Open Access Library Journal
2026, Volume 13, e16153
ISSN Online: 2333-9721
ISSN Print: 2333-9705

Ethical Issues in Dark Tourism: Between Commemoration, Education and Commercialization

Ina Nikolic

Department of Tourism, University of Applied Sciences Aspira, Split, Croatia
Email: ina.90.nikolic@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Nikolic, I. (2026) Ethical Issues in Dark Tourism: Between Commemoration, Education and Commercialization. *Open Access Library Journal*, **13**: e16153.
https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1116153

Received: October 15, 2026
Accepted: November 21, 2026
Published: November 24, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Open Access

Abstract

In recent decades, dark tourism has become an increasingly prominent subject of interest among both tourists and researchers. However, its ethical dimension continues to raise numerous questions. This paper analyzes the key ethical challenges associated with the development and tourism valorization of dark tourism sites, with particular emphasis on commemoration and the preservation of memory, the commercialization of death and suffering, and tourist behavior. Particular attention is given to the boundary between legitimate tourist interest in sites of tragedy and their inappropriate commercialization, as well as to the role of tourism in preserving the dignity of victims and historical memory. The paper also examines the diverse motivations and experiences of visitors, as visiting a site associated with death does not necessarily imply an interest in death or suffering. It further considers the potential of dark tourism to contribute to education, the preservation of collective memory and the economic development of local communities, while also recognizing the ethical risks arising from the commercialization of tragedies and inappropriate visitor behavior. The paper is based on a narrative review and analysis of relevant scholarly literature, through which key insights into the ethical aspects of dark tourism are synthesized. The aim of this paper is to identify and critically examine the key ethical challenges associated with dark tourism and to offer a philosophical and ethical reflection on the ethical legitimacy of developing and promoting tourism at sites associated with death, suffering and tragedy.

Subject Areas

Tourism, Ethics

Keywords

Dark Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Ethics, Commemoration, Commercialization of Death, Tourist Behavior, Tourism Valorization

1. Introduction

Over time, scholarly and practical interest in the tourism potential of sites associated with death, tragedy, crime and human suffering has continued to grow. Numerous studies confirm visitors' growing interest in such sites, making dark tourism an increasingly significant subject of academic interest [1] [2]. Despite the growing number of studies, dark tourism remains a complex and insufficiently explained sociological phenomenon, particularly when it comes to understanding visitors' motives, their expectations and the experiences they seek to achieve by visiting such sites [2]. The reasons why tourists visit places associated with death and tragedy are not uniform. While some visitors are drawn by the historical and educational aspects of such sites, others may be motivated by a desire to preserve memories, a personal connection to the event, curiosity or other forms of interest. Consequently, the experiences and impressions gained at such sites are highly diverse, depending on the individual motivations, expectations and perceptions of the visitors.

It is precisely the heterogeneity of motives and experiences that raises the question of the ethics of dark tourism. Regardless of visitors' motivations, the preservation of victims' dignity, respect for the character and significance of the site, and a responsible approach to the historical events that have shaped its past should remain paramount. This raises the question of the boundary between legitimate tourist interest in historical tragedies and their transformation into objects of tourist consumption. Particular concern exists regarding the morality of the tourist valorization and marketing of sites associated with death and tragedy, especially when such sites are presented and offered as part of the tourist offer [3]. In this context, dark tourism raises a range of ethical questions that extend beyond the conventional focus on economic benefits and tourist consumption. The question is no longer simply whether a particular site can attract visitors, but also how it should be interpreted, promoted and visited, and where the boundary is between commemoration and the commercialization of suffering.

Against this background, this paper examines the key ethical challenges associated with dark tourism, with particular emphasis on commemoration and the preservation of memory, the commercialization of death and suffering, and tourist behavior. The aim of the paper is to critically examine the existing scholarly literature on the ethical dimensions of dark tourism and to provide a philosophical and ethical reflection on its role in shaping tourist offerings and the social acceptability of this form of tourism. Particular attention is given to the question of how the touristic valorization of sites associated with death and tragedy can be

reconciled with respect for victims, the preservation of human dignity and responsible visitor behavior.

The methodological approach adopted in this paper is based on a narrative review and analysis of relevant scholarly literature on dark tourism and its ethical dimensions. The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar and Hrčak, with the search terms *dark tourism*, *dark tourism ethics* and *tourist behavior*. The selection of publications was based on their relevance to the research topic, with particular emphasis on works addressing ethical issues in dark tourism and contributing to the understanding of the three areas examined. Only publications written in English and Croatian were considered. The selected literature was subsequently reviewed and compared to identify ethical concerns and areas of debate. Based on this analysis, the identified concerns were grouped into three broader themes—commemoration and the preservation of memory, the commercialization of death and suffering, and tourist behavior. These themes provide the basis for the subsequent analysis.

2. The Concept and Characteristics of Dark Tourism

Tourism associated with death, suffering and tragedy appears in the academic literature under various terms including *black spots tourism*, *thanatourism*, and *morbid tourism*. However, the term *dark tourism*, popularized by [4], is the most commonly used. Despite its widespread use, there is still no single, universally accepted definition of dark tourism in the academic literature. This is largely due to the fact that different authors conceptualize dark tourism from different perspectives. Some define it primarily in terms of the characteristics of the tourist sites themselves, others focus on tourists' motivations, while a third approach seeks to integrate the characteristics of the sites with visitors' experiences and motivations.

According to the supply perspective, dark tourism primarily refers to visits to sites associated with death, suffering, disasters, wars, violence or other tragic events [2] [5]. This approach focuses on the characteristics of the tourist site itself, regardless of the reasons why individual tourists choose to visit it. Such sites may include memorial centers, former battlefields, places connected with genocide, concentration camps or locations of major disasters. This approach enables a broad examination of different sites associated with death, but it also has certain limitations. Namely, the fact that a site is associated with death does not necessarily mean that death itself is what attracts every visitor. Tourists may visit such sites because of an interest in history, cultural heritage or education, without having a particular interest in death and suffering.

In contrast to the supply perspective, the demand perspective places greater emphasis on tourists' motivations. Reference [6] associates dark tourism with travel that is wholly or partially motivated by a desire for an actual or symbolic encounter with death. From this perspective, the key question is not merely what characterizes a particular site, but why tourists choose to visit it. Motivations may

include an interest in death, a desire to confront mortality, a fascination with tragic events or a need to understand experiences associated with death and suffering. However, this approach also has certain limitations, as it may imply that all visitors to sites associated with death have some degree of interest in death itself. Research indicates that this is not always the case. Tourists may visit such sites because of historical or cultural interest, educational purposes, remembrance or simply because a particular site is regarded as an important tourist attraction that should be visited.

Due to the limitations of the aforementioned approaches, an integrated supply-demand perspective has been developed, which simultaneously takes into account the characteristics of the tourist site as well as tourists' motivations and experiences. This approach is based on the assumption that dark tourism cannot be fully understood solely by examining the characteristics of a site or by analyzing visitors' motivations. Rather, it is necessary to consider the relationship between the two, particularly how the characteristics of a particular site shape tourists' experiences and how tourists perceive and interpret that site. Reference [7] explains this relationship as spectrum of different "shades" of dark tourism, distinguished by the extent to which both sites and tourists are associated with an interest in death.

The contribution of this approach is important for understanding the fact that not all tourists who visit sites associated with death can necessarily be considered dark tourists. Reference [8] emphasize the importance of the perception of a site, arguing that tourists must perceive a particular place as "dark" for their visit to be associated with dark tourism motives. In other words, the objective characteristics of a site alone are insufficient to determine the nature of the tourist experience. If a tourist is unaware of a site's association with death or visits it for entirely different reasons, their experience cannot necessarily be considered a dark tourism experience.

This leads to the important conclusion that dark tourism should not be viewed exclusively through the characteristics of tourist sites. Although a particular place may be objectively associated with death, the ways in which tourists perceive it and the motives underlying their visits may differ considerably. Therefore, understanding dark tourism requires consideration not only of the destination itself but also of tourists' subjective perceptions, motivations, and experiences. Such an approach enables a more precise distinction between tourists who are genuinely motivated by elements of death and tragedy and those who visit the same site primarily for historical, educational, cultural or other reasons.

3. Ethical Issues in Dark Tourism

In order to examine ethical issues in dark tourism, it is first necessary to define the concept of ethics and the scope of its inquiry. Ethics is a branch of philosophy concerned with the study of human action in terms of its moral characteristics, seeking to establish criteria by which particular action can be evaluated as good or bad, or as right or wrong. In the broadest sense, ethics concerns the human

endeavor to distinguish between good and evil [9]. However, not every human action is subject to ethical evaluation. Ethics primarily concerns actions that have moral relevance, that is, actions in relation to which questions of responsibility, rightness or wrongness can be raised. For example, stealing another person's property constitutes a morally relevant act because it involves questions of rights, responsibility and harm to another person, whereas a physiological act such as yawning is not, in itself, subject to moral evaluation.

In this context, ethical reflection becomes increasingly significant in situations involving conflicts between different moral requirements and values. Such situations can be described as ethical dilemmas, which arise when an individual or group is faced with different courses of action, each of which entails certain dilemmas and potential consequences [10]. An ethical dilemma therefore arises when it is not straightforward to determine what is right and what is wrong or when decision-making requires consideration of different values and interests.

Viewing tourism through an ethical perspective is especially significant in the context of dark tourism, as this form of tourism is directly associated with death, suffering, tragedy, violence and other traumatic events. The fundamental ethical question that arises is whether it is morally acceptable to develop, promote and commercially valorize sites associated with death and human suffering [4]. At first glance, it might be concluded that such forms of tourism are ethically problematic, particularly when suffering and death are transformed into objects of tourist consumption. However, such a conclusion would be too simplistic, as dark tourism represents a complex and multidimensional phenomenon in which the same site may simultaneously serve memorial, educational, cultural, social and tourism-related functions [11]-[13].

Precisely because of this complexity, an ethical examination of dark tourism cannot focus solely on whether a particular site is associated with death. It must also take into account how the site is presented, the purpose of its tourism-related valorization and the motivations and experiences of the visitors themselves. In this context, an integrated approach to dark tourism is very important, as it simultaneously considers the characteristics of the tourist site and the motivations, perceptions and experiences of tourists. Such an approach makes it possible to distinguish between the objective nature of a site and the way in which an individual visitor perceives it and the reasons for which they choose to visit it.

By examining the relationship between tourism supply and visitor experience, a framework emerges for considering the key ethical issues associated with dark tourism. These include the boundary between commemoration and the commercialization of death and suffering, the preservation of victims' dignity and the responsibility and behavior of tourists themselves. Therefore, an ethical examination of dark tourism does not simply involve determining whether this form of tourism is "good" or "bad", but rather requires critical consideration of the ways in which death, suffering and memory are incorporated into tourist offer and of the consequences that such practices may have for victims, local communities and

visitors.

To assess the ethical legitimacy of tourism development at sites associated with death, suffering and tragedy, several fundamental ethical principles must be considered. These include respect for human dignity, respect for memory and historical truth, non-exploitation of human suffering, educational and social responsibility, and respectful visitor conduct. Together, these principles provide a basis for evaluating whether tourism activities preserve the commemorative and educational significance of such sites or risk undermining it through excessive commercialization, inappropriate representation or disrespectful visitor behavior. Accordingly, tourism development may be considered ethically legitimate when it respects victims and affected communities, preserves the integrity of historical memory, contributes to education and public awareness, and ensures that commercial interests do not take precedence over the dignity of victims and the significance of the events being commemorated.

3.1. Commemoration and the Preservation of Memory

The way in which the consequences of tragic events are presented represents one of the fundamental ethical issues in contemporary discussions of dark tourism. Although such disturbing representations are primarily intended to raise visitors' awareness of the scale and severity of the crimes committed, in practice there is an ongoing risk that such content may provoke a morbid fascination with real-life tragedies. This tension raises a key question—what feelings does a visit to a dark tourism site actually evoke? Does direct exposure to death, tragedy and violence shock visitors or, conversely, does it desensitize them and lead them to perceive death as something normal or even acceptable [14]? Despite these concerns, dark tourism can and should be ethically grounded when its focus is placed on responsible commemoration and the critical preservation of historical memory.

Evidence supporting the ethical viability of such practices can be found in the work of memorial institutions such as the German Historical Museum (German: *Deutsches Historisches Museum—DHM*) in Berlin, which addresses difficult historical subjects with respect and sensitivity [15]. The purpose of such sites is to educate visitors and provide them with a space for dignified remembrance, presenting the political and social context of tragedies openly, without glamorization and without any intention of providing entertainment or commercial sensationalism [15]. In this way, dark tourism sites can fulfill multiple social functions. They can contribute to documenting and preserving historical truth, provide spaces for healing and serve as enduring symbols of recognition and moral reparation for victims [16].

Furthermore, such sites may serve as important educational tools for future generations and can make a significant contribution to the socioeconomic development of local communities. Through visits to sites of suffering, historical events cease to be merely theoretical concepts and can substantially enrich educational curriculum [17], while also fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of

the values of peace and harmony [18]. Dark tourism can therefore play an important role as a journey through history that sustains and revitalizes collective memory of past events that remain relevant to contemporary society [19].

The distinctiveness of dark tourism in relation to other forms of tourism should be reflected in the nature and manner of the emotions it evokes. The primary objective of interpretation should be to foster empathy and a positive connection with the site visited, rather than to encourage destructive emotions such as revenge, retaliation or fear, which could undermine the peace and harmony of a community [20]. The commemoration of violence can also have a profound psychological significance for individuals. It can serve as a means of confronting loss, contribute to emotional reflection and support processes of emotional healing. This can be clearly observed in cemeteries and spontaneously established memorials at sites of violent deaths [21].

At its deepest level, visiting dark tourism sites has transformative potential. It sometimes serves as a powerful reminder of human mortality and offers moral guidance on how individuals might live and conduct themselves in their own lives [14]. By providing a safe space for preserving even the most traumatic memories, these sites can enable visitors to establish direct connections between historical suffering and contemporary human rights, thereby contributing to a more socially responsible and informed public. Concepts such as war, suffering and loss often remain abstract until they are materialized through an authentic commemorative space, which can serve as a catalyst for dialogue and contribute to reconciliation under certain conditions.

To preserve this ethical purpose, the management of memorial sites requires a continuous balancing of the interests and perspectives of all stakeholders. These include local communities, victims' families, experts and visitors, with the aim of avoiding moral conflicts [22]. The representation of death and tragedy must balance historical accuracy with the needs and sensitivities of visitors, ensuring that remembrance remains dignified, ethically guided and consistently oriented toward the prevention of future atrocities.

3.2. The Commercialization of Death and Suffering

One of the most prominent and complex ethical challenges facing dark tourism is the commercialization of genuine human suffering and historical injustices [23]. When tragic events are incorporated into tourism discourse, there is a risk that authentic pain and atrocities may be transformed into forms of entertainment and spectacle intended for superficial consumption, stripped of a deeper understanding of their historical and social context. Reference [4] as well as [24], have emphasized in their analyses that the commercial exploitation of tragic events represents a fundamental problem within this form of tourism, as such processes directly transform the memory of victims and their suffering into profit-oriented products. This tendency is further reinforced by contemporary media, which frequently exploits death as a spectacle and a mechanism for increasing sales in the

broader market [25].

The problem of commercializing death and suffering becomes particularly pronounced when the management of sites and the development of tourist offer are undertaken by private, exclusively profit-oriented entities [26]. Driven primarily by the pursuit of financial gain, such actors may compromise the reverence and dignity owed to victims, displacing the educational, memorial and broader social functions of sites of suffering in favor of sensationalism. The risk of commercialization arises when a site is deliberately reframed through the lens of entertainment and leisure in an effort to attract the widest possible range of visitors [14]. However, this practice should be approached with nuance and clear distinctions. According to [14] typology, an emphasis on entertainment is to some extent present within the sphere of "lighter dark tourism", which encompasses sites that are only indirectly associated with tragedies, whereas "darker dark tourism", which involves genuine and authentic sites of suffering, generally rejects and avoids such forms of promotion in order to preserve the necessary level of ethical rigor.

It is within this space between these two approaches that a fundamental interpretive and ethical dilemma emerges—should the development of tourist offer prioritize historical authenticity and their educational role or should it accommodate commercial success through elements of entertainment and sensationalism. The way in which certain tourism packages are advertised and marketed directly influences and shapes visitors' patterns of behavior. As reference [22] cautions, the commercialization of tragedy can often result in the trivialization of the past, as illustrated by tourist tours that transform horrific events into "ghost" stories and forms of trivial entertainment. A similar form of ethical degradation can be observed in the uncritical sale of souvenirs at sites of death, through which suffering is reduced, both materially and symbolically, to a mere consumer commodity [27]. For this reason, it is crucial to avoid promotional strategies centered on entertainment, as they can directly undermine the appropriate attitude and respect that visitors owe to such sites.

However, despite the risks of excessive exploitation, responsibly managed dark tourism can generate significant and legitimate benefits for local communities. These include generating revenue that supports the maintenance and physical preservation of sensitive sites and authentic artifacts, as well as providing survivors and witnesses with a dignified space in which to articulate and share their own testimonies [28]. The key to achieving an ethical balance lies in distinguishing legitimate economic sustainability from vulgar exploitation. The primary purpose of managing such sites should not be to generate profit through sensationalism, but rather to provide a humane and educational experience that enables visitors to understand the scale and consequences of historical catastrophes while preserving the dignity of those whose fate is being commemorated.

3.3. Tourist Behavior

When considering visitors behavior in the context of dark tourism, one of the key ethical issues concerns their attitude toward the solemnity, symbolism and rever-

ence associated with such sites. Since these places are not ordinary tourist attractions but spaces of remembrance and commemoration of victims, visitors may find themselves in a moral conflict when they fail to recognize or disregard the gravity of the historical events associated with a particular site. Instead of silence, dignified reflection and respectful communication, some sites may be characterized by loud conversations, laughter or patterns of behavior typically associated with mass tourism [26]. Such a discrepancy primarily stems from differences in visitors' motivations. While some visitors arrive with a genuine desire to learn and pay tribute to the victims, others may be driven primarily by sensationalism, superficial curiosity or the pursuit of content for social media [29].

Nevertheless, the boundary between appropriate interest and unacceptable behavior is frequently crossed, resulting in incidents that justifiably provoke public and media condemnation. Reference [22] draws attention to a range of such transgressions at specific dark tourism sites, ranging from inappropriate treatment of human remains at the Trunyan cemetery in Bali, through banal and inappropriate posing on the railway tracks at Auschwitz, to the inscription of graffiti on religious and memorial sites. A similar problem can be observed in the way visitors engage with sensitive historical material. For example, in the context of exhibitions depicting Mesoamerican sacrificial rituals, it is considered unethical to imitate the role of a victim on sacrificial altars or to handle ritual knives without authorization for the purpose of taking photographs [22]. By contrast, when such material is presented within a museum's exhibition context that educates the public about the complexity of ancient belief systems, the site retains its dignity, while the visit acquires both moral and educational value.

However, unacceptable tourist behavior is not confined exclusively to dark tourism sites, but also regularly occurs at cultural heritage sites, where irresponsible individuals carve their initials into monuments or damage historical artifacts [14]. For this reason, moral principles and personal responsibility should not cease to apply outside everyday life, but should be consistently upheld in spaces of leisure and travel as well [30]. In shaping such expectations, intermediaries such as the media, the internet, tour guides and travel agencies play a crucial role. They directly influence visitors' perceptions and shape the agenda of their visits and should therefore actively educate visitors about appropriate codes of conduct and the boundaries of acceptable behavior [30].

To prevent desensitization and ensure that memorial sites are approached with due respect for victims and their suffering, visitors should be adequately prepared to understand the historical significance and ethical implications of their visit. As social pressures and the behavior of others may influence visitors' judgment on site, visiting a place marked by tragedy requires prior reflection on its historical significance and an awareness of the potential emotional impact of the experience [15]. Responsible visitation requires strict compliance with local regulations, respect for photography restrictions, and the avoidance of inappropriate gestures or conduct. Visitors must also refrain from walking on graves, damaging monu-

ments, or entering protected areas without authorization. In this regard, [31] proposes a model of responsible visitation to dark tourism sites based on the "3 A" principle: acknowledging historical significance, developing ethical awareness and acting responsibly. Only through such a thoughtful and disciplined approach can visitors overcome patterns of uncritical consumerism and approach sites of suffering with the reverence necessary to preserve the memory of the victims.

4. Discussion

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the ethical complexity of dark tourism unfolds across three interrelated dimensions—the practice of commemoration and the preservation of memory, the risks associated with the commercialization and exploitation of human suffering, and the problem of inappropriate visitor behavior. Although the risks of trivializing the past, violating human dignity and resorting to sensationalism are real, they do not imply that this form of tourism is inherently morally unacceptable. On the contrary, when grounded in clear principles of responsibility, reverence and respect for human dignity, dark tourism can provide a space for authentic education, commemoration and social solidarity. In this regard, visits to sites of tragedy can also serve as an important psychological means through which individuals confront death, loss and difficult life experiences [32].

In addition to attracting millions of visitors, responsibly managed dark tourism can generate tangible benefits for various stakeholders, with recent research emphasizing its positive effects on local communities [33] [34]. These studies suggest that dark tourism can contribute significantly to local economic development by attracting visitors, which generates revenue, creates job opportunities and promotes infrastructure development. However, to ensure that these benefits are sustainable and reflect local needs and interests, tourism development should also involve consultation with local communities. This is particularly important in areas affected by tragedy, where tourism development may serve not only as a source of economic recovery but also as a means of supporting broader community revitalization. In a world increasingly affected by tragic events, the touristic valorization of affected sites can represent a crucial precondition for recovery for some communities, restoring hope while generating the income necessary to rebuild livelihoods in the affected area. A compelling example of such socioeconomic and emotional revitalization was documented in Japan following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. The development of a new form of tourism enabled local residents to establish tourism services and retail businesses, thereby generating much-needed income. The increased interest of visitors significantly helped the community cope with the consequences of the disaster, rebuild a sense of solidarity and restore its attachment to the affected area [35].

To preserve the ethical foundations of such practices, guided tours, interpretive materials and contemporary multimedia content must be designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of historical trage-

dies. Technology must likewise be employed with the utmost responsibility in order to prevent the genuine suffering of victims from being transformed into an aesthetic spectacle or superficial attraction. In an effort to prevent moral conflicts between visitors and local communities, [25] propose the application of two key planning models in dark tourism. The first is spatial separation, which involves the precise zoning of sites in order to establish a clear physical and functional boundary between tourist flows and the everyday lives of local residents. This approach allows visitors to access designated commemorative or educational areas while simultaneously protecting the privacy, peace and dignity of survivors and victims' families. The second is temporal separation, according to which a site should not be opened to commercial or tourism activities immediately following a disaster. Sufficient time should be allowed to elapse after a tragedy so that the affected community can undergo the processes of mourning and emotional recovery without being subjected to external pressure or public scrutiny. The combination of these two models can establish the necessary balance for keeping memorial spaces accessible for public education and commemoration while safeguarding the security and dignity of those who have directly experienced the tragedy.

Furthermore, the material and managerial dimensions of a site must consistently reflect its commemorative purpose. As reference [26] notes, the sale of souvenirs and the creation of attractions that trivialize suffering are fundamentally incompatible with the moral character of memorial sites. In cases where admission fees are charged, all revenue generated should be transparently reinvested in physical maintenance, restoration, archival research and the implementation of educational programs [26]. Visitor numbers should also be regulated and, where necessary, limited in order to preserve an atmosphere conducive to dignified reflection. Although visitors generally do not intend to act disrespectfully, it is essential that clear and specific codes of conduct be prominently communicated at the entrance, while photography should also be appropriately regulated and restricted where necessary [26].

Ultimately, it should be emphasized that commemorating tragic past events and human suffering can have a profound educational and memorial impact, evoking powerful and lasting emotional responses that may help prevent collective forgetting [21]. Its primary value lies in transmitting historical lessons that remain relevant to the present and future, thereby suggesting that memorial sites may serve as a safeguard against forgetting and contribute to fostering social awareness of the need to prevent similar atrocities from recurring [21]. Visits to sites marked by conflict, war or disaster inevitably raise difficult moral questions. When guided by reverence, empathy and ethical responsibility, they may provide future generations with valuable opportunity to learn from the past and contribute to the development of a culture of peace and tolerance. However, these positive outcomes should not be considered automatic or universal. For some visitors, notably those personally affected by the events being commemorated, such visits may evoke dis-

tress, grief or traumatic memories. Furthermore, memorial sites may reflect disputed interpretations of the past, potentially reinforcing existing disagreements rather than fostering reconciliation.

Nevertheless, the findings and recommendations presented in this paper should be considered in light of certain limitations. The analyses is based on a narrative review of selected scholarly publications retrieved through Google Scholar and Hrčak and are limited to works published in English and Croatian languages. Consequently, relevant perspectives from other languages, databases and cultural contexts may not be fully represented. Furthermore, ethical expectations cannot be applied uniformly to all dark tourism sites as atrocity memorials, disaster sites and entertainment-oriented attractions differ in their purposes, historical significance and relationships with victims and local communities. For this reason, expectations of silence and solemnity may be particularly appropriate at sites dedicated to commemoration but should not necessarily be regarded as universal requirements across all dark tourism settings. Appropriate visitor behavior and ethical standard should instead be considered in relation to the specific nature and purpose of each site, as well as its cultural and social context.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the ethical controversies surrounding dark tourism demonstrates that it is a highly complex phenomenon that can nevertheless be considered morally justifiable, provided that it is managed thoughtfully, responsibly and with profound respect for the historical context. When discussing its ethical dilemmas, it is important to emphasize that dark tourism is not the only form of tourism that raises moral concerns. The tourism sector as a whole has faced ethical challenges for decades, including environmental degradation, pollution, the depletion of natural resources and economic imperialism. In this context, the widespread assumption that visitors to dark tourism sites are merely superficial seekers of sensational experiences, uninformed consumers of inauthenticity or individuals inclined toward disrespect is increasingly challenged within academic discourse. On the contrary, research indicates that visitors to such sites are often deeply intellectually and emotionally engaged with the history and tragic context of the places they visit [14]. Nevertheless, the literature still reveals a notable lack of empirical research capable of providing a more detailed understanding of visitors' actual motivations and experiences in situ [14] [33].

Ultimately, dark tourism is neither a flawless practice nor one entirely free from the risks of trivialization and the violation of reverence. However, it is neither as negative nor as morally problematic as it is often portrayed in public discourse. Its true value lies in its potential to preserve collective memory, transmit historical lessons and foster social empathy. Maintaining an ethical balance is ultimately a shared responsibility. Site managers and tour organizers are responsible for ensuring that sites are interpreted in a dignified, value-oriented and non-sensationalist manner. Visitors, on the other hand, are responsible for their own conduct,

compliance with regulations and cultivation of genuine reverence for the victims. Only through such mutual responsibility can dark tourism realize its full humanistic and educational potential.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

[1] Logan, W. and Reeves, K. (2009) Introduction: Remembering Places of Pain and Shame. In: Logan, W. and Reeves, K., Eds., *Places of Pain and Shame*: *Dealing with* '*Difficult Past*', Routledge, 1-14.

[2] Stone, P. and Sharpley, R. (2008) Consuming Dark Tourism: A Thanatological Perspective. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **35**, 574-595. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2008.02.003

[3] Stone, P.R. (2009) Dark Tourism: Morality and New Moral Spaces. In: Sharpley, R. and Stone, P., Ed., *The Darker Side of Travel*, Multilingual Matters, 56-72. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.30945684.7

[4] Lennon, J.J. and Foley, M. (2000) Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster. Continuum.

[5] Seaton, A.V. and Lennon, J.J. (2004) Thanatourism in the Early 21st Century: Moral Panics, Ulterior Motives and Alterior Desires. In: Singh, T.V., Ed., *New Horizons in Tourism*: *Strange Experiences and Stranger Practices*, CABI Publishing, 63-82. https://doi.org/10.1079/9780851998633.0063

[6] Seaton, A.V. (1996) Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, **2**, 234-244. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527259608722178

[7] Sharpley, R. (2005) Travels to the Edge of Darkness: Towards a Typology of "Dark Tourism". In: Ryan, C., Page, S. and Aicken, M. Eds., *Taking Tourism to the Limits*, Elsevier, 215-226. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-044644-8.50023-0

[8] Smith, N. and Croy, W.G. (2005) Presentation of Dark Tourism: Te Wairoa, the Buried Village. In: Ryan, C., Page, S. and Aicken, M. Eds., *Taking Tourism to the Limits*, Elsevier, 199-213. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-044644-8.50022-9

[9] Mladić, D. (2009) Etika, In: Krkač, K. Ed., *Uvod u Filozofiju*, MATE, 217-230.

[10] McConnell, T. (2022) Moral Dilemmas. In: Zalta, E.N. and Nodelman, U., Eds., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 ed.), Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2-3. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/moral-dilemmas/

[11] Farmaki, A. (2013) Dark Tourism Revisited: A Supply/Demand Conceptualisation. *International Journal of Culture*, *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, **7**, 281-292. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijcthr-05-2012-0030

[12] Kuznik, L. (2018) Fifty Shades of Dark Stories. In: Mehdi Khosrow-Pour, D.B.A. Ed., *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology*, *Fourth Edition*, IGI Global, 4077-4087. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-2255-3.ch353

[13] Magano, J., Fraiz-Brea, J.A. and Leite, Â. (2022) Dark Tourists: Profile, Practices, Motivations and Wellbeing. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, **19**, Article 12100. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191912100

[14] Light, D. (2017) Progress in Dark Tourism and Thanatourism Research: An Uneasy Relationship with Heritage Tourism. *Tourism Management*, **61**, 275-301. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.01.011

[15] Russell, C. (2024) What Is Dark Tourism and Can It Ever Be Ethical? The Travel Psychologist. https://thetravelpsychologist.co.uk/what-is-dark-tourism-and-can-it-ever-be-ethical/

[16] Stavros, J. (2024) 'Dark Tourism' Appeals to Travelers Captivated by Death. Wired. https://www.wired.com/story/travel-dark-tourism/

[17] Israfilova, F. and Khoo-Lattimore, C. (2019) Sad and Violent but I Enjoy It: Children's Engagement with Dark Tourism as an Educational Tool. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, **19**, 478-487. https://doi.org/10.1177/1467358418782736

[18] Gibson, D., Yai, E. and Pratt, S. (2022) Journeying into the Past to Discover the Potential for WWII Dark Tourism in the Solomon Islands. *Current Issues in Tourism*, **25**, 2285-2302. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1957787

[19] Craig Wight, A. (2020) Visitor Perceptions of European Holocaust Heritage: A Social Media Analysis. *Tourism Management*, **81**, Article 104142. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104142

[20] Nawijn, J., Isaac, R.K., van Liempt, A. and Gridnevskiy, K. (2016) Emotion Clusters for Concentration Camp Memorials. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **61**, 244-247. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.09.005

[21] Ashworth, G.J. (2008) The Memorialization of Violence and Tragedy: Human Trauma as Heritage. In: Howard, P., Ed., *The Routledge Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, Routledge, 231-244.

[22] Sharma, N. (2020) Dark Tourism and Moral Disengagement in Liminal Spaces. *Tourism Geographies*, **22**, 273-297. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1713877

[23] Powell, R. and Iankova, K. (2016) Dark London: Dimensions and Characteristics of Dark Tourism Supply in the UK Capital. *Anatolia*, **27**, 339-351. https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2016.1191764

[24] Lennon, J. (2017) Dark Tourism. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice.

[25] Chen, S. and Xu, H. (2021) The Moral Gaze in Commercialized Dark Tourism. *Current Issues in Tourism*, **24**, 2167-2186. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1828309

[26] Tan, K. (2026) Monuments to Injustice and the Ethics of Dark Tourism: A Research Note. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, **43**, 1127-1135. https://doi.org/10.1002/japp.70118

[27] Mytaftsi, I. (2022) Dark Tourism and Ethics. In: Buhalis, D., Ed., *Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 769-772. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377486.dark.tourism.ethics

[28] Sari, J.A., R, T.A. and Usman, F. (2020) Tourist Preference towards Dark Tourism Attraction (A Case Study of Kelud Mountain). *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, **5**, 664-671. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt20aug380

[29] Ashworth, G.J. (2004) Tourism and the Heritage of Atrocity: Managing the Heritage of South African Apartheid for Entertainment. In: Singh, T.V., Ed., *New Horizons in Tourism: Strange Experiences and Stranger Practices*, CABI Publishing, 95-108. https://doi.org/10.1079/9780851998633.0095

[30] Sin, H.L. (2017) Selling Ethics: Discourses of Responsibility in Tourism. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, **107**, 218-234. https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2016.1218266

[31] Sharma, N. (2022) Acknowledging the Shades of Grey: The Past, Present and Future of Dark Tourism in India. In: Chowdhary, N., Billa, S. and Tiwari, P., Eds., *Indian Tourism*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 125-142. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80262-937-820221009

[32] Prayag, G., Buda, D. and Jordan, E.J. (2020) Mortality Salience and Meaning in Life for Residents Visiting Dark Tourism Sites. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, **29**, 1508-1528. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1823398

[33] Raina, P. (2023) Black or Dark Tourism and Its Impact on the Local Economy in India. *Journal of East-West Thought*, **13**, 84-96.

[34] Wang, S., Chen, S. and Xu, H. (2019) Resident Attitudes towards Dark Tourism, a Perspective of Place-Based Identity Motives. *Current Issues in Tourism*, **22**, 1601-1616. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2017.1390553

[35] Lin, Y., Kelemen, M. and Tresidder, R. (2018) Post-Disaster Tourism: Building Resilience through Community-Led Approaches in the Aftermath of the 2011 Disasters in Japan. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, **26**, 1766-1783. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2018.1511720