suffering.

Light's (2017) ample article on progress in the field of dark tourism and thanatourism proposes a long list and overwhelming diversity of reasons (*r*):

r1. the desire and opportunity for education, learning and understanding of what happened in the place visited;

r2. simple curiosity;

r3. linking visitors with the family legacy or personal connection with the place;

r4. the desire to see in order to believe, to understand better, or to connect with the place visited;

r5. the desire for recreation;

r6. pilgrimage;

r7. interest in history and/or culture;

r8. remembrance;

r9. feeling of moral duty, obligation, conscience;

r10. interest in death, morbid curiosity;

r11. visit as part of an organized itinerary;

r12. visiting a place related to national identity;

r13. visiting a place "not to be missed";

r14. the desire to honor personal ancestors;

r15. desire for contact and connection to death, black events and violence;

r16. recommendations;

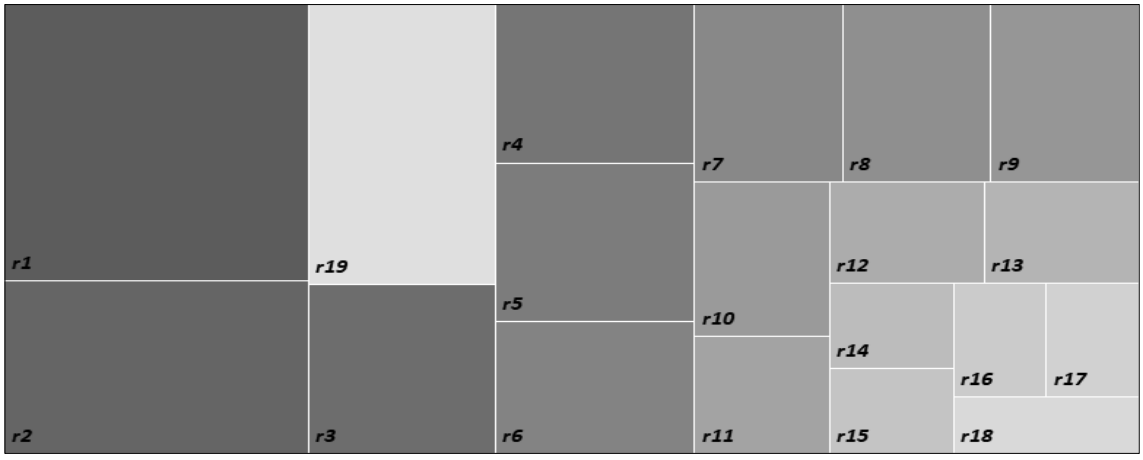
r17. seeing famous places associated with death;

r18. spending time with friends; and

r19. other.

Beyond the lack of synthesis and a clearer structure, the author concludes that the identification of visitors' intentions varies greatly, especially from the geographic point of view. For example, after referring to the article of the Japanese authors Yoshida, Bui and Lee (2016), he concludes that dark tourism and thanatourism are Western creations, perhaps also the source of the heterogeneous and spatially motivated reasons. But if we emphasize the list of motivations slightly more and engage them in the form of a figure, we see that, in fact, only a few are really important. The true dimension of motivation is reflected in Figure 3. This figure synthesizes the reasons outlined above and takes into account the frequency with which they were invoked in the specialty studies analysed by Light (2017). Among the motivations, two are individualized quite well: educational desire and opportunity and curiosity. Then there is a seven-reason group (*r3-r9*) that record a higher frequency, followed by the others (*r10-r19*) with an academic identification which is a little less relevant. Being a rather broad structure of motivation, it can be a useful methodological tool in analysing dark tourist sites.

Figure 3
The main reasons (r) for visiting places that are associated to death and suffering



Source: Adaptation of Light (2017, p. 286).

Debate regarding the ethics of dark tourism

A serious debate around dark tourism and thanatourism must refer to how ethical it is for tourism to benefit from death, suffering and macabre (Garcia, 2012). Other voices among researchers even raise the issue of accepting this form of tourism (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Clark, 2014). Another more specific ethical issue involves what Ashworth called "visitor anesthetics" (2004, p. 14): how repeated exposure of so many dark tourism visitors to ghastly history can lead to a loss of human sensitivity. By

increasing contact with suffering, visitors may consider past atrocities and suffering as acceptable and would no longer be shocked or nurture behaviors that reject suffering, those thymotic behaviors that in the past brought death and marked certain geographic areas (Fukuyama, 2006). Ashworth (2004), analysing the case of South African apartheid inheritance, concludes that such a paradigm can degenerate into a form of recreational tourism that will eventually lead to the appearance of inappropriate and unreasonable behavior for sites associated with death and suffering.

As far as sites are concerned, Wight (2006) describes them as cultural landscapes, whose management defines the context in which they are interpreted. Discourse and discursive constructions can influence and are influenced, respectively, by how dark sites or places are perceived, by the evolution of the images that define their identity, the quality of the elements authenticity and the comments made on them. Exposure techniques used in dark places are highly controversial to some traditionalists, who argue that the historical context is distorted, for example, by overloading the interpretation with information. Postmodernists, on the contrary, defend interactive experimentation and entertainment techniques. It has often been argued that the memory to which we entrust these dark tourism sites may be distorted or undermined by the cultural, social and political interpretation of death and tragedy.

Ethical criticism on dark tourism involves another aspect of the question whether or not to accept this allegedly shaped form of tourism. I refer to the existence of policies which, by their very nature, are linked to certain national projects to create a *collective memory* that targets certain sites of death and suffering. Memory and reminders are important issues that emerge from these sites (Knox, 2006). The national policy of dark tourism includes, among other things, two fundamental aspects: one relating to remembrance as a way of cohesion (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1952) and another which involves forgetting a bad stage in the history of a people (Light, 2017). Both forms can have both a positive and a disturbing impact on historical reality due to the commercialization of places of death and suffering because local or national politics can enhance some elements of the sites and dilute others. It is useful to recognize the need to forget these dark stages of history, but for building an alternative framework of understanding the selective messages presented by some death and suffering sites, it is necessary to move the debate beyond commodification and authenticity, more precisely, in the sphere of ethics. And there is a whole range of examples that could be subject to this bivalent type of ethical reasoning: the former concentration camps of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Gulag and communist prisons in Central Eastern Europe, Apartheid, the places marked by the toughest battles (if not all of them) of the two World Wars and many more.

Ethics, "contesting the existence of dark tourism" and "visitors' anesthetics" lead to packaging (Baillie, Chatzoglou & Taha, 2010) and banalization of sites and change the sense of reality of the places when they are introduced into the tourist circuit (Lennon & Foley, 2000). If the places had remained "pure" or "untouched", then their physical, social and moral sense would have been unchanged, but by transforming death and suffering into products and consumer goods, that is by commodification, they are banalized or, worse, they become historical fake (Hewison, 1987) or kitsch (Sturken, 2008). There is no doubt, according to Denham (2016) and his research on the consumption of criminality in the culture industry, that there is also a moral problem of selling death, since, in order to sell it to tourists, merchants appeal to the "selective memory" of individuals as a way of understanding what happened once.

Debates and controversies related to concept nature

The two concepts are not universally accepted because it can be noticed that literature is still quite eclectic and theoretically fragile. Studies such as that of Ryan (2014), referring to tourism activity on battlefields or Butler and Suntik (2017) regarding the link between tourism and war in general, try to avoid thanatourism and dark tourism as conceptual and analytical instruments. And, besides the two already mentioned works, there are others that similarly do not find the scientific utility of concepts. That is why Light (2017) believes that the two twinning concepts did *not* generate a single/exclusive study domain, thus representing only a possible means of understanding the places associated with death. Moreover, Logan and Reeves (2011) believe that the so-called places of suffering and shame, as emanations of condemned episodes in national or local history of societies, are an integral *part* of complicated patrimony and *not* dark tourism. According to most studies that appeal to this direction, complicated patrimony includes, among many others, destinations such as: Nanjing (China) Massacre Memorial, Hiroshima Memorial, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Cowra Japanese War Cemetery (Australia).

The approach of the framework concept is endorsed by cultural tourism, somehow *distinct* from heritage tourism after Lennon and Foley (2000). Briefly, dark tourism is related to practices and attitudes emanating from spaces and less of spaces in itself. The central argument for Light (2017) is that the two centuries of research in the field have failed to convincingly demonstrate that dark tourism and thanatourism *can be* identified as distinct *forms* of tourism. In many ways, the two concepts seem to be, with small differences, *forms of heritage* tourism. On the same line is Seaton (2001) who, unlike other authors, acknowledges that thanatourism *is not* an independent form of tourism, but varies according to motivation (individual or within a group) and subscribes to the general context represented by heritage tourism.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines heritage tourism as a breakthrough in natural history, the human heritage, the arts, the philosophy and institutions of a region or countries. By linking all the elements of the WTO definition, Timothy and Boyd (2009, p. 1) find that patrimony tourism involves elements such as:

- historical buildings and monuments;
- sites of past events such as battles;
- traditional landscapes and indigenous wildlife;
- language, literature, music and art;
- traditional events and folk practices; and
- traditional way of life, including food, drinks and sports (Swarbrooke, 1994, p. 222).

Tunbridge and Ashworth (1952), some of the fiercest opponents of the term "dark tourism," as a distinct form of tourism, embraced more the idea of *dissonant heritage*, which they defined as those tourism resources that leave different impressions to different groups. As for the examples, the authors mentioned tourism resources that referred to the inheritance of atrocities, most of wich occurred in the European space. The two authors also raised a moral dilemma, in this case whether this type of heritage deserves to be remembered or rather forgotten.

Conclusions

If death is the main element of support for the dark tourism foundation – as it is clearly understood from the definition section – then we should conclude that all sites assimilated to this tourism should

be called thanatourism. But if we do not restrict theoretical reasoning only to real death, that happened in a place that is visited today, but we extend it to the symbolic, imagined, interiorized or "lived" by inducing macabre feelings of fear and suffering, then what we have in front of our eyes when we visit a place that induces such feelings is nothing but dark tourism. This last aspect is the one which, beyond definitions, controversy, ethics and spectra, cannot be fully clarified, because the arguments of researchers, whether adherent to one thinking movement or another, are in most cases contextual and partially valid.

What most research (theoretical or empirical) lack, although voiced by its presence, is *symbolic death*. This should be seen as an extension of real death – even if it is often a human construction – and as an important tool for dark tourism because the darkness of tourism is mainly the sum of macabre, ludicrous feelings, fears and anxieties caused by visiting tourist sites. But such an approach ends in what Tunbridge and Ashworth (2017) considered to be the darkness of any form of tourism that, to a varying extent, could be felt by any tourist at any given time within a site. In this context, the question arises: isn't dark tourism, by its main aspect, the death (real and symbolic), a tool of tourism analysis and not a particular type of tourism?

Symbolic death brings with it the transposition of tourists in all sorts of contexts. Technical adaptations make it possible to experience symbolic death in the most diverse locations. For example, at the Waterloo 1815 Memorial, tourists can see how a guillotine made after and in accordance with those used for decapitations in the historical past, accompanied by a sharp sound that reproduces the sound of the fall of the lamella on the head of a person convicted to death, leaves in a basket the heads projected by a video projector of some characters who have found their end in this way and that generate the emotions of fear, horror, morbid or, on the contrary, entertainment. All these are ways in which a modern construction, through specific adaptations, transposes the tourist into a context of symbolic death. The interpretation, reproduction and policy of such spaces "speculate" death through commodification and deliver it to mass tourism, pursuing various purposes: educational, commemorative, remembering, recreational, all having a strong cultural note.

Almost all the places assimilated today to dark tourism have to do with heritage and culture. Those not yet assigned to either of these two forms of tourism will certainly be framed in the near future. Everything that can now be seen as a particular event (a crime, a disaster, a war, a haunted house or a bestseller's book referring to a specific geographic place) can be real tourist attractions and can generate an approach (cultural) with patrimonial finality. Let's not forget that this way some tourist sites were born, some even part of UNESCO's universal heritage. Let's take this case as an example: the Nazi concentration and extermination camps in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Prior to 1940, there was not even a minor interest in this geographic area. From a touristic point of view, Auschwitz-Birkenau does not exist. No one would have paid any money to see this place, because it represented nothing and had no symbolism. However, the nefarious thymos of the Nazi leadership, headed by Adolf Hitler, made this place famous throughout the world for the death sentence of thousands and hundreds of thousands of Jews, and today it is an indissoluble part of the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Holocaust can be considered, without hesitation, the emblem of dark tourism (Podoshen, Yan, Andrzejewski, Wallin & Venkatesh, 2018). Although it is not part of the universal heritage list, the place of death of Princess Diana of Great Britain and the Museum of Death in Moscow subscribe to the extensive typology of cultural and patrimonial tourism. The latter example merely presents a subjective, stylized and commodified form of symbolic death to visitors.

The usefulness of this analytical tool is not the ultimate assertion of a distinct form of tourism - as we have already seen, it is a sign of prudence to see the nuances of dark tourism - but to adapt existing

and future sites to the needs and motivations of tourists. As a consequence and perhaps the most important aspect of the studies of the last two centuries is the creation of a spectrum, a classification of sites such as those proposed by Miles (2002) and Stone (2006), starting from the authenticity and perception of the macabre, which we would call *intensity degrees* of dark tourism. The role of these degrees is to provide a more accurate description, classification and grouping of the tourist offer in order to increase the number of tourists.

The final conclusion is that dark tourism includes thanatourism, but it does *not* create a distinct, clearly defined form of tourism. Pilgrimages, identified as the oldest form of dark tourism or thanatourism, had, and some of them still have, totally different motivations and generating factors, and less the desire to spend free time in a sense of relaxation. The main motivation has a religious nature, such as pilgrimages to Mecca. For Muslims, pilgrimages to the holy places of Islam are a duty, each Muslim being "forced" to go through at least one pilgrimage in his life. Being a creation of the contemporary world, dark tourism is a new *tool* for understanding the trend and diversification of current tourist flows that most often involve cultural, educational, commemorative aspects of remembering and immunizing visitors against the inevitable future tragedy. With death and suffering transposed into tourism symbolism, the society of the future has to operate in different nuances/spectra to increase its income and to increase its life standard at least. Only economic well-being can blur the negative tendency of thymos to create events related to death and suffering, and at the same time, the development of dark tourism with a foundation in real death (and suffering).

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