

Article

Peculiarities of Sustainable Cultural Development: A Case of Dark Tourism in Lithuania

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to reveal the connection and significance of the concepts of dark tourism and sustainable tourism for the sustainable development of tourism, especially for regional tourism growth. The article discusses the theoretical aspects of dark tourism and details the aspects of this tourism industry as part of cultural tourism. The article also analyses principles and models of sustainable tourism development, with a stronger focus on the integrated development paradigm. As a relatively significant part of the research and analysis of sustainable tourism is more focused on the challenges posed by global mass tourism, this article focuses on the issues of sustainable development of niche tourism in relation to regional tourism. The article presents the analysis of Lithuanian dark tourism resources, presents the most common dark (dissonant) heritage objects, as well as the evaluation of resources according to the spectrum of dark tourism and the comparative analysis of the country's most popular dark tourism objects from the point of view of sustainable tourism. A qualitative study revealed that regional tourism in Lithuania (especially niche, such as dark tourism) lacks integrity among different stakeholders, especially in involving the local community in the processes of cultural heritage protection and cultural tourism development and in developing more intensive links with the private sector. On the other hand, the analysis also revealed that there is an ambiguous public opinion regarding the dark heritage, which does not contribute to the sustainable development of tourism and the actualization of such heritage. The article also discusses the models of sustainable development of dark tourism and invites to discuss how to encourage greater public involvement in the development of dark tourism as part of cultural tourism, so that the principle of sustainable tourism does not remain an empty declaration.

Keywords: sustainable development; tourism; dark tourism; cultural heritage management; tourism industry development; sustainable tourism development



Citation: Jureniene, Virginija, and Martynas Radzevicius. 2022. Peculiarities of Sustainable Cultural Development: A Case of Dark Tourism in Lithuania. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management* 15: 264. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm15060264>

Academic Editor: Colin Michael Hall

Received: 1 March 2022

Accepted: 2 June 2022

Published: 10 June 2022

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1. Introduction

Globally, cultural tourism and heritage development is inseparable from sustainable development. Cultural tourism, just as any other branch of economy, uses resources, part of which are non-renewable. Inappropriate planning and implementation of cultural heritage tourism activities can cause damage for heritage itself, worsen the quality of residential environment, encourage degradation of traditional culture and increase social injustice; thus, all participants of tourism activities have great responsibility for their actions and the consequences of these actions. The post-modern tourist is part of the post-society. The latter is not only consumerist, passive, secular, individualized, in search of "other", new experience. The post-society has pushed out death from the daily life by turning it into a complete taboo; it has lost the ability to create a unique and acceptable model that would explain the finality of existence. The society has become excessively interested and amazed by death. According to Seaton, back in the 20th century Great Britain, interest in death was

a loathsome and pathological phenomenon; however, now it has become a normal part of the daily life, which can be seen in the number of tragic events made public through mass information means (Seaton 2002). It can be said that every representative of the modern western culture feels a varying degree of nostalgia for death that used to naturally be a part of the daily life. This has given rise to a niche branch of cultural tourism, i.e., dark tourism. However, this has become possible in the modern society due to the following two reasons: (1) changed economic conditions that allow mass consumption of these tourism products, and (2) transition to the information society, i.e., frequent publication of death images via means of mass information. Dark tourism as a branch of cultural tourism is characterized of its massiveness and quite rapid growth. However, to achieve sustainable growth of this niche of tourism, it is essential to aim for its integration with sustainable tourism, i.e., to reveal the peculiarities of dark tourism as sustainable cultural tourism development.

The main question raised in the article is how could the development of dark tourism in the regions be encouraged, while maintaining the principles of sustainable development and ensuring the needs of local stakeholders? In order to answer that question, the article is divided into five parts. The Section 1 presents the theoretical aspects of cultural tourism and paradigm of sustainable tourism development. The Section 2 is intended to deliver the core ideas and theoretical structures of dark tourism, dark heritage, the interrelationships with cultural tourism and its development. In addition, this part presents the main classifications of dark tourism, types of resources, discusses the challenges of dark heritage protection and preservation which tourism industry and societies meet.

The Section 3 is intended to present the case—the Lithuanian dark tourism industry and its resources, typology and specific challenges related with the growth of dark tourism industry preservation of dark heritage in the region. The Section 4 discusses the results of a qualitative analysis of the case study as well as analysis and synthesis of secondary data focusing on the aspects of regional dark tourism development based on the principles of sustainable tourism paradigm. This section also delivers three models of sustainable tourism as opposed to the current situation in the Lithuanian tourism market.

The last part of the article provides conclusion and suggestions for future scientific discussion on how to encourage greater public involvement in the development of dark tourism as part of cultural tourism, so that the principles of sustainable tourism do not remain an empty declaration in national law, but rather contrary—makes a real contribution to regional tourism growth.

2. Paradigm of Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development

Lehtimäki (2009) claimed that education, increasing social well-being and pure curiosity of human-beings are the essential factors that encourage that what we call cultural tourism. Lehtimäki states that we should understand that all tourism is cultural, because it arises from certain cultural contexts and is mostly related to the goal of experiencing “other” or many different cultural experiences (Lehtimäki 2009, p. 16). Back in 1995, UNESCO claimed that cultural tourism is one of the most important guarantees of stable growth and heritage preservation (UNESCO 1995).

Cultural tourism consists of two areas, namely culture and tourism. In this context, tourism is understood both as the entirety of business and other constituents of tourism. Meanwhile, culture is here understood as both heritage and the daily life culture of today (Žalpyš 2007, p. 257). However, we face another dilemma—how do we define the culture of today? Culture can be conceptualized as an onion, i.e., the layers represent the levels of culture so that it is possible to reach deeper layers of cultural identity by knowing the first ones (Hofstede and Minkov 2010).

Hall (1997) discusses the concept of culture by using another metaphor, i.e., an iceberg. They distinguish culture into two parts—that which is visible and that which cannot be seen. The visible part of the iceberg encompasses behaviour, traditions, customs, and the part that cannot be seen consists of attitudes, opinions, thinking models, and values (Samovar et al. 2013).

Despite these (and many other) attempts to define culture, we often doubt whether it is important in the context of cultural tourism how culture is understood. Probably not because cultural tourism encompasses more and more different aspects. It is related to cognitive tourism because during cognitive tourism, the tourist arrives to know the cultural life, cultural objects or cultural events of a certain location, and, of course, have entertainment (Žalienne 2002, p. 9). Cultural tourism is closely related to heritage. According to Žalpys, this is a part of business and an opportunity to preserve cultural heritage objects by adapting them to the needs of tourism (Žalpys 2007, p. 257).

Cultural tourism plays an important role in preserving the value of national cultural heritage that has not only a physical form, but intangible values, too. According to Ashworth, only a small part of heritage is created for tourists intentionally, i.e., most of the heritage appeared due to local political or social reasons and can exist without tourism at all. Therefore, it can be concluded that cultural heritage resources not only promote development of local products that can be sold, but also create benefit for other parts of the tourism infrastructure (Ashworth 2009, p. 52). In the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, cultural heritage is explained as a group of resources inherited from the past. Despite the form of ownership, people recognize them as a reflection and expression of constantly developing values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions (The Council of Europe 2015). As it is said in the Analysis of Ethnic Cultural Heritage and Country's (Lithuania) Introduction, cultural heritage is ethnically, aesthetically or scientifically important cultural values passed on through several generations (Drasutienė et al. 2012, p. 61). Comparing the concepts of cultural resources and cultural heritage, there are no main differences; however, the concept of cultural resources includes various cultural objects and values on a wider scale. Cultural national resources play the main role in cultural tourism. According to Svetikienė (2002), resources of tourism localities consist of natural resources, cultural resources, and social, economic and management purpose objects. In this way, cultural tourism resources include objects of dark tourism as natural cultural and social purpose objects. Cultural heritage management depends highly on the ability to use historical environment and on sustainable tourism development, i.e., general initiatives and actions, both local and regional, and their development.

Sustainable tourism development exists when the actions carried out are economically possible, allowed, necessary and prospective in the social and ecological context as well as adapted and integrated into the local region.

Sharpley suggests a sustainable tourism development model (cited in Hopėniėnė and Kamičaitė 2004) that is presented in Figure 1.

This model spreads out the sustainable tourism system part which points out relations, cooperation between private, non-profit organizations, state institutions and social groups. Moreover, this model emphasizes both positive and negative impact of tourism on macro-environment. With negative impact of tourism on macro-environment, it is necessary to look for ways how to rationally use tourism resources, manage tourist flows, use the capacity of the tourism infrastructure and other elements of the tourism system (Hopėniėnė and Kamičaitė 2004).

Stewart and Ko (2002) provided a hypothetical model (see Figure 2). It shows the relation between tourism development and the community's attitude towards tourism development. The figure presents H values with a plus sign showing the benefit received, and the opposite sign shows the negative impact of tourism development.

Cultural tourism development always leads to economic growth in any area. According to Žalienne et al. (2008), tourism activities are not just a process that provides economic benefit, i.e., creates jobs, increases income into the budget. The system of tourism is oriented towards mass tourism development and manifests through negative impact on the environment as well. However, it often has a negative impact on ecology and environment. Tourists' interest in one or another tourism location usually changes, i.e., first, there is a large flow that gradually decreases. This is related to social consequences as well.

Sometimes cultural tourism can pose threat to receiving cultures. Tourism development often becomes a conflict between residents and tourists.

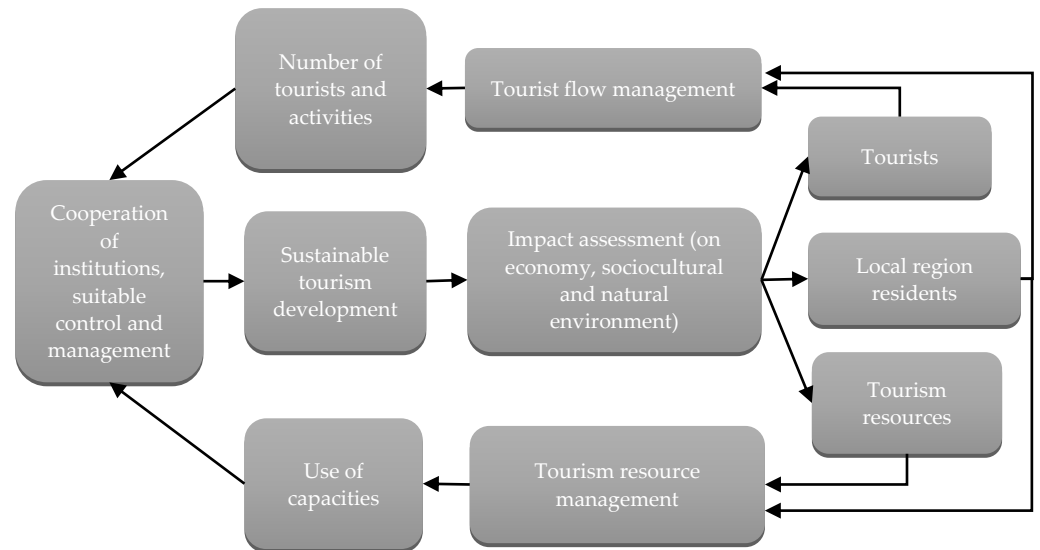


Figure 1. Sustainable tourism development model according to Sharpley. Source: [Hopenienė and Kamičaitytė \(2004\)](#). Darni turizmo plėtra: konkurencingos turizmo sistemos kūrimo prielaidos. Organizacijų vadyba: sisteminiai tyrimai, No. 29, p. 56.

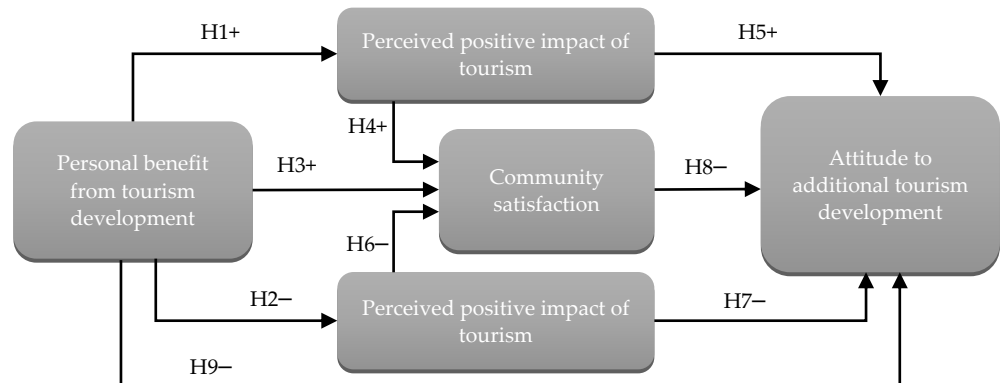


Figure 2. The relation between tourism development and community's attitude. Source: [Stewart and Ko \(2002\)](#). A structural equation model of residents' attitudes for tourism development. Tourism Management, no. 23.

In the service sector, as global problems increase, there has been a need to form the conception of sustainable development. This reveals when analysing tourism development models as well. It is important to emphasize post-modern tourism development, i.e., sustainable development of all tourism that emerged only during the last decade of the 20th century. In Lithuania, there is a lack of experience in this development because the country's independence was restored only in 1990, and this branch of economy has been developed since then.

In the last decade of the 20th century, the concept of sustainable development was expanded by introducing the social aspect that encompasses preservation and increase of opportunities for future humanity rather than just preservation of historically formed environment and natural resources. Thus, sustainability stands for leaving future generations with the same opportunities, if not higher, that we have had, and sustainable development is development that encompasses and satisfies existing needs of the society without decreasing opportunities for future generations to satisfy their future needs. This

conception encompasses social, economic and environmental aspects (Hopenienė and Kamičaitytė 2004).

In the 21st century, we cannot forget the aspect of culture as one of the aspects of sustainable development. In 2010, the global organization United Cities and Local Governments published a political statement Culture as the Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development. It states that culture is an important support of global sustainable development and it should be included into the conception of the three-aspect sustainable development (UCLG (Executive Bureau of United Cities and Local Governments) 2010). One of the most important UNESCO documents on the topic of sustainable culture 'Culture for the 2030 Agenda' (UNESCO 2008) states that sustainable development is impossible without the culture; thus, the aim is to create new opportunities for culture by integrating it into the policy of social and economic inclusion as well as environmental policy (UNESCO 2012).

Therefore, when speaking about sustainable tourism, it is essential to talk about 4 aspects of sustainable cultural tourism. This is emphasized by Pan et al. (2018) and Kriščiūnaitė and Pranskūnienė (2020). After all, the cultural aspect cannot discord with national values or attitudes and outlooks. Even now in Lithuania, the question of whether Soviet cultural heritage is preserved or presented as heritage (Radzevičius and Jurėnienė 2014) arises discussions about the (in)sustainability of this cultural heritage with the current society and communities. However, in the public discourse, there is a lack of a broader and deeper analysis on the value of this heritage in the context of the entire Lithuanian history, i.e., its evaluation is formally carried out during a specific period by government parties. This only proves that culture and cultural heritage in Lithuania are not separate from politics as opposed to Western Europe.

Since cultural tourism inevitably impacts the economic, natural and sociocultural regional environments, it is extremely important to follow the principles of sustainable development in these areas. The conception of sustainable tourism development encompasses the main principles of sustainable tourism development, but their practical application is much more complex.

To maintain the quality of natural environment and social life for an unlimited period of time, it is necessary to include the local community into all the phases of local development. Hassan (2000) claims that to achieve successful sustainable tourism development, the following is necessary:

1. To maintain natural and cultural resources that are important for tourism development, they must be included into long-term development plans;
2. To understand that tourism is an industry that brings benefit not only for the local community, but also for the locality itself and tourists;
3. To create and maintain relationships between tourism and environment—tourism cannot cause harm for the environment;
4. Tourism development must regard the situation of a specific locality (environment, uniqueness, nature, cultural heritage); in other words, when developing tourism, we cannot unify everything;
5. To achieve good results, business, local government and protection institutions should develop the tourism industry in a specific region together—only then will the optimal solution be found (Hopenienė and Kamičaitytė 2004, p. 52).

All the principles illustrate relationship between environmental sustainability and managed tourism demand. For specific localities to preserve their originality and demand in the tourism market, it is necessary to ensure cooperation between the government, business, non-governmental organizations and communities. This system is presented in Figure 3.

Therefore, the main idea of sustainable development is to achieve that natural and man-made resources are not fully exhausted, that consumers are provided with a high-quality tourism product, and that this product is integrated into the local region. Thus, the development of the tourism sector that is based on the principles of sustainable tourism

development will satisfy the needs of tourists, residents and organizations that provide tourism services (Hopenienė and Kamičaitytė 2004).

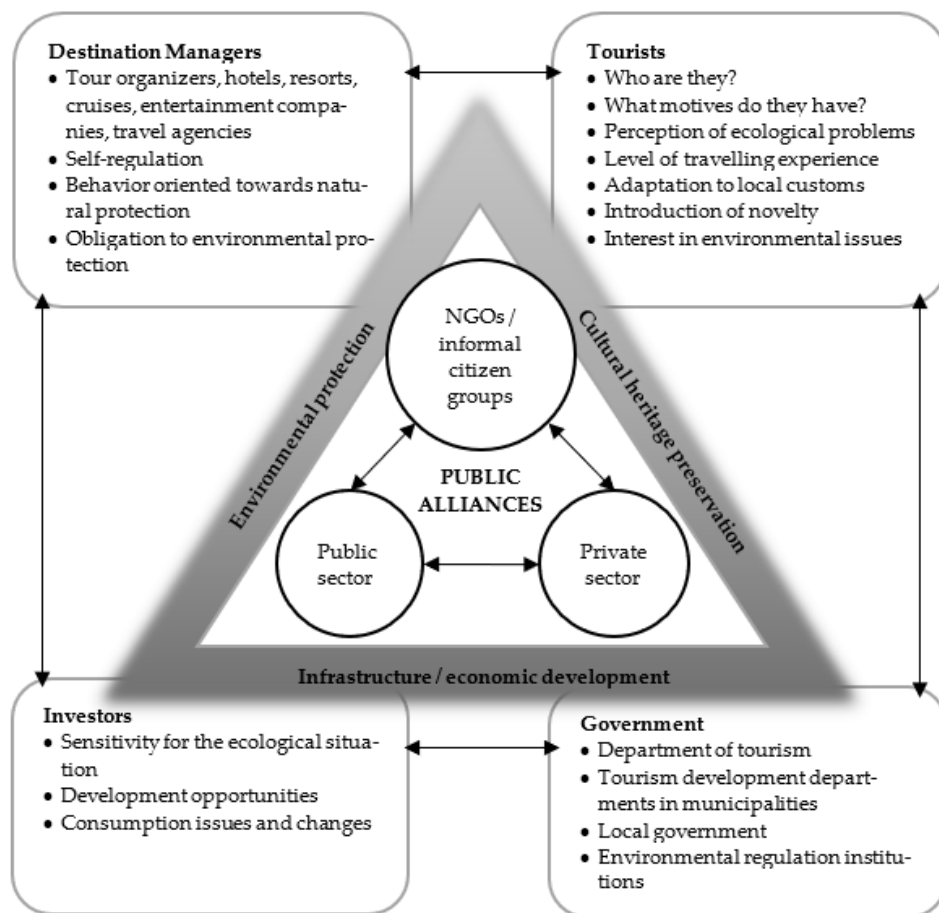


Figure 3. Relationship-Based Paradigm of Sustainable Tourism by Hassan (2000). Source: Hassan 2000. Determinants of Market Competitiveness in an Environmentally Sustainable Tourism Industry. *Journal of Travel Research* 38: 239–45.

To sum up, it can be said that sustainable development of cultural tourism not only satisfies all the modern needs of tourism short-term, but also has a long-term positive impact as well. When UNESCO, EU and the European Commission included the aspect of culture into the conception of sustainable development, cultural tourism integrated sustainable development into its concept and became its inseparable part.

3. Dark Tourism as a Branch of Cultural Tourism

However, there is a question of where in cultural tourism dark tourism is or can be. According to the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, cultural heritage is divided into tangible and intangible. Tangible cultural heritage includes monuments, ensembles and well-known locations. Monuments are divided into architectural heritage, i.e., architectural monuments; fine art heritage, namely fine artwork; archaeological heritage, i.e., archaeological structures or findings. Ensembles are treated as isolated or related groups of structures whose architecture is related to landscape. Well-known locations are treated as man-made and natural creations (The Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO 2006). Dark tourism objects can be included into the areas of cultural tangible heritage of ensembles and well-known locations.

The term ‘dark tourism’ was first used by Lennon and Foley in articles published in 1996. In the 21st century, this term spread into the worlds of science and business.

Dark tourism can be described as a branch of cultural tourism that partly oversteps the line of what is conventionally called cultural tourism resources. In Figure 1, examples 1 and 2 show the sub-branches of dark tourism.

As the Figure 4 shows, dark tourism began developing earlier than the 21st century. However, only in current century researchers made more precise description of dark tourism. As it has been mentioned in the previous section, new “other” motives of a cultural tourist that had not been noticed before had impact on this.

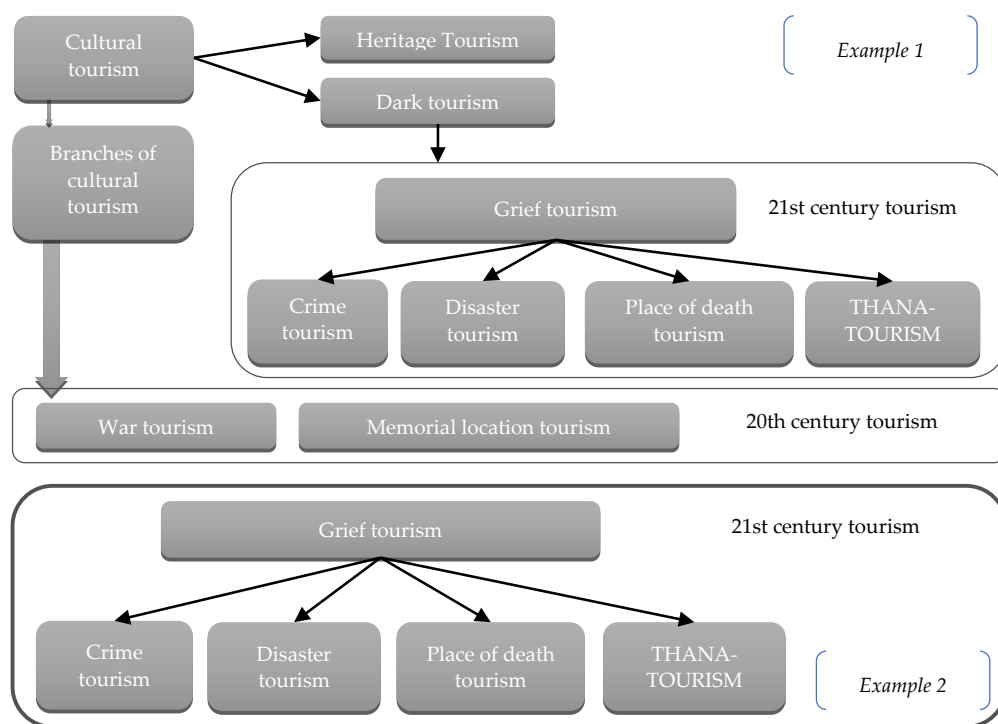


Figure 4. The development of Dark Tourism.

Foley and Lennon (2000) in their book ‘Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster’ distinguished the following seven subtypes of dark tourism: war, memorial location, crime, disaster, place of death and thanatourism. However, looking and the sub-branches, it is evident that two of these types (war and memorial location) were sub-branches of the developing mass tourism since the 20s, and since the 70s—a sub-branch of cultural tourism that had impact on rapidly growing cultural and heritage tourism industries. Back then, it was not seen in relation to sustainable tourism. Analysing dark tourism, it can be seen that the types of dark tourism distinguished by Foley and Lennon such as crime, disaster, place of death, thanatourism, have a common link that is shown in Figure 1 under the name of grief tourism. Summing up on the classification of cultural tourism, heritage tourism and dark tourism as well as their overlap, it can be said that the newest sub-branch of dark tourism is grief tourism that has its own sub-types, namely, crime, disaster, place of death tourism and thanatourism. Not all of these subtypes belong to heritage tourism. This depends on the cultural traditions, attitude and legal environment of the nation where the dark tourism location is. According to Robinson’s book ‘Cultural Heritage and Tourism’, it can be said that dark tourism is a part of cultural tourism (Robinson 2009). So dark tourism as a constituent of cultural tourism must follow the principles of sustainable tourism (see Figure 5).

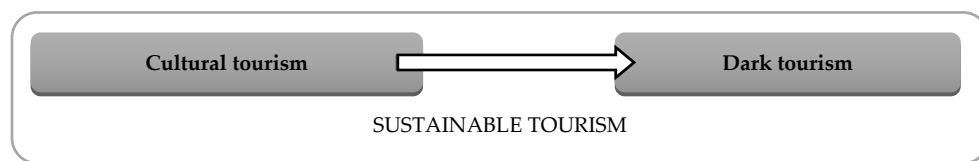


Figure 5. Dark Tourism and Cultural Tourism as Sustainable Tourism.

The Institute for Dark Tourism Research (United Kingdom) provides the following concept of research: visiting death and disaster-related or macabre-looking locations. As [Korstanje \(2015\)](#) states, dark tourism is characterized by a strange fascination or at least curiosity for what specialists call “death spaces”. The term refers to sites where the death of others is commoditized as a tourist product ([Korstanje 2015](#)). The conception of dark tourism is evaluated in mixed ways. [Foley and Lennon \(2000\)](#) point out that increased tourists’ interest in death-related objects was noticed and started to be analysed in the end of the 20th century—beginning of the 21st century. They point out that dark tourism is an evident intimation of post-modernity related to consumption of certain and recreated places of death and disasters as well as their specific presentation for the consumer. This death and disaster consumption culture could have emerged only in the contemporary society ([Lennon 2005](#); [Foley and Lennon 2000](#)).

[Sharpley \(2009\)](#) and [Stone \(2006\)](#) analyse dark tourism from different points of view. On the one hand, Sharpley claims that this branch of tourism must be developed due to educational purposes and is not less important than visiting monuments, churches and other historically important places; on the other hand, Stone points out that dark tourism cannot be developed for educational purposes because it is related to violence and death. He points out that dark tourism can be analysed from a social point of view.

In their analysis of the nature of dark tourism management, [Foley and Lennon \(2000\)](#) distinguish 6 criteria that attract potential visitors. These criteria are provided in [Figure 6](#).

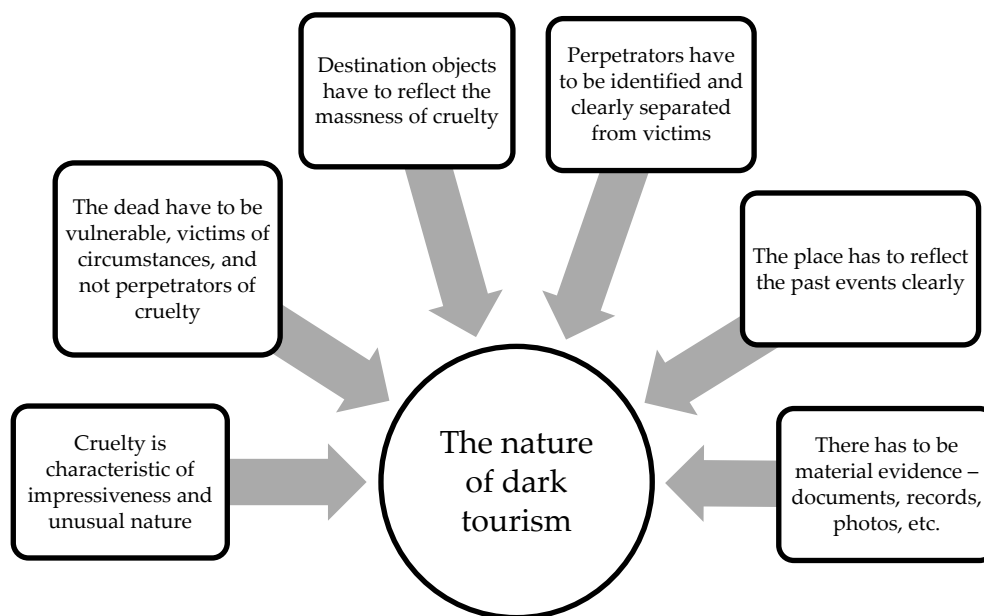


Figure 6. The nature of dark tourism. Source: [Foley and Lennon \(2000\)](#). Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster. London: Continuum.

As the figure shows, not all forms of dark tourism are limited by visiting objects that represent real death. The existing variety of dark tourism forms shows that dark tourism is also attributed objects that reveal economic rather than physical pain ([Johanson 2012](#)) and

macabre places that point to anticipated inevitable but not necessarily human (e.g., live environment, certain intangible, spiritual aspects) death (Shackley 2001).

Due to its great diversity, dark tourism attractions are not and cannot be equivalent. The subject of a recent large-scale catastrophe will always be far more sensitively valued by society than by a mythologized millennial-linked object linked to death, the application of which to tourism seems so natural and understandable that it no longer raises ethical debates. Therefore, some clarity is needed when assessing this direction of tourism, both from an ethical and an economic perspective.

In order to achieve this clarity in the field of dark tourism, many experts propose to divide a wide range of objects belonging to this tourism direction into certain (lighter-darker/lighter-brighter) categories of dark tourism, distinguishing their characteristic features (Stone 2006; Sharpley 2009). Although the naming of such a thing as ‘darker’ or ‘lighter’ dark tourism is contradictory, in the absence of other alternatives, the scientific literature so far refers to this division of dark tourism products by Miles (2002) and Stone (2006) as it is shown in Figure 7.

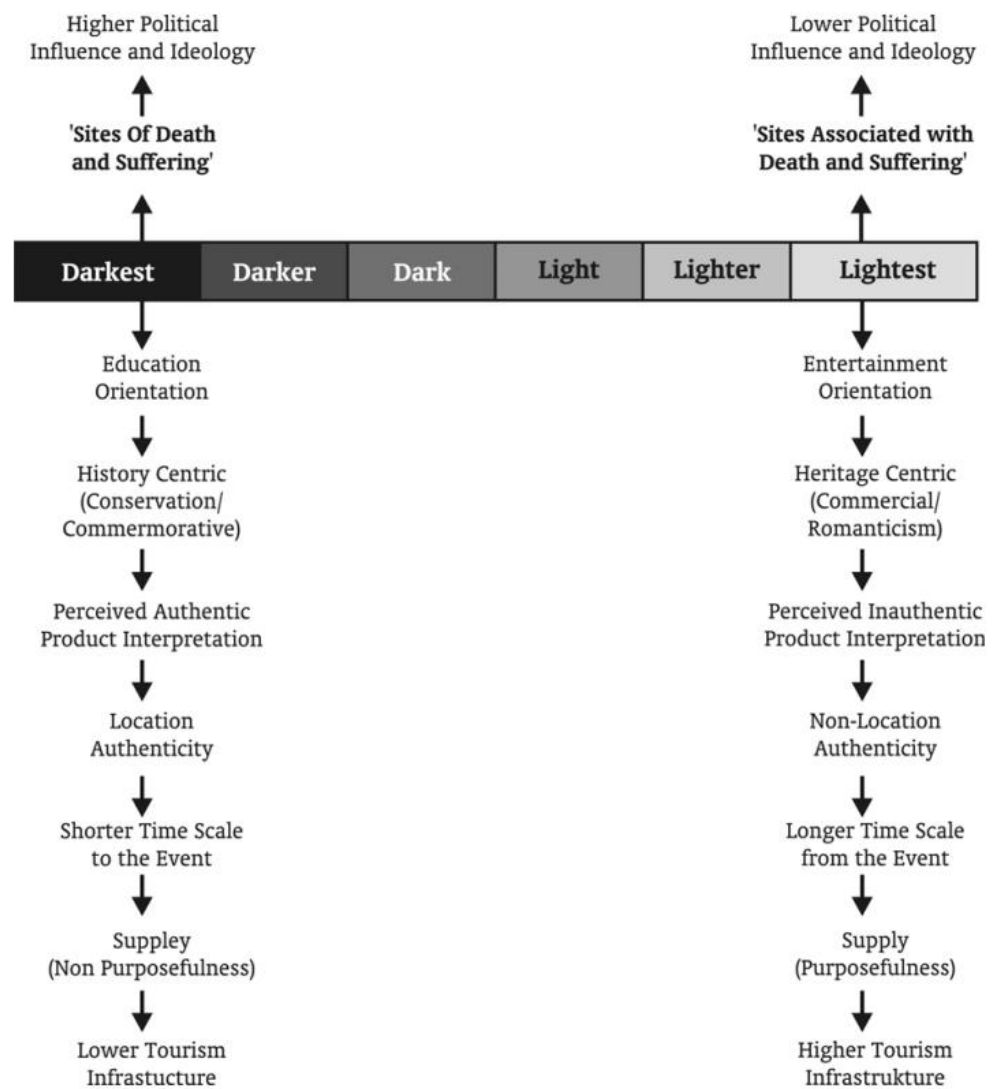


Figure 7. The Spectrum of Dark tourism. Source: (Stone 2006). A Dark Tourism spectrum: towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions. Available online: http://clok.uclan.ac.uk/27720/1/27720%20fulltext_stamped.pdf (accessed on 5 January 2022).

The spectrum of dark tourism formed by Miles (2002) and Stone (2006), which is presented in Figure 7, shows that dark tourism products are not qualitatively equivalent, resulting in different experiences for consumers and different degrees of empathy for victims. According to the author, the local authenticity has a decisive influence on the perception of the scale of the tragedy, which manifests itself through the empathy of the visitors. Miles (2002) argues that “the present dimension of dark tourism objects also contributes to the empathy of visitors for victims, and therefore the importance of how a product is perceived, produced, and ultimately consumed.” More recent tragic events that can be traced back to “living “memories” through the stories of survivors or witnesses are more memorable (according to the scale presented by W. Miles—“darker”, see Figure 7) dark tourism products than those presented from the distant past.

To successfully adapt dark tourism heritage for cultural tourism, first, the existence of the events cannot be doubted, and second, it should be relevant to the society or its part. Third of all, according to Sharpley (2009), one should remember the main goals of heritage preservation, i.e., transfer of the past.

Seaton (2002) distinguished the following 5 forms of dark tourism:

- Visiting places of mass killings;
- Visiting places of executions;
- Visiting of memorial or historical places, i.e., places where the dead are buried such as war memorials, crypts, etc.;
- Visiting places that include torture devices, holocaust, war, weapon, former prison, etc. museums;
- Imitation of well-known historical battles, fights, organization of performances with elements of death.

Stone (2011) agrees with the classification proposed by Seaton; however, the author makes it more detailed and extended in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Dark Tourism.

Type	Description
Entertainment type	Aimed at attracting tourists by means of imaginary death-related stories. Tourists are attracted mainly due to the emotions experienced through entertainment in dark tourism that is provided aesthetically, and the fact of death is perceived without high levels of adrenalin, and is usually unauthentic.
Exhibitions of dark tourism	Exhibitions of objects collected; related to death, suffering, wars and similar topics. These exhibitions are usually found in museums, the exhibits collected from different places are outside of the original place of event, and it is difficult for the visitor to experience the represented events
Prisons	Organisation of excursions to former prisons, past punishment rooms, law and order institutions. Many of these places are entertainment and commercial type, they do not always represent accurate past events and focus on attracting visitors
Graves	Visiting graves of people related to cruel historical events during which they suffered or lost their lives. Graves are treated as historical heritage; however, recently, there have been tendencies to visit graves of celebrities (e.g., kings of pop music) as well.
Places of disaster	These are places of disaster characteristic of strong past experiences that shocked the society. For example, the place of Princess Diana’s death. Popularity of such objects is directly impacted by mass media.
Places of conflict	Visiting places of military conflict is important from the educational and historical point of view because the goal of the trip is not the visit itself, but rather historical facts, reasons why the military conflict occurred in a particular place.
Genocide camps	They are related to historical events such as the holocaust, repressions by the Soviet government, anti-human conflict places.

When applying the heritage object for dark tourism, there is a need to create opportunity for its respective interpretation that would not interfere with the main principles of

social morale. When visiting dark heritage objects, visitors should not only satisfy their curiosity, but also feel the events and history of the period presented. When preparing the heritage object itself, it should be changed as little as possible to preserve its authenticity and so that it invokes strong emotions.

Increase in demand evidently promotes the supply of dark tourism services and variety of forms. One of the reasons for making dark tourism popular is curiosity as the main motif that encourages searching for not only what would create good emotions, but also morbid images of death that make the levels of adrenalin rise and are inseparable from the desire of novelty. In this age of information, people want to not only know, but also feel historical events more and more by taking a walk-through place of disaster, listening to guide stories about executions and other cruel events, looking at remaining photos and objects. Curiosity as the main motif that encourages looking for morbid death images is inseparable from the desire for novelty. In general, seeking for novelty and adventure motivates people for any kind of travel, which is usually contrasted against routine. For people living in today's urbanized, routine world, especially westerners, it is natural to look for ways to decrease the boredom created by their daily routine (Walter 2009). When looking for different experiences and novelty, tourists choose an environment that is socially and physically different from their usual residential environment (Yuill 2003). The environment of death naturally resists the living environment. In order to feel excited, tourists are determined to try even dangerous novelties, travel to unknown and unexpected environment (for instance, the war tourism case).

To sum up, it can be said that cultural heritage is constantly being refreshed through cultural tourism by creating tourism products, which creates an opportunity to create links to the past, present and future. In the area of heritage management, this highly depends on not only the ability to use the historically important, catastrophes' and disasters' places, but also on sustainable tourism development.

4. Dark Tourism Resources in Lithuania

Dark tourism objects in Lithuania are not distinguished by any separate category; however, most of the objects that can be attributed to dark tourism are included into the register of cultural values as immovable cultural values. These are war heritage objects, mass killing and torture places, forts, cemeteries, etc. According to Sharpley (2009), the division of dark tourism into smaller categories helps to determine what heritage management should focus on and what specific threats can arise when adapting a certain type of dark tourism for cultural tourism.

One of the most popular dark tourism objects in Lithuania is the Grūtas Park that has been raising discussions and creating opposing opinions in the society since its launch. In Lithuania, exaltation of the Soviet past is treated unfavourably fearing propagation of this historical period. The Grūtas Park is in a forest where partisans fought against the Soviet occupation regime. The same place exhibits list of captured and executed people, sculptures, souvenirs with Soviet memorabilia can be purchased (Figure 8A,B).

In order to attract visitors to dark tourism objects, these places are often presented in a lighter context than they are; as Wight and Lennon (2006) note, in this case, there is a danger that a cruelty heritage place will become another pastime activity rejecting the real, deeper social context as in the aforementioned case of the Grūtas Park.

The demand of dark tourism in Lithuania is increasing. This is evident because of the amount of information on websites related to not only tourism, but also history and entertainment. Wight and Lennon (2006) carried out a study about dark tourism objects in Lithuania and confirmed that Lithuania is attractive from the aspect of dark tourism, emphasising the heritage of genocide, invasions and repressions. During World War II, more than 200,000 Jews were killed in Lithuania, and there are approximately 200 mass-killing places throughout the territory of Lithuania; thus, holocaust heritage is one of the main topics of dark tourism. According to the data provided by the Kaunas 9th Fort Museum, 50,000 people were killed in Kaunas 9th Fort: 30,000 Kaunas ghetto prisoners,

10,000 Jews brought from other European countries, 10,000 people of other nationalities. Nevertheless, the place where was lost most lives of Jewish people in Lithuania is Paneriai where Nazis killed over 70,000 people.



(A)



(B)

Figure 8. (A) Train used for mass deportation in 1941. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/2d73f9he> (accessed on 22 March 2022); (B) Statue in The Grūtas Park. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/2d73f9he> (accessed on 22 March 2022).

The Paneriai memorial (Figure 9A,B) is the darkest dark tourism object in Lithuania. The monument in the mass killing place to commemorate the Jews that were killed was built in 1945 with the effort of the Jews that had survived the Holocaust. In 1952, it was demolished. In 1960, the Paneriai Memorial Museum as a branch of Vilnius Local Lore Museum was opened in the mass killing place. In 1985, a new museum building was built and the exhibit was renewed. In June of 1991, the Lithuanian Jewish community revealed a memorial for Jews who were killed with writings in Yiddish, Hebrew and Lithuanian languages. In the same year, the Paneriai Memorial Museum was transferred to the Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum. In 2009, when commemorating the 50-year anniversary of the launch of the museum, a part of the exhibit was renewed.



(A)



(B)

Figure 9. (A) Paneriai Memorial in Vilnius, Lithuania. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/bzw2uzuh>; <https://tinyurl.com/25y752kt> (accessed 22 March 2022); (B) Paneriai Memorial in Vilnius, Lithuania. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/bzw2uzuh>; <https://tinyurl.com/25y752kt> (accessed 22 March 2022).

In Lithuania, there are many war heritage objects remaining; one of the best-preserved objects that reflects cruel historical periods—Kaunas forts that include many occupant military heritages as well as the heritage showing the Nazi Germany cruelty and Soviet repressions. In 1878, Russian emperor Alexander II signed an order to build Kaunas fortress.

In 1914, on the eve of World War I, Kaunas was surrounded by 9 forts, batteries in between them and other defence structures. Kaunas became the first-class fortress of the tsarist Russian empire (Figure 10).



Figure 10. The scheme of Kaunas Forts (Lithuania) and its trail in 19th century. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/2n8uaf6k> (accessed on 24 January 2022).

From the architectural and urbanistic point of view, Kaunas forts were not different from other fortresses built in Europe or Russia in the period of the end of the 19th century—beginning of the 20th century. In the 21st century, the 7th and 9th forts were adapted to dark tourism, and currently, 1st and 6th forts are being actively adapted as well. The 9th fort was adapted to tourism activities the longest time ago.

During World War I, the 9th fort practically did not suffer damages. After the war, it was turned into a branch of the city prison, and in 1940–1941, it was the prison for People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs. In 1941–1944, the fort was turned into a death camp where masses of Jewish people from Lithuania and other European countries were killed. After that, the fort was used to store agricultural production for some time.

The new page of the 9th fort’s history was turned when in 1958 a museum was opened in the premises of the former 9th Fort of Kaunas (Figure 11A,B). Currently, the fort holds a national Kaunas 9th Fort Museum that has a variety of expositions. Two of the halls of the museums are used for Kaunas Fortress and World War I history expositions.

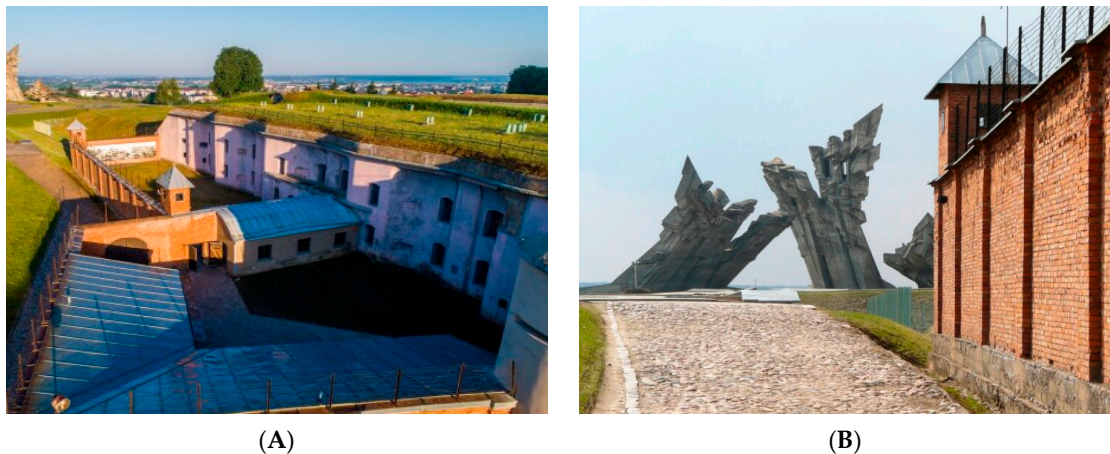


Figure 11. (A) The Building of former 9th Fort in Kaunas, Lithuania. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/2p969snd>; <https://tinyurl.com/4j4hcb6j> (accessed on 23 March 2022); (B) The Building of former 9th Fort in Kaunas, Lithuania. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/2p969snd>; <https://tinyurl.com/4j4hcb6j> (accessed on 23 March 2022).

After 1990 restoration of independence of Lithuania, the 9th fort collection was complemented by exhibits showing Soviet repressions and Lithuanian resistance. The entire collection of the 9th fort reflects the totalitarian regime and crime against humanity by condemning it and emphasising respect for the defenders of the Lithuanian freedom.

Another noteworthy Soviet occupation symbol and a dark tourism object in Lithuania is the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights (KGB museum in Vilnius). The museum was established in a building that had housed Soviet security services best known as KGB for almost 50 years. The museum reminds of the difficult and tragic period of 1940–1991 for Lithuania and its people.

The Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights (KGB museum in Vilnius) was established in 1992. This is the only such museum in the Baltic States established in the same building that had housed Soviet repression institutions The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, NKGB-MGB-KGB from the 2nd half of 1940 until August of 1991. The basement of the building has an internal prison—interrogation chamber where Lithuanians who went against the occupation government were held from the autumn of 1940 until 1987. The former KGB internal prison was left completely authentic (Figure 12A,B).



Figure 12. (A) Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius, Lithuania. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/39dzbz9f>; <https://tinyurl.com/2p88539s> (accessed on 19 January 2022); (B) Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius, Lithuania. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/39dzbz9f>; <https://tinyurl.com/2p88539s> (accessed on 19 January 2022).

In 2012 the Cold War Museum was opened, where the exposition of the Cold War epoch was introduced (Figure 13A–C). The museum was established in the Plokštinė former missile base close to Lake Plateliai. This is the first military base in former Soviet Union for R-12 Dvina intermediate-range ballistic missiles. The base was built from the autumn of 1960 until the end of 1962. In 1978, when the U.S. intelligence found out the location of the base, the weaponry was taken out of it, and soldiers retreated as well. From 1990 until 2009, the base was abandoned and damaged. The directorate of the Samogitian National Park took initiative and implemented the project Installation of the Cold War Museum and its Environment Infrastructure. A Cold War museum was established in Lithuania that reflected the historical development of 1946–1990.

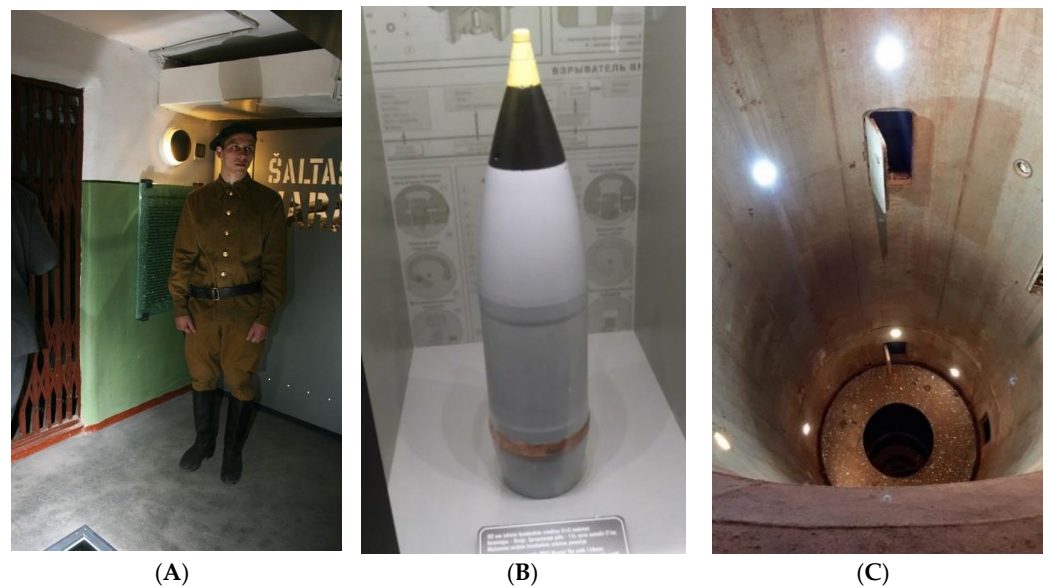


Figure 13. (A) Exposition in Cold War museum (former Soviet missile base; now—part of Samogitian National Park, Lithuania). Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/3xdbsvyz>; <https://tinyurl.com/yn5zx5c9>; <https://tinyurl.com/jbs6m6dt> (accessed on 21 March 2022); (B) Exposition in Cold War museum (former Soviet missile base; now—part of Samogitian National Park, Lithuania). Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/3xdbsvyz>; <https://tinyurl.com/yn5zx5c9>; <https://tinyurl.com/jbs6m6dt> (accessed on 21 March 2022); (C) Exposition in Cold War museum (former Soviet missile base; now—part of Samogitian National Park, Lithuania). Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/3xdbsvyz>; <https://tinyurl.com/yn5zx5c9>; <https://tinyurl.com/jbs6m6dt> (accessed on 21 March 2022).

All the resistance period of the Lithuanian fight (1944–1953) can be attributed to dark tourism because it relates to resistance against the occupation regime. The armed resistance occurred until the death of the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin. After his death, the general apology was announced. Here, two groups of dark tourism can be distinguished: partisan death places and their graves, and places of resistance, i.e., partisan dugouts (Figure 14A,B).

The pastime type of dark tourism is also carried out in Lithuania. One of the most popular places is the Soviet bunker in Vilnius.

During the armament competition between the U.S. and USSR in 1978, the order of the general secretary Leonid Brezhnev of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union ordered to build reserve television stations that would replace the existing ones in case of a nuclear war with the U.S. The first such station was secretly build close to Moscow, the second one—in Tashkent. The third such station was built in Vilnius. The construction of the bunker began in 1983 and was finished in 1985. In documents, it was titled *Dom Tvorchestva* (Eng. House of Creation). Until 1991, the bunker was used to carry out test radio and television broadcasts. On 24 September 1991, the Soviet troops left the

House of Creation. From 1991 until 2007, the object belonging to the Lithuanian National Radio and Television was abandoned. In 2007, the national radio and television leased the premises of the bunker (Figure 15A), and the bunker was used for project of experiential performance called '1984. Survival Drama' that is being active today, too (Figure 15B).



Figure 14. (A) Partisan dugout (Pašiliai Forest); (B) Partisan dugout (Žalioji Giria). Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/3pjfyw5x> (accessed on 19 January 2022).



Figure 15. (A) Soviet bunker 'House of Creation'. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/36kt673r> (accessed on 21 March 2022); (B) Scene from '1984. Survival Drama'. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/36kt673r> (accessed on 21 March 2022).

And the last object adapted to dark tourism in 2020 is the Lukiškės prison. This is a former interrogation chamber and prison in Vilnius. It is one of the oldest institutions of imprisonment in Lithuania. In 1905 its construction was finished, and only in 2019 the prison was closed (Figure 16A).

Currently, the building is used by a public institution that carries out excursions and organises art events (Figure 16B).

Navickienė and Meištė (2019) agree with Seaton's classification and provide more and newly discovered types of dark tourism:

1. *Black politics.* Places where human has no rights (North Korea, Maydan Ukraine);
2. *Black art.* Exhibitions, concerts which are related with killings, disasters, pain, sadness. This subcategory of dark tourism has a strong educational value: there is one exhibition of human body, where tourists are shown dead people in order to understand the anatomy of the body.
3. *Night tours.* Stargazing, jungle trips, night safari.

4. *Mystical places*. Tours to haunted places, to sorcerers and shamans' spots and hideouts.
5. *Hiking through swamps*. Today it is a popular tourist attraction—an activity where you can learn a lot about nature and experience indelible. These are the secret roads through the swamps that were built in the 13–15 centuries to escape the enemy.
6. *Acid forest in Nida: human–bird–tree*. In the most beautiful corner of Lithuania, Nida settled birds—cormorants, whose stools burn the trees with acid and they die¹.
7. *Lithuanian Alps—gypsum mountains in Kėdainiai*². White Phosphogypsum mountains—a unique phenomenon not only in Lithuania, but also in the Baltic States. Mountains began to pour in the fertilizer factory since 1968. Currently, phosphogypsum is accumulated in over 21 million tons.
8. *Night diving*. Polar settlement underwater in Molėtai, Luokesa lake. You can also dive at Klaipėda, where you can find sunken ships during World War II. Diving is dark tourism because underwater is almost always used by spotlights, the water hides its beauty.
9. *Kaunas museum of the blind-people*. The Kaunas Museum for the Blind was opened in 2005. It was the first museum for the blind in the Baltic States and one of the first in Eastern Europe. The museum is in the catacombs underneath St. Michael the Archangel Church. The exhibits can be perceived through sound, smells, and touch (Navickienė and Meištė 2019).

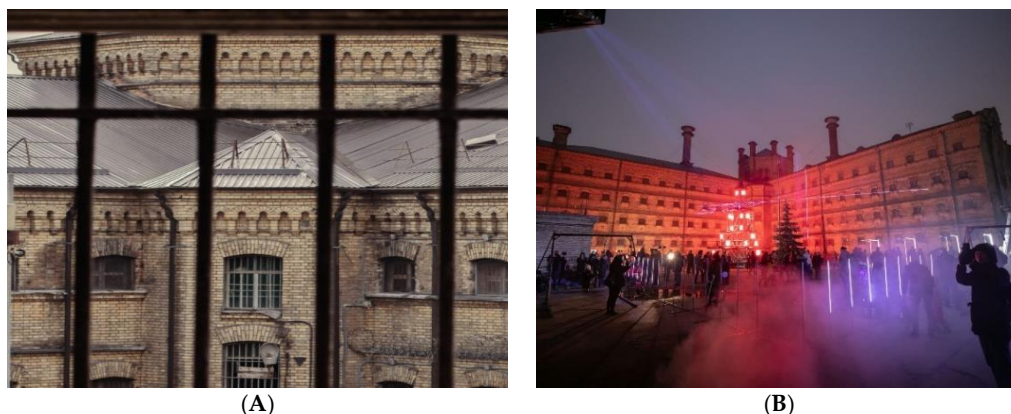


Figure 16. (A) Lukiškės prison. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/2dfer723> (accessed on 22 March 2022); (B) 'Lukiškės prison 2.0'. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/2dfer723> (accessed on 22 March 2022).

Summing up on the objects of dark tourism in Lithuania we put them in Miles (2002) and Stone (2006) developed spectrum of dark tourism. This was made with the aim to show general supply of Lithuanian dark tourism resources regarding to how strong are two main factors—relation with actual death and suffering (1) and political and ideological influence (2). The Lithuanian dark tourism spectrum is represented by Figure 17.

Assessing the spectrum of Lithuanian dark tourism, it is striking that extremes prevail in the country. A very large part of the objects is very dark and related to the history of the war, occupation and resistance movement in Lithuania. These objects are characterized by a particularly strong ideological and political direction, most of them are the places of mass-murder and suffering. However, another significant part of Lithuania's dark tourism is already on the opposite side of the spectrum. It is strongly focused on entertainment, attracting tourists and with a rather clear connotation of political-ideological sarcasm and irony. It is also important to mention that even though most of these sites are in the actual heritage sites, they are perceived by visitors as unauthentic and artificial.

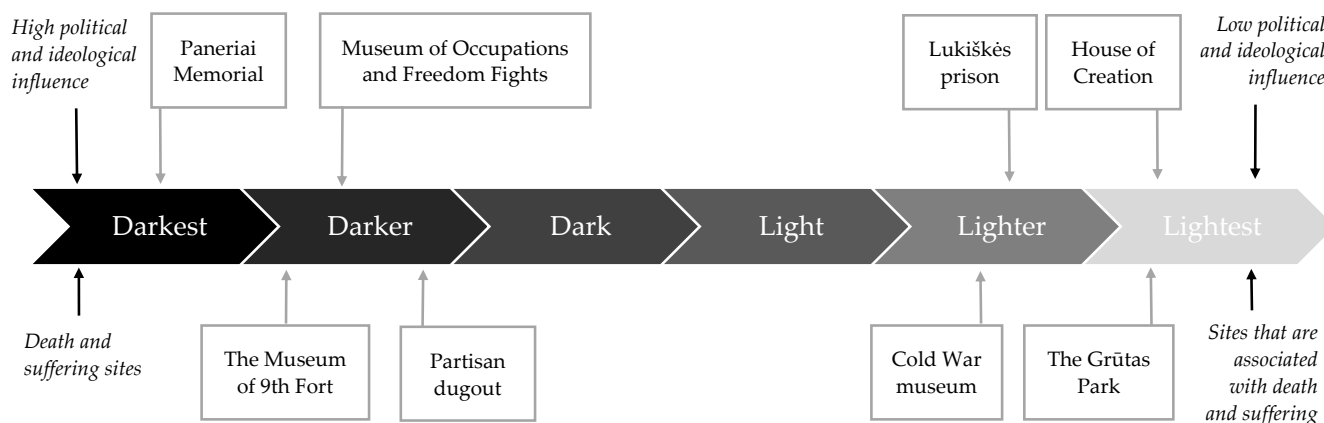


Figure 17. Lithuanian dark tourism spectrum, based on Stone (2006) heritage management model.

And based on Seaton’s classification, it can be said that the following 6 types of dark tourism are being developed: genocide camps, places of conflict, dark tourism exhibitions, graveyards, prisons, entertainment type. Only visiting places of disaster is developed in the family circle. In Lithuania, it is popular to visit graves of famous people in Vilnius Rasos cemetery and Kaunas Petrašiūnai cemetery. Navickienė and Meištė (2019) distinguish 9 newest and smaller types of dark tourism that are spread in Lithuania and the entire Baltic region.

5. Peculiarities of Dark Tourism as Cultural Tourism Sustainable Development

When analysing the peculiarities of dark tourism as a part of cultural tourism, first we will discuss visitor tendencies in the analysed objects (Table 2).

Table 2. Dark tourism objects in Lithuania (2016–2020)³.

Dark Tourism Objects	Number of Visitors, in Thousands				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Paneriai memorial (Vilnius Gaon Jewish History Museum)	27	28	34	31	10
Plokštinė Cold War museum (Samogitian National Park)	35	34	35	44	33
Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights (KGB museum)	88	83	99	98	20
Grūtas Park	63	58	57	61	51
Kaunas 9th Fort Museum	47	50	52	61	30
IN TOTAL:	260	253	277	295	144

Source: Statistical Data of Museums. Available online: <http://statistika.lrkmlt/muzieju-veiklos-statistika/pradzia/17/reportpage?sqid=dae67d8634e2e73f735bfd80257ec6312b34f758> (accessed on 19 January 2022).

The data in the table shows a dark tourism tendency, i.e., increase in the number of visitors, except of 2020—the COVID-19 pandemic year. Thus, the data of this year cannot be compared with 2016 when people all over the world had an opportunity to visit various global tourism objects, including Lithuanian dark tourism ones.

As the data shows, the most popular object from 2016 until 2020 was the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights. This corresponds to the results of a study carried out by Radzevičius and Jurėnienė in 2012 that the most popular objects of dark tourism were the Cold War Museum, the KGB museum and the bunker (Radzevičius and Jurėnienė 2014, p. 24). It can be said that as the inbound tourism went down in 2020, local tourism went up.

As it has already been mentioned, dark tourism is an inseparable part of cultural tourism. This is related to objects of cultural heritage. Cultural tourism is a part of sustainable tourism because sustainable tourism encompasses a sustainable society, economy, environment and culture (Pan et al. 2018). Sustainable culture encompasses the continuity of heritage, cultural tourism and rural tourism (Kriščiūnaitė and Pranskūnienė 2020).

The directions of the tourism sector analysis and development in the study of opportunities (2019) are distinguished as directions of tourism belonging to cultural tourism; however, it does not include dark tourism, even though it includes its separate types such as knowing the Jewish national heritage (visiting and knowing historical Jewish districts, cemeteries, memorials, museums, etc.), night tourism (going on night orientation trips, etc.), visiting museums cultural heritage objects (2019). Even though sustainable tourism is not mentioned, the study notes that social, demographic and other tendencies are relevant to the sector of tourism.

Among other tendencies, sustainable tourism is mentioned. It states that focus on sustainable environment (nature, culture, social environment, etc.) remains in its broad sense. The significance of sustainable development in the tourism sector is increasing, and this is understood as an integral and inseparable part of successful tourism development. Such elements of sustainable development as slow culture, ecology, aim to reduce CO₂ emissions and consumption, engagement of communities and NGOs, sharing economy principles, decrease of negative impact of tourism on residents, etc. remain relevant. Sustainable development for countries is becoming an additional competitive advantage in the tourism sector when they aim for complete value creation for residents, tourists and employees of the tourism sector ([Turizmo sektoriaus analizė bei strateginės plėtros kryptys galimybių Studija 2019](#)).

Therefore, altogether with analysis of dark tourism resources in Lithuania, the research of most popular Lithuanian dark tourism sites was conducted. It was carried out in order to assess how much development of dark tourism in Lithuania meets the general qualities of sustainable tourism according to three models discussed in previous sections as well as assuming that dark tourism is a constituent of cultural tourism (as it shown in Figure 5).

The analysis mostly was focused to the key aspects i.e., community involvement, cooperation between local government and private initiatives, and the links between environmental and heritage protection and the promotion of local culture. These criteria were chosen according to a Relationship-based Paradigm of Sustainable Tourism by Hassan and evaluated one-by-one from site to site with the simple Likert scale (from *low* to *high*). The results are shown in the Table 3.

Table 3. Evaluation of Lithuanian Dark tourism sites sustainability based on Relationship-Based Paradigm of Sustainable Tourism by Hassan (2000).

	Factors, Assessment Scale and Evaluation					
	Cultural Heritage Preservation	Environment Protection	Community Involvement	Tourism Infrastructure	Public-Private Partnerships	Relations to Private Sector
DARK TOURISM SITE	High-low	High-low	High-low	Good-poor	Active-passive	Strong-weak
Paneriai memorial (Vilnius Gaon Jewish History Museum)	High	High	Average	Average	Passive	Average
Plokštinė Cold War museum (Samogitian National Park)	High	High	Average	Average	Passive	Weak
Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights (KGB museum)	High	Average	Low	Good	Passive	Weak
Grūtas Park	Low	High	Low	Good	Active	Strong
Kaunas 9th Fort Museum	High	High	Low	Good	Passive	Weak

The comparative analysis revealed two essential things that, in the opinion of the authors, determine the current situation of the development of dark tourism in Lithuania. First of all, despite significant efforts of national government in Lithuania and real encouragement, many dark tourism sites—even popular and well-known not only in the country—do not seek to involve local communities in their activities, or at least in the long-standing debate on actualisation of dark heritage and the ways of acceptable delivery and presentation to tourists. It goes without saying that this encourages local people to reject the dark heritage (especially those objects with strong connotations to the Second

World War and the Cold War) and the desire of dark tourism site managers to present such heritage as entertainment as much as possible, even sacrificing the authenticity of the site and ethical issues. It is also interesting that this problem exists in both public and private heritage sites.

On the other hand, the question of the passivity of the local community (or Lithuanian society itself) in tourism development remains open. As [Korstanje and George \(2015\)](#) claimed, the open and closed-ended questionnaires applied on dark tourism seekers reveal that heritage is a key factor of their motivation; however, this does not mean that they understand what heritage is. This statement could probably be applied in another direction, as well: despite the relatively broad interest in the topic of dark tourism among scholars, local communities still have a lack of information about dark heritage with the clear focus on community needs. Finally, it should be acknowledged that heritage managers and national government activism (or apathy in some cases) are not always the real cause of the unsatisfactory situation.

Another thing that emerged from the study is the weak and slow development of links between state-owned dark tourism sites and the private sector, and the lack of private initiatives and projects. However, this is important not only for the development of dark tourism as a niche in the tourism industry, more efficient creation of the necessary infrastructure or the growth of the site's awareness nationally and internationally. More important is the fact, that unstable and episodic relations with the private sector is serious limitation of the effective development of sustainable tourism in the region. As it was explained in [Section 1](#), the development of sustainable tourism that is efficient and beneficial to all stakeholders is based on the principle of partnership. Only then is sustainable development possible when the needs of all parties are ensured (consensus principle). Unfortunately, the study revealed that even dark tourism sites located in the capital city of Lithuania do not have any significant partnerships with the private tourism businesses.

On the other hand, it is gratifying that, despite the negative aspects mentioned above, the tourism infrastructure in the assessed dark tourism sites is sufficient and consistently improved. This only confirms the fact that the state is making significant efforts at the national level to accelerate the development of tourism in the country. It should also be noted that Lithuanian dark tourism sites ensure a high level of dark heritage preservation and actively contribute to environmental protection, too.

According to [Sharpley's](#) sustainable tourism development model, it is necessary to carry out tourist flows and impact assessment. In Lithuania, the question of how to include communities into the management of dark tourism objects belonging to cultural tourism is still an issue. As it has been mentioned in the text, many objects belong to state, municipalities, departmental or private museums and are managed vertically. Often, national priorities and priorities of separate municipalities in cultural tourism development are not coordinated. They are not fully integrated. The aforementioned study points out that Lithuania has the prevailing competition and cooperation culture. Every interested party tends to receive rather than give and aims at maximising their individual short-term benefit. Cooperation is often understood as formal coordination or inclusion, there is a lack of openness to different opinions, ability to coordinate them and look for the best possible solution instead of local optimum ([Sharpley 2009](#)). However, the area of cooperation does not anticipate inclusion of communities, i.e., in order to achieve sustainable development of the tourism sector, it is essential to strengthen the cooperation culture among different interested parties such as political influencers, institutions, municipalities, business and associated business structures ([Sharpley 2013](#)). As [Stewart and Ko \(2002\)](#) points out, one needs to see and understand the benefit created by tourism. [Figure 18](#) presents the Lithuanian heritage management model, developed by [Jurėnienė and Radzevičius \(2014\)](#).

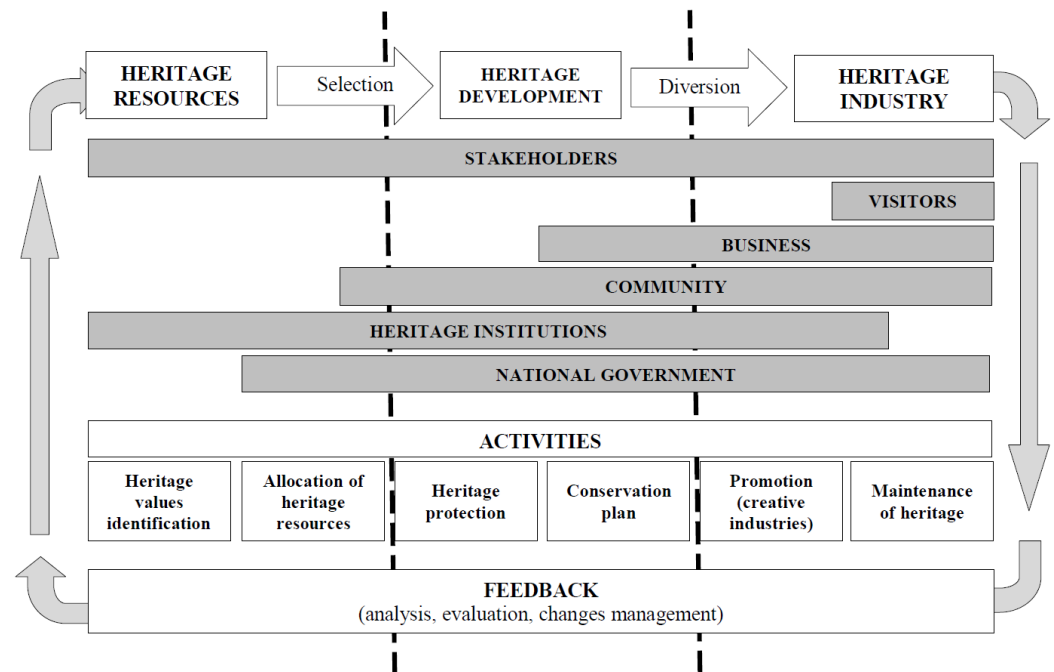


Figure 18. Lithuanian heritage management model. Source: Radzevičius and Jurėnienė (2014). Soviet Heritage and Tourism Development: the Case of Lithuania. Интелект XXI № 2, p. 38.

As it can be seen from the model, the dark tourism management model includes the community in between heritage institutions and businesses. However, creators of Lithuanian tourism strategies do not see communities as important part for an efficient and sustainable tourism development. The heritage risk management model formed by Australian Heritage Commission (Australian Heritage Commission 2000) states that risk management includes three groups of actors—tourism operators, heritage managers and the local community. Figure 19 presents the essential functions of the interested parties included in the AHC model in order to be more informative.

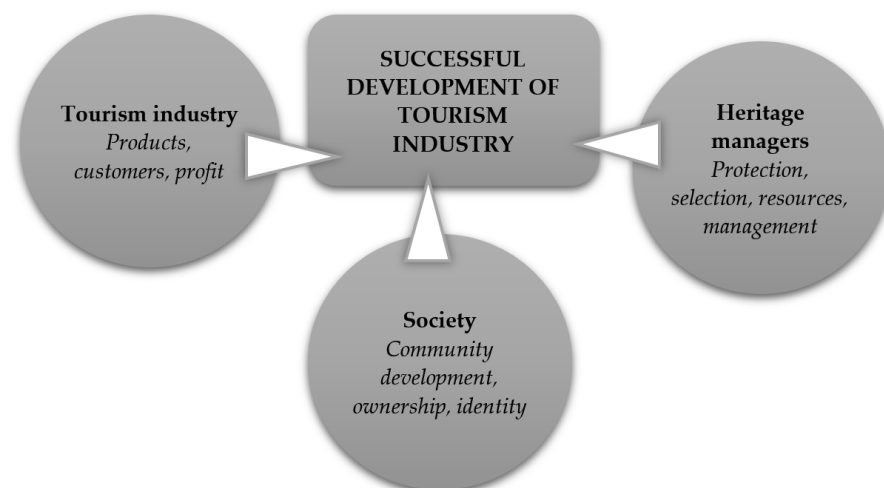


Figure 19. AHC Model of Heritage management. Source: Jurėnienė and Radzevičius (2014), Models of Cultural Heritage, Transformations in Business and Economics, Vol. 13, No 2 (32), p. 244.

As both models show, inclusion of community into cultural heritage management is one of the risk reduction factors. It can be said that the cultural heritage management model in Lithuania will remain the same as it has been since 1990. What it is more important, that the inclusion and active participation of local communities in development of dark

tourism sites helps significantly reduce the resistance and negative mood against this type of heritage and tourism. Finally, it should help to make the approach and principles of sustainable tourism alive and beneficial for all stakeholders.

6. Discussion

Dark tourism is a constituent of cultural tourism because it uses the same cultural heritage objects and creates products that are related to unique social material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional functions. According to the definition provided by the World Tourism Organisation, cultural tourism is a type of tourism activities where the main visitor motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume tangible and intangible cultural objects/products found in a tourist location. These objects/products relate to both cultural and dark tourism. Unfortunately, the feasibility study of Lithuanian tourism development does not distinguish dark tourism, although there are mentioned Jewish heritage, museum, cultural heritage object tourism.

Cultural and dark tourism coordinates well with sustainable tourism and sustainable development. Even though sustainable development in Lithuania does not include culture as the 4th sustainable development aspect until now, the analysis of researchers' studies and international documents shows that sustainable development encompasses sustainable culture as well, and it includes cultural tourism. Lithuania anticipates the aspect of sustainability in tourism development but through so-called "slow pace" tourism culture. This means that the aim includes long holidays of inbound tourism consumers in a country and their long-term engagement into the local culture. So, there is a conflict between the principles of sustainable development and dynamics and preferences of the nowadays tourists.

However, these aspects are not the most important and actual for ensuring the sustainable dark tourism development in region. The main topic is how to involve communities into the development process, into adaptation of their local cultural objects for the needs of cultural dark tourism, so that it generates added value for the region and for the community as well.

And here is a dilemma, because it is necessary to consider how the concept of dark tourism should be supplemented so that this conflict would not be so acute; how to ensure that the growing interest of travellers in visiting dark tourism sites, especially the darkest ones, does not become an obstacle to sustainable development and does not do more harm than good to the local environment and communities. On the other hand, by severely restricting attendance, tightening the preservation and consumption of the dark heritage, and protecting local communities, there is likely to create only greater pressure and opposition between sustainability and the demand for dark tourism. Furthermore, there is still open question of why local societies (and not in Lithuania only—this is common issue for the all former Soviet Republics) stand out for lack of active attention and awareness to their local history, lack communality and civic activism, which could be the keys for the higher local community engagement into development of sustainable tourism sites.

The analysis of the dynamics of dark tourism sites visitors since 2016 shows that the numbers increased³. This is related to the insufficiently developed tourism industry because the participants of the Lithuanian tourism industry seek short-term benefit based on a financial expression rather than sustainable cooperation. In 2020, the tourism market developed only based on local tourism resources. However, the KGB museum remained the most visited object.

The Lithuanian dark tourism, similar to any other tourism, is managed vertically. Often, there is no general cultural heritage strategy on state and municipal levels. Sustainable tourism development models include community that is or should be interested in effective management of existing heritage. Lithuanian tourism development studies do not anticipate engagement of communities into cultural heritage and cultural tourism development studies. This in its turn does not reflect the sustainable development model because one of the constituents is sustainable society. The anticipated cultural heritage

management model will not change. Therefore, cultural tourism development in Lithuania will not change as well, and sustainability will remain just a declarative expression.

As it was mentioned before, dark tourism, as a type of tourism, is a complex, ambiguous and controversial topic that has been the subject of much debate and criticism. Therefore, the deeper and more active involvement of the local community is essential for the more sustainable development of dark tourism, both locally and globally. It is the community (and, in a broad sense, the society of the region or country) that should be most interested in the preservation, promotion and sustainable use of its cultural, heritage and historical resources. As Light (2017) stated, the people whose stories are represented at a place of death represent a stakeholder group that has, to date, been largely neglected. Engaging with such groups enables a better understanding of the tensions over the interpretation and marketing of such places but could potentially contribute to developing strategies that are considered acceptable and appropriate (Light 2017). This can be achieved through joint projects of researchers, cultural workers and local people (one of the great initiatives in Lithuania is the involvement of communities in activities, events and general implementation of project “Kaunas—European Capital of Culture 2022” in order to exploit local heritage, including dark heritage, too⁴).

However, in addition to the active involvement of communities, the development of sustainability principles in national tourism development documents is no less important. Here again, it is important to emphasize that we are not talking about the “incorporation” of declarative principles of sustainability, but about the revision of the tourism strategy, which aims to introduce more horizontality into national tourism management. However, let us not forget the obvious fact that today’s world is extremely dynamic, and therefore the strategy must be flexible and responsive to reality. Therefore, horizontality in tourism management and community involvement are some of the best ways to achieve this, while actively developing sustainable dark tourism.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, V.J.; Formal analysis, V.J.; Investigation, M.R.; Methodology, V.J.; Project administration, V.J.; Resources, M.R.; Validation, M.R.; Visualization, M.R.; Writing—original draft, V.J. and M.R.; Writing—review & editing, M.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ A hort video about <https://tinyurl.com/bdHz3afz> (accessed on 6 January 2022).

² A Short movie about gypsum mountains <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Op9K3Mx0U-4> (accessed on 6 January 2022).

³ This argument does not include the statistics for 2020, when COVID-19 spread worldwide and the consequent restrictions on travel and tourism were applied.

⁴ See more about Kaunas—European Capital of Culture’ programme “Memory Office”: <https://kaunas2022.eu/en/memory-office/> (accessed on 22 March 2022).

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