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Dark Tourism – the Dark Side of Berlin

Abstract. In search of new destinations and experiences, tourists are now visiting places that are monuments of tragedy, suffering, death and destruction. These places are often connected to mass murders or catastrophes. Such locations have always attracted interest, fascination and evoked dread. This phenomenon has been described as "dark tourism" or thanatourism. The aim of the article is to discuss the subject of thanatourism in the urban space of Berlin, which is becoming an increasingly popular branch of cultural tourism in Germany and other countries. The article consists of three main parts: a theoretical introduction, a description of thanatourism resources in Berlin and the analysis of the phenomenon in reference to selected aspects.

Keywords: thanatourism, tourist attractions, metropolis, Berlin, commercialisation, promotion

1. Introduction

Curiosity, the desire to learn and understand the world are all human traits that guide us to explore numerous different places. Humans are inspired by such factors as fashion and the willingness to learn and experience something new that reaches beyond everyday life and "standard tourist attractions". Metropolises as tourist destinations are multifunctional units that are able to cater for tourist needs. In recent decades, urban tourism has been perceived largely as a cultural, economic and social phenomenon, but it has also stimulated urban changes. Contemporary studies of urban tourism reflect a diversity not only in terms of demographic qualities but also in interests and behaviours of tourists. Everywhere

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in the world cities are evolving as a result of the development of tourism. They are adjusting their offerings to new trends, branches and types of tourism.

Tourists arriving in cities are often aware of the typical attractions and offers. One can often observe that travellers do not limit themselves to only exploring key tourist areas of cities, but also search for untypical places and non-standard attractions that are often located in different parts of the city, beyond the well-known areas. This is becoming increasingly popular not only among experienced tourists, but also beginners.

Following John Urry [2007: 16], the purpose of tourism is to provide intense and pleasant experiences that engage us in a different way than everyday life. Dark tourism is one such way of providing those experiences. In dark tourism, destinations are associated with death and suffering.

2. Aims and methods

The aim of the article is to discuss the concept of dark tourism by studying the case of Berlin. The article presents the significance of modern thanatourism, taking into account various places in Berlin that are visited by tourists. It also analyses thanatourism in terms of its social and marketing importance. The analysis is divided into five main aspects: ethical-moral, social-cultural, interpretative and political, promotional-marketing, management and commercialisation. Each one can be treated as a subject for further, in-depth analyses.

The considerations presented in the article are based on the review of the available literature on the problems of thanatourism, which in addition to scientific articles, also includes websites associated with broadly understood dark tourism. Based on the review of the different meanings of this type of tourism, the author analyses the role of "dark tourism" in the urban space of Berlin.

3. Dark tourism

Dark tourism is not a novel phenomenon, but it has not been described until recently. First attempts to formulate its definition and characteristics were made by Malcolm Foley and John J. Lennon in 1996. According to these authors, *dark tourism* involves journeys to places associated with catastrophes, genocide or murder. It also includes trips to battlefields, places of death (which resulted from wars, catastrophes, assassinations, accidents, cataclysms), concentration camps, museums and exhibitions focusing on death, burial places (cemeteries, mausole-

ums, pyramids, catacombs), prisons or places of terrorist attacks. Another term used in the literature to describe this phenomenon is *thanatourism*. The name originates from the Greek god and embodiment of death – Thanatos. Dark tourism and thanatourism are not the only concepts mentioned in studies that discuss the topic of suffering. Numerous other types of cultural tourism focus on tragedy and death – military tourism, war tourism or battlefield tourism [Tanaś 2006].

In this article, 'dark tourism' is the predominant term. To further understand the concept, it is necessary to explain the relation between dark tourism and thanatourism. Dark tourism is considered to be a general term for various forms of tourism associated with death, suffering, tragedy or crime. Thanatourism is a more detailed concept regarding long-term travelling practices motivated by a specific desire to experience death. In this article, the two terms are treated as distinct, yet parallel and closely connected.

1. The growing interest in dark tourism is reflected by an increasing number of scientific and popular-science articles, as well as blogs and social media entries dedicated to the subject. The topic of dark tourism is most often discussed in the literature in terms of the following aspects:

2. The character of the demand for such places (the motivations and experiences of visitors) [Podoshen 2013].

3. Dark tourism as a form of cultural tourism [Reformat 2018].

4. The establishment of the definition, typology and methodology of dark tourism and thanatourism [Stone 2006; Tanaś 2006, 2008; Wight 2006].

5. Ethical and moral problems of dark tourism and thanatourism [Buczkowska, Malchrowicz-Mośko 2012; Gorączko 2016].

6. The management, interpretation and marketing of places of death and suffering for tourism and tourists [Hartmann 2013; *Popiel 2012;* White, Frew 2013].

3.1. Dark tourism – the history of the phenomenon

The fascination with death is not a phenomenon characteristic only of modern times. The end of life and the accompanying concept of passing from one world to another, which is so characteristic of many religions, has been of interest to people for thousands of years. One day all of us will have to face death – first that of other people and finally, our own. It is important to accept this fact and for many the best way is to confront death in places tainted by its presence. In ancient times, the Egyptians visited the pyramids, while the Romans travelled to the Colosseum where many gladiators died. In medieval times, the places of death and burial of martyrs and saints were often the target of numerous pilgrimages. According to Sławoj Tanaś, at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a "boom" in trips filled with thanatopsy. Memories and diaries from that pe-

riod describe visits to places of death and violence, castles (Scotland, Loire Valley in France), prisons (England, France), cemeteries (Pere Lachaise in Paris), battlefields (Flodden, Culloden in Scotland) as well as places where executions and murders took place (the tsar palace in Ropsha, the place of the murder of Peter III) [Tanaś 2006: 88]. The 20th century saw two world wars at an unprecedented scale. These events have scarred the landscape with such places as death camps, places of genocide, numerous cemeteries and monuments commemorating victims of totalitarian ideology.

The 21st century has initiated a very particular phenomenon, enabled by the unprecedented, quick and easy access to information – the reporting of events online. The second phenomenon is the ever-present cult of youthfulness. Humans want to live as long as possible, looking young and remaining healthy, setting aside the notion of the end of life. Furthermore, thanks to advances in science and industry, individuals have become independent from the church. Secularisation is well under way, particularly in developed countries. Modernity has breached the barriers between *sacrum* and *profanum*. Religion used to be a buffer between life and death – it explained, described and helped people accept the phenomenon. Chris Rojek claims that in places where cemeteries were treated with respect and dignity, modernity has paved the way for mass tourism, transforming them into tourist attractions [Rojek 1993: 138]. Modernity treats tragedy and death as a commodity. Despite the presence of educational elements in such places we accept the fact that tourist visits become (with or without awareness) an opportunity and motivation for improving the product [Lennon, Foley 2000: 3-5]. Currently, death in popular culture has become part of entertainment in the form of torture chambers in castle dungeons, or houses of fear in theme parks.

3.2. Berlin: the city of memories – the historical context

Berlin is the capital of Germany and the country's largest city. The history of the city is very long and diverse, which is reflected in the wide range of monuments and tourist attractions, both historical and modern ones. The rich past of Berlin is full of radical changes – traces that are abundantly present in the entire modern city. Throughout its history, Berlin has played the role of the capital of several German countries a number of times. It was the capital of the Margraviate of Brandenburg, the Kingdom of Prussia, the North German Confederation, the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, East Germany, West Germany and contemporary Germany.

The years 1933-1945 are a particularly important period as Berlin became the headquarters of the Nazi government. This is, most probably, the darkest time in the history of the city, which is reflected by a number of places in and around

the city that could be classified as dark tourism attractions. The second stage is the period after World War II, when the capital of the Reich was subjected to the common rule of the Allies, was divided into sectors occupied by military authorities, and finally separated by the Berlin Wall (1961) until its fall (1989) was the symbol of Cold War and the division of Germany.

The German capital had to face the difficult heritage of past years. Duncan Light and Craig Young [2014] observed that political power shapes the urban landscape, particularly in relation to monuments, especially in Berlin, which – according to Karen Till – is a place haunted by memory [Till 2005: 25]. As observed by Ian Kershaw, memory fades into oblivion, but the scar does not disappear [Kershaw 2008: 361-370].

Dark tourism places are also present in the vicinity of the city. They include, e.g. Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen – the German Nazi concentration camp, as well as Zeppelin and Maybach – Zossen – Wünsdorf centres.

The sites presented in Table 1 can be divided into two types: commercialised and non-commercialised places – those that are already viewed as tourist attractions and are part of the tourist offering, and those that are hardly ever reached by tourists. Commercialised places are usually marketed for tourism by an institution. One example of a commercial tourist attraction is the Berlin Dungeon. The site is a combination of a house of fear and a historical museum. The atmosphere of dread is intertwined with a sense of humour. An approximately 60-minute tour includes 10 adventures guided by 10 professional actors who assume the roles of known historical personas from Berlin of the last 700 years. It is a commercial site created for entertainment with educational elements and its location is not directly associated with a specific person or event.

One example of a multi-faceted commercialised tourist space associated with thanatourism is Checkpoint Charlie. It was one of the most well-known border crossings between East and West Berlin. It is now a symbolic border control point where one can purchase an imprint of the stamp of the border guard from a selected occupation zone. Since 1962, it has also been the location of the Berlin Wall Museum. Criticisms from historians claiming that the museum collections are more of a tourist attraction than a historical exhibition, led to the creation of the site called "BlackBox Cold War". There, one can receive basic information on the history of the Berlin Wall. No business activity associated with tourism is allowed inside and in the vicinity of that place because its main aim is the education of tourists. However, high numbers of visitors have attracted commercial activity in the immediate area in the form of private points of retail sales, including fast food and souvenir stalls.

The above examples are included in the materials promoting tourist attractions in Berlin – they are present in guidebooks, offerings of tourist agencies and tour operators. They are the destinations of organised trips. Tourist guides and tourist offices use the city's historical-cultural conditions to create theme tours. The most important

Table 1. Selected dark tourism attractions

Museums and educational centres	Monuments, information tablets, places of memory	Other
Berlin Story Bunker Berlin Underground (bunkers, flackturm, Fichtebunker, Tunnel AEG) Anne Frank Centre Nazi Forced Labour Documentation Centre Memorial Site – Prison SA Papestraße Memorial of Köpenick Week of Blood June 1933 Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial Silent Heroes Memorial Center German Resistance Memorial Center Marienfelde refugee transit camp Plötzensee Memorial Center Allied Museum Anti-War Museum Museum of Medical History at the Charité Holocaust Museum Museum Stasi German Spy Museum Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind The Military History Museum Berlin-Gatow Jewish Museum Topography of Terror	„Stumbling stones" Berlin-Plötzensee Kindertransport Memorial Memorial to the German Resistance New Guardhous Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe Memorial for Peter Fechter Women's Protest MemorialRosenstraße Empty Library Memorial Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism Deportation Memorial Soviet War Memorial	Berlin Dungeon Checkpoint Charlie Dorotheenstadt cemetery Invalids' Cemetery Complexes Zeppelin & Maybach – Zossen – Wünsdorf, Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church Airport Tempelhof Berlin Wall (fragmnts, memorials, observation towers, streets: Bernauer Straße, Bornholmer Straße, East Side Gallery, Checkpoint Charlie, Checkpoint Bravo Dreilinden) Sachsenhausen Olympic stadium Old Jewish cemetery

Source: own resources.

ones that could be categorised as thanatourism are those related to the Holocaust, the Berlin Wall, the Nazi period and the Cold War. They contribute to increasing tourist traffic in selected places and hence – they increase their commercialisation.

It is difficult not to notice the thin line between commercialisation, simplification and a brutal message, while preserving authentic and solemn character of a given place. It is difficult to even discuss these aspects when placed in the context of artificially created attractions, such as houses of fear or torture chambers designed to evoke

extreme emotions such as fear and dread and whose main aim is to generate as much profit as possible.

Admission to non-commercial places is often free. They have been created to commemorate and educate, not generate profit. These places are often integrated into public space. Most often, they do not feature a tourist offering, nor are they part of one. Such places include monuments, tablets and commemorations that are not part of the main areas of interest of tourists.

4. Dark tourism – the case of Berlin

Thanks to its geopolitical, economic and social-cultural conditions the city has a high potential for thanatourism. In order to understand, use and develop the already existing potential, it is important to approach the subject as broadly as possible. Five aspects of thanatourism in Berlin are discussed below.

4.1. The ethical and moral aspects

Thanatourism arouses a lot of controversy that results mainly from ethical reservations concerning the question of whether it is moral to visit places associated with death for tourist purposes. These doubts are strengthened when these places are historically associated with various events, such as wars, catastrophes, etc. These could include the martyrdom of a specific nation or minority, a difficult and ambiguous history, as well as a number of factors that often create the impression that dark tourism involves deriving pleasure from visiting places associated with pain and suffering. This is especially true when such places are exploited for political reasons.

For many people, a visit to places associated with death, particularly cemeteries, is an act of remembrance. It is also an act of honouring the dead, particularly in places associated with catastrophes or genocide. This way of learning about the world helps to preserve tragedies of the past in memory and to avoid similar events in the future. However, there are people motivated by morbid curiosity. The authorities of Berlin had to intervene to prevent people from visiting the bunker located in the city centre where Adolf Hitler committed suicide. There was an attempt to remove the damaged structure from public space for fear that it might attract neo-Nazi supporters. Despite these efforts, tourists still managed to get inside. For several decades, the area remained somewhat neglected because of its close location to parts of the Berlin Wall. Eventually, after the unification of Germany in 1990, a parking lot and a residential area were created in this place. Recently, a commemorating tablet has been placed there.

The place is important for history, culture, and society. Therefore, it requires adequate commemoration, one that takes into account the character of the past events. It is important to appropriately select information and to present it as objectively as possible.

More on the ethical aspects of tourism, including dark tourism, can be found in the work by Karolina Buczkowska and Ewa Malchrowicz-Mośko [2012].

4.2. The aspect of interpretation and politics

Places associated with tragedy and death are made accessible for various reasons, such as entertainment, education, to honour events in collective awareness, and for political reasons [Stone 2006: 145-160]. The question of historical interpretation plays a key role in the case of attractions of thanatourism. It is important to discuss the method used to select and develop content, e.g., for exhibitions, promotional materials, information tablets, etc. Dark tourism makes use of selective interpretation, which can be defined as the process of creating numerous images of the past in which history is never an objective recollection of the past, but rather a selective interpretation based on the way we perceive the present. Given a certain interpretation and narration, such places may be ill-understood, not understood at all, or simply avoided. Narrations are often created in order to manipulate visitors for certain political or ideological aims.

It has to be stressed that experiences of visitors are burdened by various degrees of emotional intensity depending on the state of their knowledge, their sensitivity and personal life experiences. One has to remember that the historical heritage is viewed by people of various nationalities, with different experiences and shaped by different historical and political backgrounds.

One place that stirs a lot of emotions and has become a political tool and a symbol of facing the difficult past is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which was unveiled in 2005. The memorial is the main site that honours the victims of Holocaust in Germany. It consists of 2711 concrete blocks placed in parallel rows. The author of the monument does not impose a single interpretation of the site. The lack of information plaques and signs preventing visitors from standing on the monument leads to situations where most visitors without prior preparation experience the site in a rather unreflective manner, not even trying to understand the significance of this popular "attraction". In 2017, this situation inspired Shahak Shapir, an Israeli living in Berlin, to create a shocking photo project called "Yolocaust" to make people aware of how inappropriate their behaviour is. He used photos taken by tourists at the memorial and shared them on social media sites, then combined them with archived photographs of concentration camps. The edited photos appeared all over the world and initiated a discussion on the behaviour of visitors.

4.3. The promotional and marketing aspect

Not every place has been intentionally created and promoted as a tourist attraction. Some have become such attractions as a consequence of certain events or because of people associated with a given place; others have been created and promoted by the media. Television, Internet sites and social media constantly inform us about tragedies, catastrophes, mass murders and terrorist attacks. After hearing about such events, we often quickly return to our everyday lives and a visit to places mentioned on TV becomes another bullet point in our holiday trip plan.

The media make use of quick and simple messages designed to evoke emotions by covering tragic events that later influence experiences of visitors. The media can stimulate the initial interest in a specific place or event. They often create an image that is hard to change later on. They obscure the educational value and authenticity of the place. On the other hand, the media, especially films, can help to understand and interpret events and places. The role of media in the advertising of places of trauma and crime has been widely described in Magdalena Hodalska's work [2014].

Tourists surveyed in the area of the Brandenburg Gate, the East Side Gallery and the Topography of Terror confirmed that actual experiences derived in authentic sites were less real and less dramatic than those evoked by images shown in the media. This is quite a typical dissonance, which is experienced when expectations created by the media are confronted with the reality of a tourist's experience. Surveyed tourists realised that the history they were experiencing was presented to them in a specific form but they accepted it.

The popularity of places can often be increased by the marketing activity of companies and organisations that focus on generating profits resulting from the development of tourism. This is achieved by a particular way of advertising a tourist product (a place associated with death) providing the service: if it is marketed as an educational trip, which includes some sort of reflection, then the awareness of its commercial character is more likely to remain in the background.

4.4. The aspect of management and commercialisation

Tourist interest in places associated with death and suffering is a major challenge for institutions that have been selected for the supervision of such sites. On the one hand, it is necessary to respect the memory of those places and people directly or indirectly associated with them. On the other hand, such institutions have to cater to the needs of tourists who are guided by various motivations.

It is important to avoid the trivialisation of death when creating a tourist product and to present it using the right form and narration. Heritage associated with cruelty is particularly vulnerable to all kinds of disharmonies, conflict and criticism, especially when there is a need for profit. To avoid conflict and raise interest in the historical and educational aspect of a place, there is a ban on business activity in the area of certain places in Berlin. One such place is Checkpoint Charlie (described above). Despite the ban, large numbers of tourists still generate the need for street food and souvenirs in the vicinity of the site.

Commercialisation is not always a negative phenomenon. Some sites remain in good condition today only thanks to the tourist infrastructure that has helped to save them from slipping into oblivion. Some of the profits from ticket sales are allocated to the maintenance of the place and used to conduct scientific research. Many places, in addition to having a rich educational and publication offering, become large museum sites with well-developed catering and accommodation services. As a result, they can be perceived as a complete tourist product or part of it and hence raise doubts as to the commercial use of the symbolism of death and suffering.

One example is the Stasi Museum located in the building used by the Ministry of National Defence of the former GDR. The museum has prepared an exhibition showing methods used by the secret police operated and how they affected their victims. The exibition also documents the acquisition and takeover of the building on January the 15th 1990 by civil rights' activists. The institution conducts scientific research and offers educational programmes for children and youth [www.stasimuseum.de].

4.5. The social-cultural aspect

People's attitude towards death is indicative of the cultural state of a society. In particular, it reveals the way in which people, both individually and collectively, face sadness and trauma. In 2016, there was a terrorist attack at a Christmas market near the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. 12 people died in the attack and about 50 other people were injured. A monument was erected on the stairs leading to the church – a "metal scar". The church itself also commemorates the victims of World War II. The media claimed and assured that residents of Berlin would not succumb to fear and would not change their lifestyle and that the society would not bend the knee to terrorism. Both tourists and residents of Berlin, after the initial shock and fear of future attacks, quickly returned to the festive atmosphere of the market.

Another issue is how the existence of "dark places" affects residents and tourists that are ever-present in the urban space. The development of tourism has

a significant influence on the functioning of cities and changes in urban space. In highly developed agglomerations, the boundaries between the behaviour of residents and visitors (tourists) are getting increasingly blurred. The needs associated with free time – entertainment, recreation and participation in cultural and sports events, visiting restaurants and shops – are gaining in importance. On the other hand, it is important to maintain the sense of security, the identification with the space and the need to commemorate past events and people. Despite high numbers of tourists, the everyday life of residents is visible in the urban landscape. The urban space is a common good, a stage for everyday life of the urban community, whose needs have to be taken into account. Residents often overhear stories told by tour guides under their windows, which are often far removed from historical facts, and they hear comments and questions from tourists.

This confrontation between tourists and residents is exemplified by the Brandenburg Gate, which was the site of political manifestations. It used to be an important propaganda element from the time of the uprising in 1788 until the fall of the Berlin Wall. On the other hand, it has become an icon for Berlin's tourism, a place that all the city's tourists visit.

5. Summary

The aim of the article was to identify the gaps in the knowledge regarding the subject of dark tourism in the urban space of Berlin. The subject was analysed from the social-cultural, economic and marketing points of view. Each of these areas should be explored further.

What makes Berlin one of the most attractive cities in the world is the diversity of places, attractions and experiences tourists can explore. This creates perfect conditions for the development of various types of tourism, including dark tourism, which cater to the needs of the increasingly demanding and conscious tourist. Dark tourism enables visitors to approach a tragedy from a different, unusual perspective. The notion of dark tourism is broad enough to encompass both tourism motivated directly by the interest in death and trips only indirectly associated with death, i.e. those where it is only one of the motivating factors.

The turbulent history of the previous century has left behind places associated with death and suffering. The entire city of Berlin is filled with monuments, various kinds of commemorations, museums, education centres, and places erected for entertainment purposes, such as houses of fear. Not all places of death, catastrophes and destruction have been commemorated and not all of them have evolved in the direction of tourism. A significant part of efforts aimed at commemorating the past has been shaped by cultural values, politics and local

communities. Consequently, tourists cannot reach every place. Thanatourism in Berlin does not take extreme forms. Among dark tourism attractions, one will mainly find museums and places of memory created to meet the needs and expectations of tourists and generate profit. Equally important is the infrastructure accompanying these places, which is designed to make tourist visits comfortable. They are made more attractive to meet tourists' needs for authenticity, strong emotions and information. Most places are commercialised and are part of the tourist offering, e.g., theme pathways featuring the Berlin Wall or the Cold War. Thanks to their location in the vicinity to the main attractions, they are visited as incidentally, in addition to the regular itinerary.

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Dark tourism – ciemna strona Berlina

Streszczenie. Turyści w poszukiwaniu nowych destynacji i wrażeń docierają do miejsc, które utożsamiane są z tragedią, cierpieniem, śmiercią i zniszczeniem. Są to miejsca masowej zagłady i katastrof. Od zawsze budzą one zainteresowanie, fascynację i grozę. Zjawisko to zostało określone jako *dark tourism* lub inaczej tanatoturystyka. Celem artykułu jest wprowadzenie w problematykę tanatoturystyki w przestrzeni miejskiej Berlina, która współcześnie staje się popularną formą turystyki kulturowej, również w Niemczech. Artykuł składa się z trzech głównych części: wprowadzenia teoretycznego, inwentaryzacji zasobu tanatoturystyki w Berlinie oraz analizy zjawiska w wybranych aspektach.

Słowa kluczowe: tanatotuurystyka, atrakcje turystyczne metropola, Berlin, komercjalizacja, promocja