

Cemetery as Village Tourism development site

Research

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Abstract

Rural areas are often affected by lack of impressive tourism attractions. Thus the creation of rural tourism and routes is hard and rarely providing long-term results.

An overlooked opportunity to change this trend is in the cemeteries. A space with rich cultural heritage in a form of art, architecture, poetry and historical facts offers visitors opportunity to discover true nature of surrounding society. Opportunities are often missed due to general misconception of cemeteries as places of only dark tourism.

The experiences from Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE) and European Cemeteries route (CEMR) reflect this. Cemeteries, especially in small towns and rural areas, present an opportunity to discover, create and promote stories. With proper management we might even find new routes and connections among them, thus building the new, long term viable tourism products.

In our article we will focus on several points:

- Perception and dimensions of the cemeteries

- Case study of possible tourist products in rural cemeteries (in England, Slovenia and Croatia)
- Simple ICT solutions to develop viable tourism products around cemeteries

Research description

The overlooked cultural heritage aspect of cemeteries often leads to marginalized position in marketing and communication of the cemeteries within tourism areas. Except for the most known cemeteries as in Paris, Dublin or Stockholm, visits are mostly limited to the target groups of art history, architecture or other professionals who prefer visiting cemeteries.

Yet on the other hand professionals who deal with the cemeteries argue that dark tourism experience in cemeteries is small comparing to other experiences for the visitor. In fact the artistic, historical and cultural experience is much bigger and provides many more opportunities for developing cultural tourism products beyond dark tourism.

Through our experiences from managing ASCE and CEMR we noticed that significant parts of the cemeteries visits, even the most popular ones, relate to the stories of people in their relationship to the town historical events. These stories attract visitors and provide important interpretation of the history, culture and values of society through time.

In our research we want to discover if this is valid for small village cemeteries as well and specifically identify stories and ways to use these stories in promotion and development of village tourism.

Research goals

Within our work we have set the following research goals:

- Research the perception and dimensions of cemeteries in relationship to building the viable touristic products
- Defining the role of dark tourism within cemeteries
- Identify overlooked tourism experiences at cemeteries
- Perform experimental identification of tourism experience at village cemeteries

- Discover possible information and communication tools and strategies to fit the rural areas tourism development

Hypothesis

During our research we want to test the following hypothesis:

- Dark tourism experiences presents less than 20% of overall tourism experience at cemeteries
- Over 50% of dark tourism experience is related to war memorials at cemeteries
- It is possible to identify at least 1 tourist interesting story at any rural area (village) cemetery

Methodology

To test the hypothesis we plan to execute the research by following methodology:

- Structured interviews among members of European Cemeteries route with following data collected:
 - amount of places in cemeteries guided tours related to:
 - Cultural heritage
 - Dark tourism
 - amount of war memorials within the dark tourism points

Interview will be performed on limited sample of cemeteries managers and researchers:

- work on cemeteries subject daily (manage or research or work on cemetery management or developments)
- work with cemeteries that are recognized as Significant cemeteries of Europe (members of ASCE)
- use ARtour app in their cemetery for creating guided walks for individuals
- cemetery is listed in European Cemeteries Route
- WDEC events (guided tours, venues) are performed in the cemetery

- Personal structured interviews with locals from 3 rural areas in Europe about interesting stories of people deceased in their cemeteries with following data collected
 - Is there any story that they find interesting, unusual or talked about often within village but not necessarily related to important person
 - What are the facts about this story?
 - Photo and location of the grave of the person and the cemetery
- Create simple promotional tool (poster or flyer) based on stories collected and guide created

Research limitations

The research is partially planned as preliminary study and limited to small samples. If the results will show significant and reliable hypothesis confirmation we plan to extend the sample and further study developments.

The story attractiveness and promotional tool effectiveness cannot be tested due to limits of research resources. Therefore authors will only perform subjective judgment based on discussion of the stories and materials within limited test groups.

Understanding the cemeteries dimensions

Death is the most common mental connection to a cemetery for an average human being. This association is accompanied with negative emotions, like sorrow and frustration.

As it shall be discussed later, death of a person is only a reason for shaping one of many extensions, which define cemetery. Therefore, a cemetery is not only a memorial area, but also a place, where cultural heritage and the history of specific places are presented. With such understanding of cemeteries, tourism is a deed that follows. When in grief, many other feelings may erupt at the cemetery, such as enthusiasm and a feeling of cultural consciousness. All these might happen, when we begin to realize different extensions of cemeteries.

CLASSICAL EXTENSION: Cemetery as a burial place

As the most classical example, we define a cemetery as an area intended for different funeral rites and preservation of posthumous remaining of bodies at a specific place.

Kolbuszewski describes cemeteries as: “a certain sector of space delimited by certain a priori formulated resolutions, according to which it is there that funeral practices consistent with religious, ethnic, cultural (that is customary) and other easily defined needs of a given community, will be carried out.” (Kolbuszewski, 1995).

Throughout history of humankind, different burial places, as well as funeral methods, had been used. The perception of death had also undergone some changes throughout history and this is the reason for different relations of death to cemeteries.

Fear of the ancient civilization, as well as other pagan tribes to the souls of the dead who dictated the burial outside the settlements, was completely diluted and sinking in the wake of the consolidation of Christianity. For centuries, the townspeople accepted cemeteries into central activities and space of their lives. In the 18th century from this trustworthiness to the deadly folds, develops a tendency, which

causes the real contradiction of the original mood. No one is afraid of the dead anymore, and even because of the shortage of space, the burials move back to the outskirts of towns. (Aries 2002).

The 20th and 21st centuries again reverse this picture. Due to the increasing number of inhabitants in cities, the expansion of the city center, formerly small cemeteries, again become city cemeteries. The same applies to the villages. Once a remote cemetery, due to a changed demographic image, becomes an integral part of the place.

Once mostly located outside the walls of European cities, cemeteries have become integrated into the urban landscape as the cities grew, and many are now very centrally located.

As cemeteries moved to cities, their most interesting extension began to evolve – a reflection of a culture.

AN EXTENSION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

“Cultural heritage includes areas, structures, objects and material works as result of creativity of mankind and its different activities and social development, characteristics of certain periods in Slovene and broader territory, protection of which is, because of its historical, cultural and civilized purpose, a part of public interest.” (Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 16/2008)”.

Cultural Heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. Cultural Heritage is often expressed as either Intangible or Tangible Cultural Heritage (ICOMOS, 2002). It includes creations, which are culturally worth of protection, because of their importance in specific environments.

Existence of a city and its cultural heritage, is not only seen throughout historical records, books and buildings, but also through grave monuments. From the definition of cultural heritage, cemeteries undoubtedly present a part of it.

For the study of very distant periods of the past, the burial grounds and graves represent that important source of information that reveals the civil, economic and social structure of the previous communities, the rank and status of deceased

individuals, within those communities and their perception of life and death. In a broader context, they reflect objects usually associated with graves, including cultural and trade links of a distant past. Material or written sources, thus repeatedly show the presence of rituals or gifts that made life easier for the deceased abroad. Throughout individual archaeological periods, changes are shown in the way of burial, when the plan and burial cemeteries, skeletons and fires are exchanged over time, as well as it is visible in attached objects. (Plesničar Gec 1999: 50-55).

Cemetery, as a place with rich architectural and artistic value, presents exceptional collection of structural masterpieces and great achievements of statuary. Next to latest aspect, architectural complexes arise, as cemeteries decide to hire greatest local artists to create memorable complexes. Significant examples are: Žale in Ljubljana (architect Jože Plečnik), Woodland in Stockholm, under the protection of UNESCO (architects Lewerentz and Asplund), San Cataldo in Modena (architects Aldo Rossi and Gianni Braghieri) and many others.

Cemeteries also present an important part of our national history. Many monuments and symbols present history of a nation and describe culture from specific historical period.

Main reasons for development of tourism at cemeteries are excellent architecture and preserved cultural heritage. "Cultural tourism" is therefore one of the most important and most interesting parts of touristic development of cities.

TOURIST EXTENSION

Cultural tourism

McIntosh and Goeldner (in Richards, 1996) define as a cultural tourism "all types of trips where tourists learn about the history and heritage of other nations and their contemporary way of life and thinking".

Cultural and heritage tourism is a major area of growth in the special interest of tourism market. Cultural tourism assets include museums, art galleries, historical theme parks, heritage sites, and arts festivals. However, despite the touristic popularity of visiting heritage sites and participating in cultural activities, relatively little detailed attention has been given to the cultural and heritage tourism of the cemeteries.

Cemeteries are interesting from many points of view. Firstly, because of their local-architectural plan (park arrangements, or because of architecture of tombs,

monuments, sculptures and famous personalities, who lived or worked in a specific place). Secondly, cemeteries may interfere with their cultural-historical heritage, for better knowledge of national history. Thirdly, guided tours throughout the cemetery or prepared materials for individual visits of the cemetery present an acquaintance of a visitor with all components of heritage, expressed over ethnology, archeology, architecture and history.

The beginnings of visiting cemeteries as a touristic destination are in early 19th century, when cemetery Pere Lachaise became an important touristic destination. Cemetery's unique environment and specialties attract tourist and often become one of travel destinations. Nowadays, many tourists' guide books include numerous cemeteries, which attract different groups of travelers and stimulate many juvenile cemeteries for development.

As cemeteries are quiet and peaceful in comparison to the city bustle, other senses are much more sensitive for accepting information. A visitor establishes a bond with a person whose grave he visits and later – if it is about an artist or any famous person - he visits an artist's creation, structure,... or he may visit a concert, exhibition,...which is connected to that person. A cemetery can also be used as a place for concerts, exhibitions,... - not only those of famous people, but generally – cemetery prepares a completely different tourist attraction than classic city views. **Visitors are bonded to a specific place in a special way, which increases chances of tourists' return.**

A rich piece of information about the historical and cultural heritage of European cemeteries also carries the international project of the European Cemeteries Association (ASCE). Week of Discovering European Cemeteries- when a number of events are organized at European cemeteries, in the last week of May, through which members of the association pursue the mission of promoting cultural and historical heritage and attract many tourists. Within the framework of the most important week for cemeteries, in Europe, free guided tours of cemeteries, lectures, concerts, exhibitions and other accompanying activities are held each year and attract numerous tourists.

Cultural tourism with presentation of cemeteries vs. dark tourism

Tourism is a complex phenomenon involving a wide range of people, increasingly seeking for new and unique experiences in order to satisfy the most diverse motives, reason why the world tourism landscape has been changing in the last decades (Seabra C, Abrantes J, Kastenholz E (2014)). Dark tourism provides a specific niche in the tourism market even though the dark tourism is not a new concept. For many

years now dark tourism has been part of the fascination, dating back to the pilgrims. Stone and Sharpley (2008) give for example the Roman gladiators games, pilgrimages or attendance at medieval public executions as early forms of such death-related tourism.

Dark tourism is defined by Foley and Lennon (1996) as “the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites. Gosar, A. (2015) defines as dark tourism sites of natural disasters, scenes of battles, military clashes and mass killings, and terrorist acts, and the cemeteries holding the graves of a nation-state’s leaders and of popular personalities in politics, culture and music (in other words: the graves of celebrities) continually receive attention and, subsequently, visits of individuals and tourist groups.

However, phenomenon has drawn substantial attention from academic research in recent years, for instance (Seaton 1999, Lennon and Foley 2000, Milles 2002, Sharpley 2006, Stone 2006, etc).

Despite the increasing academic interest in this subject since mid-1990s, there is general agreement that dark tourism remains theoretically fragile and poorly conceptualized (Stone and Sharpley, 2008).

We assume that the issue of fragile understanding of Dark tourism is based on the issue that authors are trying to define a broad term that could (and rather should) be researched as theoretical concept (phenomenon as described by Foley and Lennon).

To avoid broad and fragile concept we recognize **Dark tourism as market (business) definition** based on the concept of market by Derek F. Abell (1980):

- Target group
- Need
- Product

Dark tourism market is serving the **need** of a **target group** (tourist) to observe and understand (violent) death through **specific points of interest** (tourist offer, **product**) where **violent death** occurred or can be better observed or understood.

War and Battle-related sites are part of the local, national or even world heritage and attract tourists to these areas (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). Although it is possible to find war memorabilia sites variously labelled, for example “atrocities heritage”

(Ashworth, 2004), and thanotourism (Dunkley, Westwood, & Morgan, 2007; Seaton, 1996), they remain elaborated and understood primarily under the dark tourism label and concept (Causevich and Lynch, 2011).

Thus, perhaps to understand dark tourism as a broad concept, we foremost, need to keep an open mind, resist the temptation to constrain it to a strict definition (Biran and F. Hyde, 2013). In addition, on the other hand, we need to keep an open mind and resist the temptation in order to leave the definition to a free judgment.

Research of dark tourism among Significant cemeteries of Europe

As described in methodology we have performed structured interviews among members of European Cemeteries route. Aim of this research was to further identify prevalence of dark (death-related) tourism offer at cemeteries. It is important in the aspect of understanding that cemeteries are much more cultural rather than dark tourism places.

All of the interviewees identified cemeteries in the aspect of the cultural tourism where people can discover art, history and architecture.

When presented with option to identify cemeteries as dark tourism space, most of the interviewees still identified cemeteries as cultural tourism areas while one of them find more suitable relationship in describing them as dark tourism spaces.

If a 1-hour guided tour of the cemetery would be prepared for general group of tourists it would include between 10 to 20 points of interests. Less than 20% of these points would be related to dark tourism, while over 80% would be related to famous people, their lives and other interesting cultural aspects (art, history,...).

Most of the points within the dark tourism points (about 80%) were actually related to war memorials and monuments and only 20% to more specific points related to violent death.

Conclusions and hypothesis test

From the structured interviews performed we have discovered that most of the offer (products) in the researched cemeteries is actually related to cultural tourism. While this could be a consequence of the way managers think about the cemeteries it is beyond doubt offer related to satisfying needs of learning history, art and architecture is prevailing among cemeteries.

As well based on our results we can confirm both hypothesis and conclude that dark tourism offer represents only about 20% of total offer of cemeteries. And most of this

offer is related to war memorials and monuments which are not the most expanded form of dark tourism offer.

Research of village (rural areas) cemeteries as tourist product element

Using cultural heritage offer of cemeteries to attract visitors can be done by discovering and writing stories of people and their lives. While this may be often simple within Significant cemeteries where outstanding people are buried (often of national or international importance), we were intrigued by the question whether this is valid for rural areas cemeteries as well.

For the purpose of testing we have identified 3 cemeteries from rural areas and one town cemetery in Europe:

- Newbury, England
- Fram, Slovenia and Črna na Koroškem, Slovenia
- Sveti Juraj, Croatia

Newbury, England

Story discovery

To acquire an interesting story we have contacted local organization, Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery, Newbury, England. While Newbury is a town (not a village) we have taken this cemetery as a case mainly because the organization is for years working on researching stories and interpreting them in a form of **theatrical plays**.

A story about Sarah Louisa Hopson was presented as interesting case on which a complete theater play was written. Sarah's story has these main characteristics:

- Sarah is not buried in the cemetery, but some of her relatives are and present a physical place that a tourist can visit and learn more about
- Sarah is a typical 19th and 20th century woman from small towns in rural England
- Within story we discover the position of woman, family life and other cultural aspects in those times
- The story has an interesting detail when Sarah gave birth at 30 years. Her daughter lived only for 17 days and died **May 19th** 1911 because of

meningitis. Few months later Sarah was sent to asylum where she was buried on **May 19th** 1958.

- Her life along with many historical and cultural details is presented in the theatrical play that can be performed at the cemetery or in a theatre.

Possible product

The story and performance as a theatrical play offers a chance for a visitor to satisfy following needs:

- Learn about rural history of England in the late 19th and early 20th century
- Learn about life of a woman in those times, relationships, medical facts and even fashion (theatre play with dresses of those times)
- Get intrigued by mystery facts (dates of death and burial for daughter and mother)

The needs can be satisfied through (products):

- Personal guiding,
- Reading the story at the cemetery on an informational table, in a mobile or printed guide
- Attending a theatrical play

Target groups that fit these needs and satisfaction methods are:

- Woman from broader region that want to learn rural history, woman position, relationships or other interesting cultural aspects of late 19th and early 20th century

Promotional tool

Based on the story and product we have prepared a possible flyer that could be used in regional public places (or as banners on the internet).



Saturdays at 6pm
Guided tour & Theater show

© Federico Pardo Saguier

A mystery of May 19th

that's what it said on the birth certificate – under 'name of father' - B... bastard. Well I suppose that's right he were a bastard, wanted nothing to do with it once he knew I were "with child".

Discover the power of mother's love in early 20th century in a true story about **Sarah Louisa Hopson.**

Newtown Road Cemetery

www.fnrcnewbury.org.uk

* Photo from Barcelona cemetery by Pardo Saguier, photo archive of ASCE

Conclusion

Newbury story was quickly identified due to active local group of Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery. Besides story mysterious facts that serve as attention message (May 19th), story contains many historical facts that help satisfy broad needs of possible tourists.

While the town of Newbury may hold many other tourist attractive points of interests, we are sure that the cemetery with the story of Sarah Louisa Hopson can make additional important tourist impact.

Črna na Koroškem, Slovenia

Story discovery

Little village of Črna is famous for the best woman skier in modern history Tina Maze. While this presents certain tourist product development opportunity it is not a viable product because of the temporary status of her career and decrease of attractiveness as the career ended.

From the local community we have acquired a story about Hinko Meserko with following characteristics:

- A local **bakery** man that was able to **fix anything** and was well known for his abilities. He was especially keen on fixing watches and lost his temper quickly in case he couldn't manage to fix it. In such cases he would get extremely mad and throw the watch on the floor, destroying it with his feet.
- He is buried at local cemetery of Javorje where he died in 1971
- There is no other related story or research work about his life done yet

Possible product

The story itself does not seem to provide any very special characteristics or data that would make it especially appealing. Yet we can find following needs that could be satisfied:

- Learning about rapid technological changes of 20th century
- Learning about small village bakery and life in 20th century
- Feel as a part of society

These needs could be satisfied by:

- Info materials at the cemetery with enriched content in form of watches or other technology of 20th century
- Special offers in local bakeries and restaurants (bread by Hinko)
- Guided tours of the cemetery and village titled "Technology and baking in 20th century"
- Family weekend packages that include local baking products and simple 20th century technological workshops

Target groups could have interest in such offer include:

- Families from wider region that want to educate their children on their own history

Promotional tool

Based on the story and product we have prepared a possible flyer that could be used in regional public places (or as banners on the internet).



* Photos from Pexels.com by Aleš Krivec (clock) and Décio Guanabaro Silveira Guanabaro

Conclusion

While the primary story seemed a bit less interesting than the one in Newbury it still presents an opportunity for the village to create a viable product that could be interesting for developing complete village tourist offer.

The cemetery itself may not be a relevant tourist point here and could be completely excluded from the offer as well, yet it presents a starting point for discovery of the tourist product.

At the same time we find the grave of Hinko in the cemetery to be very relevant as tourist point in case of being part of a wider route of villages.

Sveti Juraj (St. George), Croatia

Story discovery

From the local community we have acquired a story about Milan Rukavina, nicknamed Barba. Key facts:

- Born in 1915 and quickly became enthusiastic about photography and music, taking hundreds of photos about life in the village;
- Played organ in the local church and received a special thank you letter from pope Paul;
- For years explaining to locals that he would love to die on April 23rd (St. George's day) playing the organ;
- His wish was granted on April 23rd 1996 as he played the organ and died.

Possible product

The story provides opportunities to develop product in several ways through satisfying the needs for:

- religious pilgrimage
- learning about the life in a small coastal village in 20th century
- learning about religious beliefs
- discovering a mysterious story

These needs could be satisfied by:

- pilgrimage point of interest (grave itself, the church, his house)
- exhibition of his photos (in one or more places)
- exposing more details about St. George and related stories in promotion materials

Target groups for the product are quite wide:

- religious tourists, pilgrims

- history lovers, people who want to see the history of 20th century in variety of views

Promotional tool

To reach the possible audiences and products we should prepare several promotional tools. Due to the limits of the research and goals we decided to prepare only one as an example.



**His date, his wish.
Granted by god.**

Barba, a photographer, an organ player.

He loved April 23, day of St. George.
The most beautiful day. And all he ever
wanted was to die on that day, playing
organ.

Discover more in
Sveti Juraj, Croatia
www.svetijuraj.com

* Photo by Mladen Vrbanić

Conclusion

The story of Milan Rukavina seems to bring most mystery, expectations and possibilities. It provides all sorts of possible developments in the village itself that could be interesting stories and substories about his life.

Fram, Slovenia

During our research we discovered cemetery that represents a case study based on general attributes of the cemetery being interesting as tourist point. Cemetery in Fram can be dated in references all the way back to 15th century when it was mentioned in the writings of Paolo Santonino.



The cemetery position and history exposes following interesting attributes:

- Landscape and viewpoint
- Rich history that can be connected to understanding of various periods, demographic and legal changes in the area
- Relevance of small village teachers in the life of important people (dr. Pavel Turner, an important Slovenian professor from 20th century erected a special monument for his teacher in Fram cemetery)

Through these attributes and facts we can notice possibilities to develop cemetery as a point of interest for tourists, not necessarily only through individual stories (as in cases of Newbury, Črna and Sveti Juraj). As such, Fram could invite tourists for a guided tour where cemetery itself is the highlight spot.

Village research conclusions and hypothesis test

Overall we have identified interesting **stories** in three cases. Story identification was rather simple and fast since it only required a short interview with local communities or residents and an hour of total work from their side.

In one case we have noticed that the cemetery itself, even as a small village cemetery, represents an interesting point of interest.

The challenge however is to build products on the story itself. The promotional tools, exhibition, guided tour or custom play require certain expertise that is scarce in the village communities.

This challenge remains to be answered by tourist experts as well as cemeteries organizations. Due to changes in the cemeteries that we are witnessing (more cremations, less space required, abandoned monuments) we believe that finding a proper methodology to turn cemeteries into tourist interesting points (parks, memorial parks, exhibition spaces,...) is an opportunity for everyone from public organizations to business owners.

Conclusion

Changing perception of cemeteries as a place for burial towards cultural heritage space provides several opportunities for tourism. It enables the community to explore the development of products and services that help the destination gain new income while preserving its heritage.

Especially in the manner of small rural regions and villages this opportunity may be even larger and more important than in big cities. Normally these regions do not have interesting stories and their descriptions rely on natural, religious or anthropological facts. A church and a restaurant is sometimes accompanied with an object of special meaning (famous person statue or house).

Yet to really develop an interesting product requires some more work to form theater plays, information plates, souvenirs that tourists can enjoy and buy.

An important aspect to open the thinking in this direction is to make a clear distinction between dark and cultural tourism. Due to perception of cemeteries as a place of death, professional and academic research is mostly mistakenly presenting cemeteries only as places of dark tourism. For this purpose we have performed a research among ASCE members to present the actual role of dark tourism in the cemeteries, which is below the 20% of total offer or needs that can be satisfied.

While the research provided valuable results in understanding the role of tourism at cemeteries and discovering stories we are keen on further researching the possible methods and solutions to develop sustainable tourism products based on and performed at cemeteries in rural areas.

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Appendix

Structured interviews scenario

Before further explaining any details about this research I would like you to explain me in your own words what is your personal perception of cemetery relationship to tourism?

[answer]

Dark tourism is visiting places related to death and suffering. Is your perception towards cemetery relationship to tourism still the same or would you change something? Would you say that cemeteries are places of cultural or dark tourism?

[answer]

Due to possible preferences of interviewees we progressed the interview by discovering a percentage of points of interest in general guiding that could relate to dark tourism: If you had to prepare 1 hour tour guide in the cemetery for an unknown group of tourists, which points of interest would you select?

[answer]

We proceeded with following question: How many of these points could be defined as dark tourism points (thus related to death, violent death)?

[answer]

To better understand the nature of the dark tourism in cemeteries, we proceeded with the question: From these dark tourism points, how many are actually war memorials or monuments?

[answer]