

“Tourism ‘Death Space’ and Thanatourism in Poland”

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Abstract

Tourism space organizers use ‘death space’ for the purpose of creating tourism attractions and products in response to market demand. The article presents a short review of research into thanatourism and the use of ‘death space’ for tourism purposes in Europe and Poland, as well as selected examples of tourism assets and attractions related to death included as a part of Poland’s tourism potential and of cultural tourism.

Key words: *thanatourism, dark tourism, ‘death space’, cultural tourism, Poland*

Paper Type: *Scientific study*

1 Introduction

Death is a cultural asset commonly found in contemporary cognitive tourism. The changing character of tourism consumption leads to the discovery of new tourism spaces, often long familiar, but relatively poorly documented and studied.

Using selected Polish examples, the author makes an attempt to describe the tourism assets and attractions whose potential is based on the phenomenon and ontology of death, strengthened with artefacts and material and non-material heritage. Values associated with death within socio-geographical space allow ‘death space’ to be identified as part of it. Those tourism motivations and needs which result in travelling to a ‘death space’, have led to tourism attractions and products on the basis of ‘death space’ being organised, and the subsequent development of this part of tourism space. At the same time, due to its cultural value, ‘death space’ may be an important tourism goal (e.g. related to religion, education, or entertainment).

Global tourism, developing as a result of the increasing affluence of societies, the amount of leisure time and developments in transport, requires not only new tourism spaces and forms of organization, but also the fulfilment of needs arising socially. One response to these needs is the development of various forms of cultural tourism. Rapidly developing social interests creating a tourism demand include sites and spaces related to death. These interests are reflected in academic research into the use of ‘death space’ in cultural tourism, as well as in the attempt to identify the relation between ‘death space’ and tourism space (Seaton 1996, Tanaś 2006b, 2008b).

Changes in the perception of death in the 20th c. undoubtedly resulted from the development of mass culture (Morin 1965) which significantly increased the popularity of comic-book type

death, the fear of a dead person (a ghost), and the love of such scenes in literature, radio and film. Morin (1965) understands mass culture as that created according to the norms of industrial production, spread by means of mass media, and addressed to society. Mass culture favours participation in danger through media (e.g. death, disaster), while remaining completely safe. From beneath the deluge of violence presented to the contemporary inhabitant of the western world by the media and its cultural products, comes a mysterious fascination with death, accompanied by a simultaneous desecralization of the act of dying.

Death is inextricably connected with fear. Nowadays, it is presented not only through the macabre, murder, tragic accidents, war, genocide, capital punishment and global threats, but also as entertainment. 21st c. humanity is constantly encountering violent and brutal death. However, death in everyday life is more ‘delicate’. Real death is distanced from the theatrical death experienced by the spectator. Giving death a comic-book nature creates a taboo about real death, and at the same time is a source of motivation to see its manifestations, including those observed during tourism and holiday trips.

2 Understanding thanatourism

‘Death-branded’ spaces and sites have been present in thanatological, anthropological, historical and sociological studies for a long time. They appeared in geography in the 1960’s dealing with ‘death space’, dead spaces (cemeteries) and ‘deathscape’, when studies of the spatial layout of cemeteries, known as necrogeography, began (Kniffen 1967). Necrogeography is the study of the morphology of cemeteries, which provides a reflection of the real world (Francaviglia 1971) and forms a cultural landscape, defined by specific features and forms. Considering

'death space' and dead spaces, thanatourism studies are a part of necrogeography which includes tourism, dealing with the geographical aspects of using 'death space' for tourism purposes, as a part of a wider socio-geographical space.

Publications on the use of 'death space' for tourism purposes established the general goal of research, which is to identify, describe and analyse tourism journeys to 'death space' (including social and geographical analysis), known as thanatourism (Seaton 1996, 2002, Tanaś 2006a, 2008a).

Dark tourism includes all issues referring to the origins and consequences of tourism connected with death and cruelty, involving trips to disaster areas and sites of mass death, genocide or murder (Lennon & Foley 2000, Stone 2006). *Dark tourism* is described as a subsection of cultural tourism or heritage tourism, and is a consequence of the global development of communications and media, as well as tourists' needs.

Foley & Lennon (1996) claim that *dark tourism* includes visiting places like battlefields (historical and contemporary) and other sites related to war tourism, museums and exhibitions on the theme of death, cemeteries and tombs, prisons, concentration camps, disaster areas, sites of tragic accidents, terrorist attacks, etc.

Thanatourism (Seaton 1996, 2002, Dann & Seaton 2001) is treated as a subtype of *dark tourism* where death is the object of interest and derives from thanatopsis - death contemplation.

Thanatourism (Tanaś 2006a) may be defined as a particular type of cultural tourism, including trips to places which document or commemorate death. To a certain degree, such trips may result from the particular traits of the person or persons whose death is the object of interest, or from the character, history and interpretation of the event or site, as well as the motivations (and needs) of the trip participants.

Thus, thanatourism should be considered from the following perspectives:

- the personal qualities and achievements of the dead person or persons;
- the character, history and interpretation of the event or site connected with death;
- motivations and needs (education, homage, adventure, excitement, entertainment), effects (psychological, social, economic).

Thanatological explanations of the tourism consumption of death have appeared in many British publications (Stone 2010, 2011, 2012, Stone & Sharpley 2008, Sharpley & Stone 2009, 2011). The studies are based on the thanatological paradigm of relations between the socio-cultural aspects of death and mortality, logical reaction to the inevitability of human death, and the potential role of tourism in relations between the living and death and dying. The essence of the tourism experience of 'death space' is its 'narration', and this is a consequence of motivation. Depending on whether motivation is educational, religious or entertainment-related, the tourist will interpret 'death space' differently, but will start thinking about death in every case, though to a different degree and in different ways (Fig. 1).

Is interest in death a result of supply, of the growing number of tourism attractions making use of dark assets (Lennon & Foley 2000), or does it come from the growing interest in death and the macabre (Miles 2002, Stone 2006) or from educational

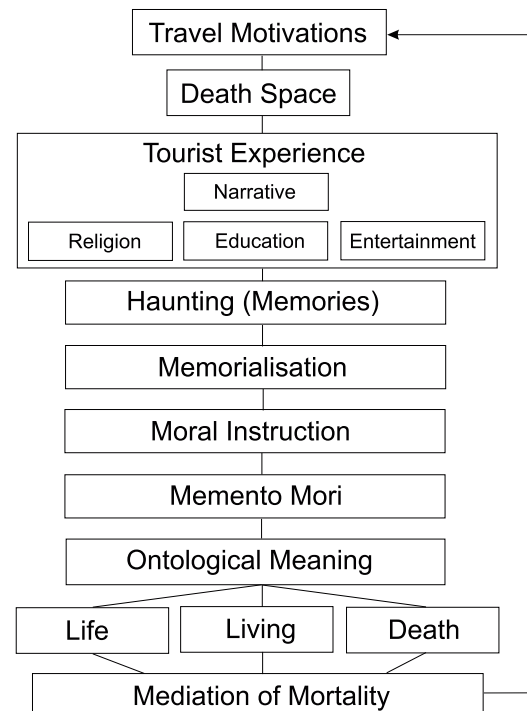


Fig. 1. Consequences of the tourism experience of 'death space'
(author, based on Stone 2012)

needs (Tanaś 2012)? Certainly, there are other motivations. But if so, are they morally acceptable?

Lennon & Foley (2000) based their research on a description of the tourism use of concentration camps in Poland, including the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial in Oświęcim (Berbeka 2012). Dark tourism research has been presented in many works describing 'dark journeys', classified according to the object of the tourist's interest as 'black-spot', slavery, genocide, war, battlefield, terror, phoenix and death tourism.

In disciplines dealing with the causes and effects of tourism, the study of 'death space' is relatively new. It is mostly the domain of researchers from Anglophone countries. In Poland, there have been few authors dealing with these issues so far. Work concerning the identification of thanatourism and sepulchral space (cemeteries) has been conducted by Tanaś (2004, 2006a,b, 2008a,b, 2012), Stasiak & Tanaś (2005), Buczkowska & Malchrowicz-Mośko (2012), Chylińska (2009), Grzesiak (2011), Muszel (2007), among others.

Tourists look for experiences different from those they have in their everyday lives. They are consumers who buy a tourism product, using the assets of geographical and social space, prepared for them in an appropriate way. The ontological and phenomenological aspects of death also give rise to cognitive interest.

Tourism space organizers use 'death space' for the purpose of arranging tourism attractions and creating tourism products to satisfy market demand. 'Death space' is often used in the process of education, as a part of historical or educational tourism, or in sightseeing.

Regardless of whether it is high or popular culture, the message received by the tourist is always significant. Cultural tourism broadens social awareness, enhances discovery by crossing boundaries, creates needs, identification, value and interpreta-

tion. Contact with 'death space' can be stimulating for a tourist. By crossing invisible cultural boundaries, the tourist discovers an unknown world, often incomprehensible and challenging. This particularly concerns uninvolved and casual tourists. They often object to places related to death, such as exhibitions of mummies, preserved dead bodies, or bone remnants.

Places where death is displayed, particularly through artefacts, are addressed at yet another type of tourist. In the case of pop cultural and entertainment-related tourism products, death, its image and symbolism are often used in order to evoke certain impressions and emotions. Haunted castles, museums of death, scenes of executions and torture, or trips to danger zones are certainly examples of a completely different use of 'death space' for commercial purposes, often seen as controversial and morally wrong.

Thanatourism is a bridge between life and death, between the dead and the living. The tourist is obliged to contemplate death, which has not only a religious dimension, but also, or perhaps primarily, a social one. We may fear death, we may respect and understand it, but we may also laugh at it. Tourism is capable of generating each of these effects, depending on the needs and resources of both the tourists and the organizers of tourism attractions.

On the one hand, death is absent from people's private lives, due to the diminishment of the sacred, the seculariza-

tion of Western society, medicalisation of the process of dying and the commercialisation of death. On the other hand, death is omnipresent in pop culture and the media. Paradoxically, thanatourism plays an important role in the relations between the sacred and the profane in death, raises interest in death as understood and perceived in different ways, performs an educational function and strengthens the taboo against real death substituting an authentic encounter with its unavailability. Thanatourism makes it possible to reconsider our approach to death, by stimulating the need to contemplate it (thanatopsis), to move from primeval fear and disgust to an understanding of and preparation for it. Tourism attractions based on the phenomenon of death may also decrease the fear of dying through contemplation, education, commemoration or entertainment (Stone 2012).

Depending on the needs and motivations for travel, the tourist faces various aspects of death at numerous places and in different ways. Table 1 presents possible places of a tourist's encounter with death and its consequences, as well as the prospect of this encounter. Tourist interest in death usually comes from cultural differences, which cause different perceptions of death in terms of religion, customs (including cults and commemoration of the deceased), beliefs (folk culture, life after death, ghosts, supernatural powers, phantasms, immortality, reincarnation, legends, death cults), treatment of dead bodies (burial, cremation, mummification, cannibalism, storing human remains), and ways of expressing emotion in the face of death (seriousness, sadness, fear, respect, fun).

Table 1. Potential sites of tourist interest in 'death space'

Source:author

Sites of interest (tourism attraction)	Example, description
Shrine	epitaph, headstone, tombstone, crypt, sepulchral art, symbolism (sculpture, painting, song, music), other artefacts (e.g. 'mourning banners'), religious belief
Cemetery	way of commemorating the deceased person, symbolism of death, sepulchral art, plantings, landscape
Grave chapel	coffin, sarcophagus, sepulchral art, death symbolism
Ossuary	skeletal remains, sepulchral art, death symbolism
Grave	deceased person (saint, blessed, renowned), sepulchral art, symbolism of death
Rituals, beliefs	burial, liturgy, holidays, cult, religious belief, events (performances), the occult, spiritualism
Pilgrimage	encounter with a supernatural power, pilgrimage to a grave, relic, homage, remembrance, religious belief
Remembrance site, monument, commemorative plaque	homage, remembrance, history, education, performances
Mass death site	martyrology, crime, tragic event, sudden death, remembrance, homage, education
War	extermination, genocide, battlefield, war crime, act of terror, education
Disaster	natural disaster, anthropogenic, remembrance
Collective grave	nature of death, history, remembrance
Sites of individual death	crime, tragedy, event, sudden death, symbolism of death, remembrance, homage
Museum, exhibition	sepulchral art., symbolism of death, heritage, mummies, human remains, education, show, entertainment, pop culture
Landscape	symbolism of death in natural and anthropogenic landscape, 'culture scape', cemetery
Culinary art	dishes, symbolism of death, culture
Commerce, services	devotional articles, souvenirs, ritual products, material products of culture, artefacts, guide services, tourism services
Media transmission	TV, radio, Internet, press, knowledge, education
Music, literature, art., film	concepts, myths, education, interpretation, creating needs and motivations to travel, pop culture
Fashion	symbolism of death, identity, culture, pop culture
Entertainment	pop cultural dimension of death, amusement parks, theme exhibitions, ghosts, phantasms, the occult

3 Tourism 'death space' in Poland

The key groups of elements creating death space in Poland include sepulchral art (cemeteries, tombs, crypts, epitaphs, grave chapels, ossuaries, relics); sites of mass death and collective graves connected with war or disaster; sites of individual death as a result of an accident or crime; other remembrance sites; museums, exhibitions; rituals and beliefs; events and pop cultural entertainment.

Sepulchral art

According to the National Heritage Institute, at the end of 2012, in Poland, out of 66,424 items registered as fixed historical monuments, 4,389 were cemeteries, 28 – tombs, 226 – grave chapels and 113 - graves, which constitutes over 7% of all such monuments in Poland. Sepulchral space is the 'death space' most frequently visited by tourists and includes cemeteries, grave chapels and relics of saints or the blessed.

As regards cemeteries, the most attractive in Poland include the largest - Central Cemetery in Szczecin, national cemeteries with the graves of notable Poles - the Rakowicki Cemetery in Kraków, the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw, the Old Cemetery in Zakopane, the Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv (Ukraine) and the Rasos Cemetery in Vilnius (Lithuania).

The geography of denominational cemeteries in Poland is fairly complicated, however certain patterns in their location may be observed. Roman-Catholic cemeteries are distributed relatively evenly over the area of the whole country; they are often 19th c urban cemeteries.

Protestant cemeteries are mainly found in the west and north of the country. The most interesting Evangelical lapidarium can be visited in Wschowa, at the old Evangelical-Augsburg cemetery; it contains about 400 gravestones and monuments from nearby cemeteries.

Jewish cemeteries occur mostly in the eastern, central and southern part of Poland. The most interesting include the Remuh Cemetery in Kazimierz, Kraków, the cemetery in Lesko, in Łódź, and the cemeteries in Warszawa, Tarnów and Wrocław. A particular role is played by Jewish cemeteries with graves of tzadiks, destinations of orthodox Jewish pilgrimages (Leżajsk, Lelów). Jewish lapidarium have been organized in places like Szydłowiec, Kazimierz Dolny, Tykocin and Chełmno on the Ner River.

Eastern Orthodox and Greek-Catholic cemeteries are situated above all in the east and south of the country (Carpathians). A lapidarium with stone Lemko crosses from the Lower Beskid area has been created at the cemetery near the Orthodox church in Kotań. Also the Old Believers' cemeteries in Wojnowo and Gabowe Grądy (Mazurian Lake District) are worth noting.

Mennonite cemeteries in Żuławy Wiślane are the remnants of Dutch settlement. It is interesting to see the lapidarium of Mennonite gravestones at the castle in Malbork and in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki.

The least common, but still recognized touristically, are the Tatar cemeteries (Bohoniki, Kruszyniany - Podlasie).

Military (war) cemeteries are connected above all with the First and Second World Wars. We should mention here the cemeteries from the First World War grouped in the area of

Tarnów and Gorlice, as well as in the Polish-Slovakian borderlands. War cemeteries from that period are also found in the Mazurian Lake District, Podlasie, Mazowsze and Małopolska. Cemeteries from the Second World War are scattered over practically all of Poland. There are about 2000 of them and they contain the graves of soldiers from the Polish Army, Red Army, Wehrmacht, Allied armies and others.

A separate and quite particular group consists of cemeteries which are special due to their exceptionality or uniqueness. They include castle (Człuchów), fortified (Lubiechowa, Marciszów, Brochów), defensive and plague cemeteries. Occasional animal cemeteries are a kind of oddity, the most famous of which are the horse cemeteries in Kliczków and Janów Podlaski. This group also includes burial mounds in the villages of Szwarzajcaria and Odry. An interesting example of a symbolic cemetery is the Cemetery of the Lost Cemeteries (*Cmentarz Nieistniejących Cmentarzy*) in Gdańsk.

Sites where famous historical figures are buried (rulers, artists, leaders, clergymen, saints and the blessed) have been tourism destinations since the 19th c. The graves of Polish rulers (kings and princes) are situated in a small number of places. Royal cemeteries can be found at Archcathedral Basilica in Poznań, at the Cathedral in Płock and Wawel Cathedral, Kraków.

The graves of writers, artists, leaders and politicians can be found in the Crypt of Distinguished Poles (*Krypta Zasłużonych na Skalce*) in Kraków, the Crypt of Distinguished Citizens of Wielkopolska (*Krypta Zasłużonych Wielkopolan*) at St Wojciech's Church in Poznań, the crypt at St John's Cathedral in Warsaw and in the Wawel crypts in Kraków.

Graves of priests, the blessed and saints, are the destinations of pilgrimages and tourism trips alike. The most frequently visited in Poland are the graves of St Wojciech in Gniezno and St Stanislaus in Kraków, St Jadwiga of Silesia in Trzebnica and St Faustyna in Łagiewniki (Kraków). This group also includes the graves of the blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko and Primate Stefan Wyszyński in Warsaw.

The most famous Polish symbolic grave is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw. Crypts can be found in practically every old brick church. However, those in the oldest Polish churches are interesting not only because distinguished people were buried there, but also because the mummified bodies evoke strong emotions. The most interesting places of this type are the crypts at the Franciscan church in Kraków, of the Zamoyski family in Zamość, the Czartoryski family in Sieniawa and the Opaliński family in Sieraków, the crypts in the castle church in Oleśnica, and the Benedictine crypts on Święty Krzyż (Świętokrzyskie Mountains). The unique floors tiled with gravestones at the St Mary's Basilica in Gdańsk are an interesting attraction.

Family chapels and tombs are often exquisite pieces of architecture and art in original and unusual forms. They include the chapels of magnate and noble families, usually situated in churches they founded in their former estates.

One of the most interesting sepulchral sites in Poland is certainly the Chapel of Skulls (*Kaplica Czaszek*) in Czeremna (Kudowa Zdrój), which is an 18th c. ossuary. It is one of the greatest tourism attractions in south-western Poland.

Sites of mass and individual death, remembrance sites

Sites of mass death are typical of the Second World War. Numerous Nazi concentration camps, death camps and prisoner of war camps were situated in the area of today's Poland. All of them are collective graves of many thousands murdered by the Nazis, which are today pilgrimage and tourism destinations.

The places which are most frequently visited by tourists include the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Mausoleum in Oświęcim, the Majdanek Museum in Lublin, the Museum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Treblinka, the Stutthof Museum in Sztutowo, the Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica, The Museum of the Former Sobibór Death Camp, as well as the former sites of concentration camps in Bełżec, Chełmno on the Ner River, Łódź-Radegast, Palmiry, Łambinowice and Żagań.

Moreover, in Poland, tourists visit places of execution and martyrdom from different historical periods, including the Mausoleum of Polish Village Martyrology in Michniów.

A separate group contains the sites of tragic accidents and disasters, such as the plane crashes at Okęcie Airport (1980) and Kabacki Forest (1987), or coach crashes near Żywiec (1978) and Gdańsk (1994).

In Poland, a popular form of commemorating those who died a tragic death, especially in car accidents, is by placing a cross beside the road. During coach tours, guides tell tourists about the tragedies which happened at such places. If the victims were well-known figures monuments are erected at the sites of their tragic death, or for those who had meritorious lives, at related places. An example here is the cross on the dam in Włocławek dedicated to the priest, Jerzy Popiełuszko, murdered there (1984), or the place at the 10th Anniversary Stadium (*Stadion 10-lecia*) in Warsaw where Ryszard Siwiec self-immolated (1964).

Tourists travel to sites commemorating tragic events, human death and suffering in the form of museums, mausoleums, monuments and commemorative plaques (e.g. the Warsaw Uprising Museum, the Monument to the Defenders of Westerplatte in Gdańsk, the Mausoleum of Struggle and Martyrdom in Warsaw, and monuments commemorating the communist murder of workers in Gdańsk, Poznań, Szczecin and Katowice).

Museums, exhibitions, rituals

In Poland, death artefacts are exhibited in museums in the form of permanent or temporary exhibitions. A very interesting form of presentation is the staging of burial or death rituals, as well as associated religious festivals. This group includes coffin portraits (Regional Museum in Międzyrzecz), crosses, sarcophagi, tombstones and epitaphs (Castle Museum in Brzeg), old publications of funeral and graveside speeches, funeral rituals, passion plays (the most famous performed in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Kalwaria Paławska and Górka Klasztorna), religious festivals (All Saints Day, Paschal Triduum), and other elements (e.g. crosses of conciliation, lanterns of the dead).

Events, pop cultural entertainment

In recent years, a popular form of commemorating historical events has been reconstructions, organized by reconstruction societies and groups. While the fact of commemorating a historical event does not raise any moral doubts, a public

presentation of killing, murder or genocide may do so. In July 2013, a reconstruction of the massacre of Poles in Volhynia is planned to take place in the village of Radymno. Reconstructions of battles, very popular with tourists, are organized near Grunwald (1410), in Warsaw (Warsaw Uprising 1944), or on the Bzura River (1939).

The last group of thanatourism assets consists of amusement parks, museums and exhibitions whose aim is to create an atmosphere of fear and fun. There are not many places of this kind in Poland. They include the Museum of Horror in Wojnowice Palace and numerous torture chambers in Polish castles.

4 Conclusions

The quality of trips to sites connected with death is as varied as their participants: their motivations and the goals of these trips. The perception of 'death space' may be very personal, or tragic, or symbolic. It may be a mass or pop-cultural perception, usually occurring in non-sacred buildings and sites. It should be remembered that the perception of death varies depending on the culture of a given society. This variety and uniqueness creates the need to experience space in a different way, resulting from cultural relativity, which in turn enhances tourism as a part of culture.

The positive functions of thanatourism include creating attitudes towards death, empathy for others, creative activity, as well as understanding of thanatological and eschatological issues. The cognitive process, so important in youth tourism, involves the direct understanding of death semiotics, its symbolism, tradition and rituality (Tanaś 2012).

However, tourism generates some unwanted, negative functions as well. The dysfunctions of thanatourism may result from a superficial understanding of 'death space', treated as unwanted, and full of negative emotions. 'Death space' may also be treated as a place of contact with the pop-cultural image of death. Tourism may lead to excessive and detrimental exploitation of this space, its commercialization and profanation. The local community may also object to using a sacred space for tourism purposes.

In the case of 'death space', harmful tourist behaviour can be observed, usually disrespecting the solemnity of the site or treating 'death space' merely as an unusual tourism attraction.

Thanatourism is an activity based on a particular understanding of the symbolism of 'death space', along with a whole set of codes defining it which leads to an interpretation of death. The power of interpretation lies in the possibility of a profound understanding of the encountered phenomenon or element. 'Death space' forces us to interpret, which is the basis of cognition, and the interpretation as an educational process will depend on the value of the message. The main aim of interpreting 'death space' or death itself should be an understanding of its meaning. Then working out our sensitivity to it, especially the death of another, which can itself lead to an understanding of the phenomenon and ontology of death.

The form in which death is presented, and the method of narrating a historical fact, are very important for the interpretation of the event and the visited site. The authenticity of death and its perception as a result of receiving external stimuli

are crucial to understanding the causes and effects of a death (Stone 2012). In the 'death spaces' visited, death is presented in such a way that the tourist 'consumes' it in through his/her own experience. By providing appropriate narration however, the organizers of the 'death space' may achieve their goals.

In Poland, using 'death space' for tourism purposes brings up multiple issues, mostly of a religious and ethical nature. Treating the Auschwitz concentration camp as a tourism attraction is strongly opposed, especially by the older generation. However, the facts are undeniable. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial is visited by hundreds of thousands of tourists and pilgrims every year. Study of the motivations for visiting this place (Berbeka 2012) confirms the author's assumptions presented above. Half of the visitors stated that the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum was one stop during a tourism excursion, and

this indicates the particular tourism attractiveness of the site and its significance as a tourism product increasing the tourism attractiveness of the Małopolska region as a whole. Also war cemeteries and relics of the First and Second World Wars in the Polish-Slovakian borderlands confirm the possibility of using 'death space' in historical or educational tourism.

Thanatourism has been studied in Poland only recently and by a small group of researchers. However, its popularity is growing, though it is raising a lot of controversy and moral challenges, mostly for historical, religious and cultural reasons. The need to conduct further descriptive and empirical studies of tourism 'death space' in Poland has been confirmed as thanatourism has been defined as a new cultural tourism product in the "Report on the tourism economy in 2007-11", published by the Ministry of Sport and Recreation.

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