

DARK TOURISM ATTRACTIONS AND EXPERIENCES AS A NICHE OR ALTERNATIVE TOURISM PRODUCTS

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Abstract

There are many types of niche or alternative tourism that have emerged over the years which are based on the extent to define by their relative orientation toward attractions, accommodations or motivations (adventure tourism, urban tourism, cultural tourism, dark tourism, ecotourism, ethnic tourism, green tourism, heritage tourism, life-seeing tourism, literature tourism, volunteer tourism, rural tourism). In this paper, main accent is point on the dark tourism as act of travel and visitation to sites, attractions and exhibitions which has real or recreated death, suffering or the seemingly macabre and the best-known destinations for dark tourism in the world.

Key words: niche tourism, alternative tourism, dark tourism, tourism products

INTRODUCTION

Among the most remarkable socioeconomic phenomena after Second World War is the expansion of the global tourism industry. Today, tourism is one of the world's largest industry. Despite the positive, especially evident are the negative effects on development of mass tourism.

The evolution of tourism theory after Second World War has, according to Jafary, passed through four stages or platforms, namely advocacy, caution, adaptancy and knowledge. These platforms provide a useful framework for understanding the emergence and development of alternative forms of tourism (or niche tourism) and sustainable tourism (as the best decision in tourism development).

The alternative tourism emerged in the early 1980s as a part of the adaptancy platform and may therefore be regarded as an early form of engagement with the idea of sustainability in the tourism. Alternative tourism represents an alternative, not a solution, to the alleged problems associated with mass tourism development.

ALTERNATIVE AND NICHE TOURISM

No universally agreed or widely adopted definition of alternative tourism is to be found, although there are a number of very good attempts and many authors give a list of criteria against which it should be assessed.

Thus, according to Holden, "alternative tourism is a process which promotes a just form of travel between members of different communities. It seeks to achieve mutual understanding, solidarity and equality amongst participations."¹

Dernoi define alternative tourism by accommodation type: "In alternative tourism (AT) the client receives accommodation directly in or at the home of the host with, eventually, other services and facilities offered there."²

According to Eadington and Smith, alternative tourism has been broadly defined as forms of tourism that are consistent with natural, social, and community values and which allow both hosts and guests to enjoy positive and worthwhile interaction and shared experiences.

Rosenow and Pulsipher proposed the term new tourism that applies both to tourists and communities to develop a tourist industry based on their unique assets. They suggest eight principles: unique heritage and environment; preserve, protect and improve the quality of attractions; develop other attractions with roots in their own locale; economic opportunity and cultural enrichment; local services; utilize communication for marketing; improve things rather than destroy them in the limit of the local carrying capacity; and less consumption of energy.

Alternative tourism represent a shift from mass to more flexible products. He emerged around 1970-80 to resolve the problems and negative effects of the conventional tourism industry.

¹ Williams S.: *Tourism: New directions and alternative tourism*, 2004, p.174

² Ibid., 173

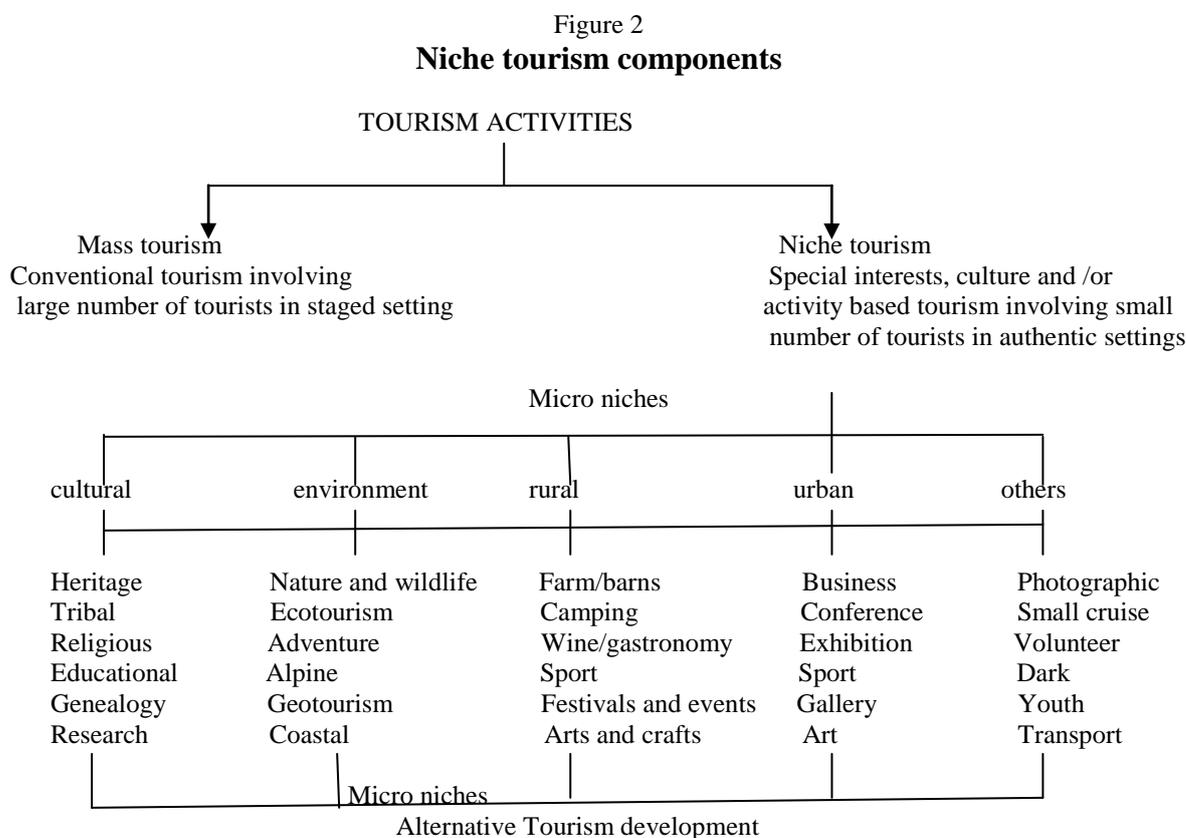
Table 1
Types of alternative tourism models

| Type | Brief description |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Adventure tourism | Commercial tours that engage in risk-taking nature-based outdoor recreational activities; e.g. kayaking, rafting, sky diving, mountaineering (Buckley, 2007; Bentley&Page, 2001) |
| Agritourism or Farm tourism | Leisure or educational visitations to working farms or other agricultural business operations, e.g. camping, fishing, hunting, farm stays, produce picking (Lobo, 2008; McGehee, Kim&Jennings, 2007; Comen&Foster, 2006; Weaver&Fennel, 1997; Clarke, 1996) |
| Cultural tourism | Tourism that engages the visitor to local culture in an “aesthetic, intellectual, emotional or psychological nature” (Reisinger, 1994:24); e.g. visual/performing arts, archeological/heritage cities (Stebbins, 1996) |
| Dark tourism | Visitations to places where tragic event took place; e.g. graveyards, memorials, catacombs. Also known as “thanatourism”, grief tourism, death or black spot tourism. (Yuill, 2003; Ashworth, 2002; Seaton, 1996) |
| Ecotourism | Activities conducted in the natural environment with the objective to educate the visitor; e.g. rainforest/wildlife excursion (Weaver, 2001) |
| Ethnic tourism | Activities with emphasis on cultural authenticity of a destination, offering first-hand experience to the visitor; e.g. native minority heritage parks (Li, 2000; Klieger, 1990; Wood, 1984; Greenwood, 1982) |
| Geotourism | Visitations to destinations based on their geographical character, as well as its social and cultural character; e.g. Yosemite Park, Las Vegas, St. Andrews (Buckley, 2003; Stueve et al., 2002) |
| Green tourism | Tourism centred upon rural landscape with “wildlife” and historical heritage, also referred as “rural tourism” (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2008; Torridge District Council, 2008) |
| Heritage tourism | Leisure and educational visitations to places, from cultural to environmental, that are based upon its past history; e.g. history museums, heritage parks, festivals (Dunlap, Schleicher, Keptner&Denk, 2001) |
| Life-seeing tourism | Tourism where visitors directly stay at local residences engaging and learning about traditional customs and way-of-life (Sarazin, 2003; White, 1993) |
| Literature tourism | Visitations to locations that are related to a writer’s or artist’s life history, as well as the setting for a novel or work; e.g. author’s home (Herbert, 2001) |
| Volunteer tourism | Visitors engage in volunteer work at a destination with the aim to fulfill social and personal needs; e.g. building bridges for villages, teaching English (Bartham, 2006; Singh&Singh, 2004) |
| Urban tourism | Tourism based within a city or town setting where visitors engage primarily in cultural activities; e.g. seeing exhibitions, visiting city monuments, park and architecture (Law, 1992) |

Source: M. Miyake: *Tourism and the local business community in small cities and towns: a qualitative study of the Blackstone valley, Rhode Island*, Boston University, 2008, p.21

The different alternative tourism products are based on the extent to which they are defined by their relative orientation toward attractions, accommodations or motivations. Many alternative tourism products gravitate toward one of the three criteria, while several combine attraction and motivation. In addition, each subtype has internal variations that may fall in different positions within triangle (figure 1).

The connection between niche tourism and alternative forms of tourism is shown in the following figure (figure 2). Thus, any alternative form of tourism is a niche or micro-niche tourism.



Source: Novelli M.: *Niche tourism: contemporary issues, trends and cases*, Elsevier Butterworth – Heinemann, 2005, p.9

DARK TOURISM

One emerging area of special interest tourism (one alternative form of tourism or one micro-niche) has been identified by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, professors of Glasgow Caledonian University, in 1996 in a special issue of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, as a “dark” tourism. The professors in 2000 published a book titled “Dark tourism: The attraction of death and disaster”, which generated academic attention.

There are many synonyms for the term “dark tourism” in the literature. Some of them are the following: thanatourism, “morbid” tourism, “black spot” tourism, “grief” tourism, milking the macabre, “fatal attraction” tourism, “disaster” and “conflict” tourism.

Bristow and Newman introduces the term “fright tourism” as a variation of dark tourism where individuals may seek a thrill or shock from experience.⁴

What is common to all these terms (forms of tourism) is the link between tourism (tourism sites, attractions or experiences) from the one side and death, disaster or suffering on the other side.

⁴ Scharpley R. and Stone P.R.: *The darker side of travel: the theory and practice of dark tourism*, Channel View Publications, 2009, p.10

In many cases there is no clear definition of this tourism niche.

According to Stone P.R., dark tourism is “the act of travel and visitation to sites, attractions and exhibitions which has real or recreated death, suffering or the seemingly macabre as a main theme.”⁵

According to Seaton, dark tourism is “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death.”⁶

Marcel define dark tourism as “visitations to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continue to impact our lives”.⁷

The appearance of dark tourism is not related with age or gender of the tourists as a specific demographic background, but rather their social and historical background.

Dark tourists are people who travel to a destination for the following:⁸

- people looking for a direct connection with the past event or a spiritual experience;
- relatives of people who were part of the event;
- historians looking to understand and analyse the tragedy;
- the major significance of the event.

Some authors believe that dark tourism is a historical phenomenon and its roots date back to long ago. Thus, they cite numerous examples of tours from past such as pilgrimages to sites of religious death, the Via Dolorosa (the route followed by Jesus when he was crucified), the tombs of the pharaohs in Egypt, the Coliseum in Rome, the Tower in London and so on. However, dark tourism in real sense begins to be practiced in recent decades when parallel to the growth of tourism, emerging desires on the part of tourists to visit dark attractions and in particular, the sites of dark events.

The notion of dark attractions was introduced for the first time by Rojek in 1993, who considers the commercial development of grave sites or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent death as tourist attractions. Rojek thus defines black spots.⁹

Dark tourism products are multifaceted, complex in design and purpose, and diverse in nature.

⁵ Scharpley R. and Stone P.R.: *The darker side of travel: the theory and practice of dark tourism*, Channel View Publications, 2009, p. 10

⁶ Ibid., p.15

⁷ Tarlow E.P.: *Dark tourism – the appealing dark side of tourism and more*, p.48

⁸ “*Identifying and evaluating strategic niche market segments for which Namibia has a comparative advantages*”, p.30

⁹ Scharpley R. and Stone P.R.: *The darker side of travel: the theory and practice of dark tourism*, Channel View Publications, 2009, p. 13

According to Dann, the manifestations of dark tourism can be categorized as follows (table 2):

Table 2. **Division of the dark**

| | |
|---|---|
| Division of the dark | |
| <i>Perilous places</i> Dangerous destinations from the past and present | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • towns of horror • dangerous destinations |
| <i>Houses of horror</i> Buildings associated with death and horror, either actual or represented | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dungeons of death • heinous hotels |
| <i>Fields of fatality</i> Areas/land commemorating death, fear, fame or infamy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bloody battlegrounds • the hell of the Holocaust • cemeteries for celebrities |
| <i>Tours of torment</i> Tours/visits to attractions associated with death, murder and mayhem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mayhem and murder • the now notorious |
| <i>Themed thanatos</i> Collections/ museums themed around death and suffering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • morbid museums • monuments to morality |

Source: Lennon J. and Foley M.: *Dark tourism – the attraction of death and disaster*, Continuum, 2006, p.15

The dark tourism according to Seaton is a form of tourism consumption or behavioral phenomenon. Based on the behavioral perspective (the tourist's motives for visiting), Seaton suggest five categories of dark travel activities:¹⁰

1. travel to witness public enactment of death;
2. travel to see the sites of individual or mass deaths after they have occurred (battlefields, death camps and sites of genocide, the homes of infamous murderers, places where celebrities died, the sites of publicized murders);
3. travel to memorials or internment sites, including graveyards, cenotaphs, crypts and war memorials;
4. travel to see evidence or symbolic representations of death at unconnected sites / museums containing weapons of death or attractions that reconstruct specific events or activities;
5. travel for re-enactment or simulation of death.

The products of the dark tourism are not only driven by consumer tastes, but also by commercial and marketing politics on behalf of the supplier and by changes in the wider

¹⁰ Scharpley R. and Stone P.R.: *The darker side of travel: the theory and practice of dark tourism*, Channel View Publications, 2009, p.15

political and cultural climate. Depending on the features of dark tourism products, Scharpley suggests seven dark suppliers:¹¹

- Dark fun factory – these types of products possess a high degree of tourism infrastructure, are purposeful, offer sanitized products in terms of representation and are perhaps perceived as less authentic. Dark fun factory are the visitor sites, attractions and tours which have an entertainment focus and commercial ethic and which present real or fictional death and macabre event. They are the lightest edges of the “dark tourism spectrum” (the London dungeon, Dracula park in Romania).

- Dark exhibitions – refer to those exhibitions and sites which revolve around death, suffering or the macabre with an often commemorative, educational and reflective message. These products are more “serious” than dark fun factory and possess a darker edge of the “dark tourism spectrum”.

- Dark dungeons – occupy the center – ground of the “dark tourism spectrum” with a mixture of dark and light elements. These products of the dark tourism have a combination of entertainment and education, possess a relatively high degree of commercialism and tourism infrastructure and occupy sites which were originally non purposeful for dark tourism.

- Dark resting places – focuses upon the cemetery or grave markers as potential product for dark tourism. This type of products is in the center of the dark tourism spectrum with both dark and light elements.

- Dark shrines – are often very close constructed to the site of death and within a very short time period of the death occurred. They occupy the darker periphery of the dark tourism spectrum”. Most dark shrines are non-purposeful for tourism and possess very little tourism infrastructure.

- Dark conflict sites – are those activities, sites or destinations associated with warfare. They essentially have an educational and commemorative focus, are history-centric and non-purposeful in the dark tourism context.

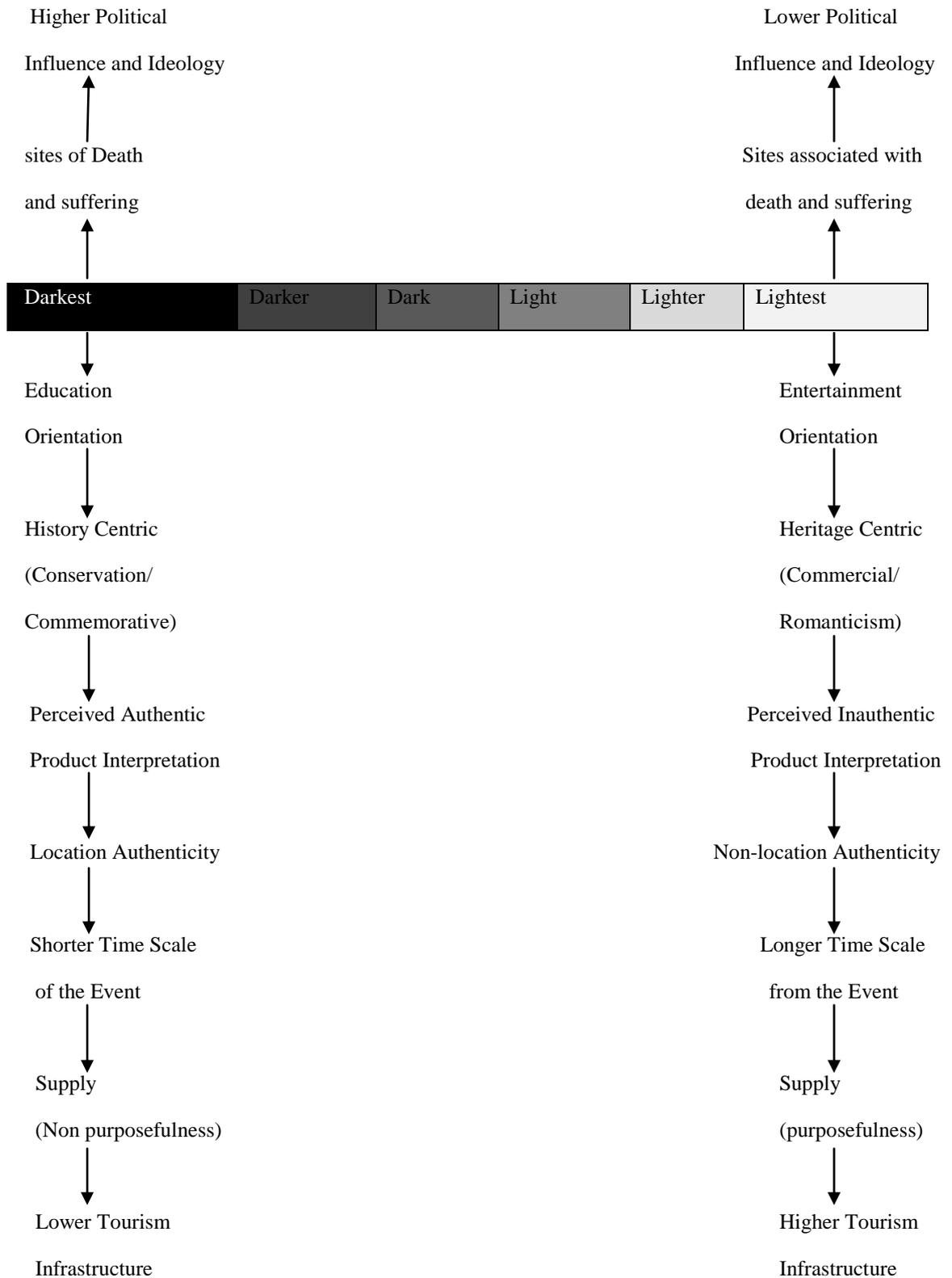
- Dark camps of genocide – represent those sites and places which have genocide, atrocity and catastrophe as the main thanatological theme, and thus occupy the darkest edges of the “dark tourism spectrum”. Dark camps of genocide are macabre in the extreme and they are produced to provide the ultimate emotional experience whereby visitors “sightsee in the mansions of the death.”

As a result, there are: darkest, darker, dark, light, lighter and lightest tourism products (figure 3). But the dark tourism is evidently a function of both demand and supply (figure 4). The supply of the dark tourism attractions or experiences varying from “accidental” to “purposeful”. From the one side, the dark tourism sites and attractions may be consumed in different ways by different tourists. From the other side, there are the places that have become tourist attractions by accident (accidental supply), but there are places which are created directly for economic gain (purposeful supply). Depending of the relationship between supply and demand for dark tourism sites and attractions, there are pale tourism, grey tourism and black tourism.

¹¹ Stone R.P: *A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions*, Vol.54, No.2/2006, p.153

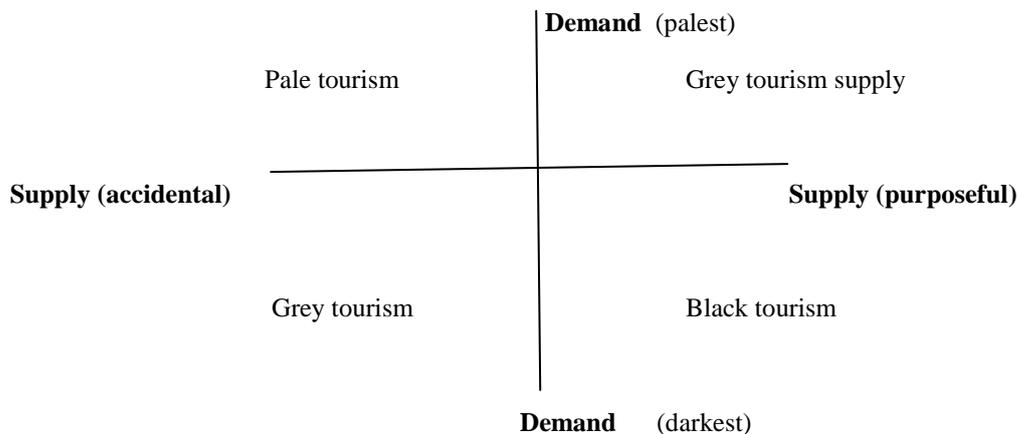
Figure 3

A dark tourism spectrum: perceived product features of dark tourism within a “darkest – lightest” framework of supply



Source: Stone R.P: *A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions*, Vol.54, No.2/2006, p.151

Figure 4. **Matrix of dark tourism demand and supply**



Source: Lennon J. and Foley M.: *Dark tourism – the attraction of death and disaster*, Continuum, 2006, p.

All over the world exist more or less important destinations for the development of dark tourism. In Europe Dark Tourists can visit:¹² concentration camps at Auschwitz in Poland; American cemetery in Normandy, France; London Dungeon; Colditz Castle, Germany's most famous prisoner-of-war camp; Gulag in Grutas Park, Lithuania; Coliseum in Rome where 9,000 gladiators and 10,000 animals fought against each other in one 117-day killing spree by Roman Emperor Trajan; Pow camp at Colditz in Germany; Vilnius KGB Prison in Lithuania; Jack the Ripper Tours in the streets of Victorian London where you follow a trail of bloody murders; The site of St. Peter's death in Rome; Culloden battlefield near Inverness, Scotland; Beaumaris Prison in Anglesey, Wales; Jim Morrison's grave at Pere La Chaise cemetery in Paris.

The best – known destinations for dark tourism in the world are considered: Anne Frank museum in Amsterdam; Auschwitz in Poland; Ground Zero in New York; Chernobyl in Ukraine; Pearl Harbour in Hawaii; London Dungeon in Britain; Hrad Bran in Romania; Vrazedna pole in Cambodia and Arlington in USA.

SUMMARY

Under the alternative tourism concept we can find a series of classifications and types of tourism which are based on their relative orientation toward attractions, accommodations or motivations. Any alternative form of tourism is a niche or micro-niche tourism. There are not one definition about the terms alternative tourism and niche tourism. Dark tourism is one emerging area of special interest tourism (one alternative form of tourism or one micro-niche) which has been identified by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, professors of Glasgow Caledonian University, in 1996 in a special issue of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. There are many definitions and synonyms for the term dark tourism. What is common to all these terms (forms of tourism) is the link between tourism (tourism sites, attractions or experiences) from one side and death, disaster or suffering on the other side. Dark tourism is a function of both demand and supply. Some authors believe that dark tourism is a historical phenomenon and its roots date back to long ago. However, dark tourism in real sense begins to be practiced in recent decades when parallel to the growth of tourism, emerging desires on the part of tourists to visit dark attractions and in particular, the sites of dark events.

¹² <http://www.tourism-futures.org/content/view/1388/273/>

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