



Dark Tourism Management: Facing and addressing ethical issues.

Aidan Axiak
343402L/4

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Abstract

Author Aidan Axiak	Date 28/09/2024
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<p>This study aims to explore the ethical challenges of managing dark tourism sites in Malta, an important topic due to the increased popularity of these naturally sensitive sites. This study investigates how site managers and local communities navigate ethical concerns, such as balancing historical authenticity with entertainment and preventing the commodification of tragedy. Qualitative research methods such as interviews and a focus group were used to gather insights from both managers and community members. Furthermore, the insights revealed that ethical management requires stronger community involvement, and clearer guidelines to maintain respect for the historical and cultural significance of a site. This research found that involving community perspectives in management decisions and balancing education and entertainment are crucial steps for ethical management. Additionally, this study suggests the development of an ethical guideline and toolkit, tailored to Malta, which can then be applied globally to dark tourism sites. These recommendations offer practical solutions for improving the management strategies of dark tourism sites while maintaining a sensitive approach to the local context.</p>	
Keywords Ethics - Dark Tourism - Management	

Declaration of Authenticity



Student Name and Surname: Aidan Axiak
Student ITS Number : 343402L/4
Programme : BA in International Hospitality Management
Research Title : Dark Tourism Management: facing and addressing ethical issues

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of James Sultana.

28/09/2024

Date

Aidan Axiak

Student's Signature



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1. Introduction

Visits to sites of death, tragedy and suffering have grown in popularity, raising important ethical concerns about how such sites are managed and presented. As tourism to these locations increases, so does the need for ethical frameworks that balance everything these sites have to offer. This chapter provides the rationale for this study, a brief overview of the research aims, as well as a layout for this dissertation.

1.1 Research rationale

Dark tourism (DT), which involves visiting sites associated with death, tragedy, and suffering, has become an increasingly prominent area of research within tourism (Lennon and Foley, 2000). While DT has gained both academic and commercial attention, its ethical management and development are still largely unexplored. This research study will focus mainly on the ethical management of DT in Malta. Despite Malta having a large tourism sector, there is not much information about which ethical practices should be used at dark tourism sites. This is particularly true when it comes to balancing the authenticity of a site with the tourism aspect (Agius, 2021).

The main research gap that this dissertation will be aiming to address is how DT sites should be managed within the Maltese context. This will consider many elements, such as authenticity, entertainment, community involvement, managerial practices, and other elements which might affect the ethical viability of a DT site. Previous studies found by the author focused on either the managerial or the community aspects, often ignoring the benefits of an analysis involving both parties (Garcias, 2012). This research aims to fill in that gap and explore how ethical management can be created by balancing the educational value of a site, and respect for the local culture (Shekhar and Valeri, 2022). This is becoming increasingly important as interest in DT increases. By creating a more well-rounded approach, this study can increase knowledge on the best practices for ethical DT management in Malta. Furthermore, this research will be practically useful as it aims to help future studies in developing an accurate set of guidelines, specifically designed for DT sites (Agius, 2021).

1.2 Overview of study and aims

This research aims to explore the ethical challenges and management strategies involved in DT. This will be done by qualitatively examining and comparing the insights of both managerial and community perspectives. More specifically, this will be achieved within a Maltese context through one main aim supported by two specific objectives:

1. **Research aim:** To discover how DT sites in Malta can be ethically managed. For this purpose, interviews and a focus group will be held to investigate the different experiences and opinions on the ethical management of DT. The results will be thematically analysed to determine what the best practices for ethical DT management are.
2. **Objective one:** To explore what ethical issues are encountered by those managing DT sites in Malta. This will involve identifying specific challenges that create ethical dilemmas in day-to-day management, as well as how these affect both the visitor experience and the community.
3. **Objective two:** To discover how these ethical issues can be addressed. Based on the findings of the second objective, this research will focus on developing strategies and solutions to overcome these ethical challenges.

Research questions:

The above research objects will be addressed through three research questions:

1. How can DT sites or events in Malta be ethically managed?
2. What ethical issues are encountered by those managing DT sites or events in Malta?
3. How can these ethical issues be addressed?

1.3 Dissertation layout

This chapter has introduced the topic and provided background regarding DT and its ethical dilemma while the following chapter will review the current literature surrounding the topics highlighted in this dissertation. This will be followed by the methodology, which explains the qualitative and sampling methods used by this study, alongside its limitations, and its ethical considerations. The Results and Analysis section will present the results obtained and the analysis and triangulation of all collected data. Finally, the conclusion will discuss the results in the context of the study implications and recommendations for future studies. This dissertation will use the SAGE Harvard referencing style throughout.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will review the key literature on DT, focusing on its ethical and management practices, visitor motivation, the importance of educational elements, and impact on communities. By highlighting gaps in current studies, this chapter will provide a foundation for understanding how these issues could apply to the Maltese context.

2.1 What is Dark Tourism?

'DT' is typically understood as sites relating to death, disaster, and suffering that have been turned into tourist destinations or products. Richard Prentice (1993) was the first author to acknowledge the touristic interest in death as a rapidly growing market during his analysis of several surveys regarding tourism on the Isle of Man. However, the term 'DT' was first coined by Lennon and Foley in (1996) three years later in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. Tourism to places of death and suffering has been present throughout history as evidenced by numerous instances from the Medieval and Roman periods where spectators would eagerly attend gladiatorial matches including brutal battles between humans and animals (Stone, 2006). Additionally, large crowds of people gathering to view an execution could be considered one of the first historical examples of DT. The niche market of DT, otherwise known as 'Thanatourism' has seen significant growth in recent years due to media exposure and public awareness, thus incentivising more research and development on the subject (Seaton, 1996; Lennon and Foley, 1996; Lennon and Foley, 2000).

Cristiana (2014) states that during the early 19th century, a noticeable increase in attractions such as Pompeii and Waterloo was documented. Since then, several authors such as Price (2017) have claimed that more tourists are travelling to destinations with the aim of viewing memorials, cemeteries, and other sites related to death or tragedy. DT has frequently been classified as a part of cultural tourism rather than heritage tourism (Bowman and Pezzullo, 2009) possibly due to its focus on the cultural reaction and human experiences of those involved in a tragedy. Meanwhile, heritage tourism is more focused on the protection and renovation of historical destinations (Lennon and Foley, 2000, Bowman and Pezzullo, 2009).

A controversial point in DT has been the 'when?' element, referring to the debate on how much time must pass for an event to qualify as DT. Lennon and Foley (2000) claim that DT is a product of postmodernity, classifying DT as a phenomenon which has solely been present since the twentieth century. They argued that DT sites create "anxiety and doubt" (Lennon and Foley, 2000, p.11) which opposes the modern sense of safety and optimism, thereby attributing the rising interest in DT to the rise of mass media. Ultimately, Lennon and Foley (2000) labelled DT as involving death and disaster within living memory while scholars such as Beech (2000) and Seaton (1996) prioritised the behavioural and motivational aspects of visitors more than the specific criteria of the site itself. This is a demonstration of the multifaceted nature of temporality within DT.

2.1.1 Conceptualisations of Dark Tourism

Within the domain of tourism studies, the conceptualisation of DT has progressively emerged as multi-dimensional. This section explores the various theoretical frameworks created to understand this niche. Visitor motivation, ethical issues, and the cultural and social impacts associated with DT are crucial when exploring the darker aspects of history. DT attractions vary from light-hearted houses of horror, ghost tours or places of pilgrimage, including the graves of saints in the case of religious tourism, to major genocide or disaster sites such as the Holocaust death camps. Regardless of how 'dark' a location's history is, effective management and ethical practices are necessary steps in ensuring its success as an attraction (Garcia, 2012). Achieving this requires comprehensive knowledge of all the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts associated with DT (Sharpley, R. & Stone, P.R. 2009).

2.1.2 Dark Tourism Spectrum and the Shades of Darkness

A key issue is the classification of locations as DT sites. Scholars have debated on whether it is feasible and justified to classify locations that are connected to death or suffering as DT as the sole criteria (Sharpley and Stone, 2009), potentially resulting in an unclear and diluted application of the term. This issue has frequently caused authors to question whether different degrees or 'shades' of darkness can be used to appropriately measure and differentiate between the sites. Sharpley (2005) was the first to introduce

the concept of labelling sites using the terminology of 'paler' to 'darkest'. Stone (2010) further expanded on Sharpley's concept by summarising the different categories in four main shades of DT:

Pale tourism: This category includes locations where visitors did not specifically look for a DT attraction and the site was not meant to be viewed as a component of the DT experience in the first place. This type of attraction includes graveyards or memorials, among others (Oddens, 2016; Sultana, 2020).

Grey Tourism (demand): Grey tourism refers to sites in which visitors share an interest in death, however, they do not visit the specific site with the intention of DT, nor is it the main reason for their travel. An example of this type of tourism is the Canterbury Cathedral, where tourists visit the site of the bishop's murder (Oddens, 2016).

Grey tourism (supply): Grey tourism refers to sites where death was intentionally exploited and developed into a DT site, intended to attract visitors who have an interest in death, but it is not typically their main reason for travel. This could include the London Dungeon Experience which contains ghost stories and tours, developed with the active intent of attracting dark tourists (Stone, 2009; Garcia, 2012).

Black tourism: The purest form of DT, black tourism, is where a visitor satisfies their fascination with death by intentionally visiting sites with a strong relation to death and disaster. This type of attraction includes sites such as the 'Flight 93' tour, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and other similar types of locations (Sharpley and Stone, 2009).

Similarly, Stone (2006) previously created a spectrum ranging from 'lightest' to 'darkest' to classify types of DT sites. 'Light' locations were directly associated with suffering and political ideologies, but they were not the actual sites where these events occurred. This type of site is termed 'Heritage centric' and is frequently less oriented towards education and more towards entertainment (Stone, 2006). Thus, these types of sites frequently deviate from historical accuracy because they place more emphasis on sensationalism or entertainment than on an accurate and nuanced portrayal of the historical events or tragedies connected to the destinations. The darkest locations are typically sites where death and tragedy have physically occurred. Due to the sensitive nature of these attractions, more emphasis is placed on educating visitors and fostering a deeper sense of understanding and empathy for the victims involved (Stone, 2006). Moreover, since

they were not intended to be tourist destinations in the first place, these places usually do not have a lot of infrastructure for tourists because they give greater importance to authenticity than on traditional tourism features. Destinations situated on the darker end of the spectrum tend to carry a heightened political charge, attributed to the events occurring within recent memory (Sultana, 2020).

Holocaust-related locations form part of the earlier referenced 'black tourism' and thus, they appeal to a different segment of tourists (Griffiths, 2019; Light, 2017). Due to their sensitive nature, their purpose is to immortalise past events and remember the victims of the tragedy. Sodaro (2017) states that many memorials are actively working to encourage citizens to confront hatred, genocide, and other similar actions. Finally, even though these sites are primarily associated with Jewish people, they are a place to learn more about injustice and harsh realities that are experienced globally. Nevertheless, some scholars (Lennon and Foley, 2000); Garcia, 2012; Seaton, 2009; Sharpley, 2009) raised concerns about tourism taking place in sites related to death. This debate has also caught media attention, and it has occasionally become a moral panic.

2.2 Supply and Demand

Doubts have been raised about whether DT is driven by the attractions-supply or tourists-demand (West, 2004; Sharpley and Stone, 2009; Miles, 2002; Stone, 2006). Seaton (2018) and Sharpley (2009) claim that while there is substantial research on the supply side, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the social, political, cultural, and historical factors that create the demand. DT is undoubtedly a combination of both supply and demand aspects (Miles, 2002; Sultana, 2020), requiring further research into their individual and combined dimensions.

2.2.1 Supply

The 'supply' aspect of DT is heavily focused on the attributes of a particular site and on the visitor's existence within the location (Sharpley, 2005; Sharpley, 2009; Magee and Gilmore, 2015). Magee and Gilmore (2015) outlined the attributes frequently associated with the supply approach of DT:

The orientation of the site (entertainment–education), its key central purpose (heritage–historic), perceived authenticity (in terms of both locational authenticity and product interpretation), time scale from original event (longer–shorter), type of supply it belongs to (purposeful–non-purposeful) and infrastructure (higher–lower). (Magee & Gilmore, 2015 p. 900).

Sharpley (2002) organised Graham's (1998) research in five main categories of DT sites; risky locations, haunted houses, sites of massacre, journeys of agony, and morbidly themed tours. Likewise, Seaton (1996) suggested that the main categories for DT travel should be to view the public representation of death, to witness the place of an individual or group's death, to explore burial and memorial sites, to view artefacts or representations of death in places such as museums, and to travel with the intent of viewing a theatrical performance which simulates or represents death.

The 'servicescape' framework sheds light on the significance of physical elements of a service environment and their cognitive, emotional, physiological, and behavioural impact on both clients and employees (Booms and Bitner, 1982). These reactions can strongly affect a customer's desire to indulge in or avoid a particular environment (Magee and Gilmore, 2015). In heritage and dark tourism sites, environmental features such as barbed wire or a gravestone will have a symbolic meaning which contributes to the overall atmosphere and story of a particular site (Rafael and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). To ensure a complete DT experience, managers must construct a servicescape that evokes understanding and empathy from customers.

Similar to Sharpley (2002), Stone (2010) introduces the concept of the 'Seven Dark Suppliers', which covers what Stone explains as the seven main types of DT sites.

- Fun Factories are defined by their entertainment-centred activities or fun venues with macabre themes. This will frequently involve the commercialization of and re-enactment of famous death-related or macabre events.
- Dungeons are generally prisons or courthouses which may or may not still be in use. This provides tourists with the opportunity to explore and understand the judicial system in place at the time of their operation.
- Exhibitions involve authentic, serious portrayals of historical events which are centred around atrocities or other chilling themes. As touristic but mainly educational sites such as museums, these are more focused on giving an unbiased explanation of their theme.
- Resting places are cemeteries and graves related to famous people or events.

- Shrines can be explained as memorials for disasters or tragedies that occurred. These are typically designed to inspire an empathic and emotional response from visitors.
- Conflict sites are historical educational experiences centred around famous battles or wars. These provide their visitors with an opportunity to understand what happened, as well as its impact on society.
- Camps of Genocide represent the darkest category on the spectrum, as these sites allow visitors to explore and understand mass atrocities and genocides whilst engaging with a constant theme of remembrance. A well-known example is the Auschwitz concentration camp, reminding visitors of the terrible atrocities that happened there (Agius, 2021).

Stone (2006) argues that no research is complete or accurate if the demand-related motivations are not analysed. Moreover, DT is a behavioural concept, thus it is necessary to focus on the motivation of tourists visiting the sites.

2.2.2 Demand (Tourist Motivations)

Motivation is key to understanding tourists' travel decisions and behaviour, making studying the motivational element of thanatourism essential. Motivational theories have been a primary focus of tourism researchers for years (Huang, 2010), often using Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as a guide, as it identifies relaxation, education and family bonding as the main factors influencing travel (Pearce and Lee, 2005; Jang and Wu, 2006; Farmaki, 2013). Seaton (1996) suggested that tourists' main motivation is an actual or symbolic encounter with death. However, Farmaki (2013) criticised his studies for only considering individual motives and disregarding any sociocultural variables. Understanding the motivations behind a tourist's curiosity is a crucial part of understanding the ethical requirements of DT. Yuill (2003) summarised these motivations as push and pull factors. Push factors, such as guilt, shame, and nostalgia, may prompt individuals to explore DT sites while pull factors such as education, remembrance, and the sacralising of a disaster site, draw visitors that seek a deeper understanding and commemoration of historical events. Curiosity could also be explained through a desire to learn more about one's history or as a means of disaster prevention (Kelman and Dodds 2009). Pull factors could also include friends or family and their influence. For instance, military prisons might 'pull' family or friends of past inmates who might wish to experience what their relatives did (Alamango, 2014). Dann (1998) states that a person might experience both push and pull factors simultaneously.

The 'Other' concept, referring to how people perceive themselves in contrast to an individual or group who is different to them, acts as a significant driving factor in DT (Sharpley and Stone, 2009). Often subject to exclusion based on demographic characteristics such as race, the 'Other' is labelled as inferior, different, or even threatening. Dark tourists may be drawn to places of death and suffering due to their perceived distinctness from their own reality. Originating from a desire to understand, interact or empathise with experiences which are unknown and therefore different from them (the 'Other'), dark tourists are attracted to sites associated with death since it can never be experienced consciously. The 'otherness' associated with death remains a prime motivator for visiting DT sites.

2.3 Dark Tourism Controversy

Kelman and Dodds (2009) claim that DT has both positive and negative impacts, often occurring simultaneously. The money and media attention that tourism may bring to a location are the most evident benefits. However, these factors may also be viewed as drawbacks since although they contribute to the immediate and long-term healing process, they can also draw unwanted attention and raise moral dilemmas. The 1999 volcano evacuation in Baños Ecuador was turned into an attraction to save the town economically, thereby pointing towards the benefits of DT (Lane et al, 2003). The resources attained from gaining media attention could have a positive effect by providing construction supplies. The chance to profit from tourists can offer a quick incentive to ~~restore~~ or enhance services after an evacuation. Furthermore, some victims of the disaster requested assistance and donations from tourists for sharing their experiences and providing personal tours. However, Kelman and Dodds (2009) note that these benefits can also be drawbacks, as media attention and profits may trivialize tragedy and raise ethical concerns about commercializing suffering. Titta Niemelä (2010) stated that DT is a complex combination of history, tragedy, and heritage. Indeed, thanatourism's profit and political element makes it even more controversial (Stone, 2005).

2.3.1 Education and Entertainment

When it comes to DT, striking a balance between entertainment and instruction becomes essential. The duality of human interactions with such locations adds complexity to the ethical aspects of DT, regardless of whether they are seen as a source of entertainment, occasionally risking the trivialisation of important human experiences, or as an educational tool that fosters empathy and understanding. Authors such as Hooper (2016) have argued that despite new technologies providing a strong bonus to education, people's intentions may be questionable, claiming that one of the biggest ethical issues in DT is developing thrill-based attractions which only prioritise revenue. The interpretation of a thanatourism site is a large dilemma for managers due to the fine line between education and entertainment (Garcia, 2012). In Garcia's (2012) research, both interviewed managers placed so much importance on sticking to historical accuracy and never diminishing victims' suffering that they both had historians and experts verify their stories.

Researchers such as Hewison (2023, p144) argued that heritage tourism presents a "bogus history", and that many heritage sites present a more censored version of history, which prioritises nostalgia and ease of understanding for customers over accuracy. Other scholars (Bennett, 1988; Walsh, 1992; and West, 1988) also shared Hewison's perspective (2023) on heritage sites selecting entertainment over education, arguing that only selective parts of history are presented to guests. Occasionally, adults opt to bring children with them to these sites, therefore creating a need for heritage or DT sites to educate patrons of all ages. Providing a thorough educational experience to all visitors is expressly stated in the mission statement of the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz (Agius, 2021). It is crucial to understand how children interpret emotionally provocative sites, to mitigate potential psychological distress. This is particularly relevant given the diversity of DT sites, ranging from concentration camps to disaster areas such as the World Trade centre after 9/11 (Wyatt, Leask, and Barron, 2022; Kerr, Stone, and Price, 2021).

Despite dealing with upsetting subject material, DT sites frequently require the incorporation of entertainment elements to enhance visitor experiences. Krisjanous (2016) states that entertainment components in DT sites can help create engagement with visitors pre-visit, increasing their motivation to visit and shaping the expectations for these attractions. Additionally, this can be used as a tool to signal appropriate behaviour for the site. This can be particularly useful as many DT sites offer little in terms of the usual tourism structures and facilities. At battlefield sites like Culloden, the experience

has been characterised by 'edutainment', a mix of both elements (Willard et al., 2021). The dramatised story of the battle increases visitor engagement as multimedia provides opportunities for more literal interpretations of the historical events. Pearce (2008) states that these elements can often help to enhance the visitor experience, increasing its impact and memorability.

2.4 Ethics and Tourism in General

The controversial and multifaceted nature of DT raises significant ethical considerations (Cohen, 2018). Ethics is defined as a branch of philosophy which examines what is right and what is wrong (Tzafestas, 2016). Similarly, Castañeda (2012) states that when tourism was a new concept, it was either viewed as completely 'good' or completely 'bad', having been severely criticised as either a form of imperialism (Nash, 1977) or a form of post-colonialism (Hall and Tucker, 2014). In addition, Macbeth (2005) highlighted a substantial gap in the domain of tourism studies and stated that it is crucial to develop an ethics platform which monitors the planning, development, and management of tourism (Cohen, 2018).

Gibson (2008) views Western perspectives on tourism as a superficial endeavour, suggesting that they might have contributed to a delay in recognising the significance of ethical considerations in the field. The paradox of tourism is that it deviates from ordinary ethics and is perceived as a domain free from normal moral judgments, where vacation enjoyment may conflict with the values of daily life (Cohen, Higham, & Reis; 2013). Cohen (2018) references three particular ethical issues that are more important than the others: hedonism, justice, and compassion. Malone et al. (2014) stated that tourism is a hedonistic activity where the main aim is one's own amusement and pleasure. However, they also state that the link between hedonism and ethical consumption practices in tourism is unexplored, often being understood as paradoxical. Finally, Malone et al.'s (2014) research concludes by stating that since an individual can derive pleasure from both moral choices, as well as the entertainment provided by an activity, hedonism and tourism ethics have become intertwined as subjects. Fennell (2015) proposes that 'akrasia', defined as consciously breaking ethical standards, seems to be important to certain touristic experiences. These could include actions such as binge eating or drinking, as well as the deviation from dietary and sexual restrictions during vacations

(Fennel, 2015; Cohen, 2018). Another potential cause of the general disregard for ethics may be the tourism marketing as an 'industry' which has the goal of securing a profit (Cohen, 2018).

2.5 Dark Tourism Ethics

DT, due to its nature, is extremely sensitive to ethical issues. Lennon and Foley (2000), often regarded as pioneers in the field of DT, have raised questions about the transformation of DT into a commodified tourist product. Furthermore, Kelman and Dodds (2009) stated that DT sites are frequently marketed on their notoriety. Apart from those involved in creating DT sites, Hooper (2016) notes that not all visitors have benevolent intentions. Sharma (2018) reports people taking inappropriate pictures at the Memorial of Murdered Jews in Europe, as well as occasional vandalism.

Tourists in general can be a burden to any site or location due to their basic requirements such as food, water, soap, cash, and similar products. This will tend to include certain luxuries such as restaurants, hotels and other forms of entertainment (Garcia & Servera, 2003; Kelman & Dodds, 2009). The lack of supplies in disaster-affected places increases the possibility that visitors will exhaust the resources that the local population depends on. Disaster tourism can create dangerous situations for tourists, especially for those who do not understand or dismiss any risks. Fisher et al. (1997) provides the example of Mt. St. Helen before the 1980 volcanic eruption where tourists attempting to climb the rumbling volcano diverted police attention and funds from other disaster risk reduction undertakings. Additionally, tourists in disaster zones have caused further damage both physically and psychologically to disaster zones. For example, during the 2004 New Zealand floods, tourists drove through the flood waters and increased the damage to local properties (Kelman and Dodds, 2009).

Aside from endangering people, DT runs the risk of having important items taken, damaging property, or interfering with a criminal investigation, leading to legal repercussions. The damage exerted on victims can also be psychological such as when following a disaster, victims face theft, trespassing, photos and videos without consent, and insensitive questions (Smale, 2000). Alternatively, disaster tourism can aid in communal grieving, support, and disaster recovery. Disaster tourism may also be

beneficial towards the education of disaster risk reduction (McClure, 2006). These arguments raise multiple concerns towards the practice of DT, particularly whether it is acceptable to make revenue and benefit from a victim's death or suffering (Seaton, 2009). Using the managerial debate at Auschwitz on how far visitor services should be placed as an example, Agius (2021) expressed that it is unacceptable to profit from the death of those who died from noted acts of brutality and violence, as well as to partake in commercial activities related to those deaths.

The ubiquity of technology presents further ethical considerations for DT sites. Hodalska (2017) explored the relationship between DT and digital narcissism, arguing that the massive increase in selfies in sites of trauma and violence such as Auschwitz can be explained through how individuals process these events in the modern days of social media., Hodalska posited that the significance of these locations and the tragedies they represent are trivialised by selfies, which are frequently characterised by humorous or amusing attitudes. She hypothesised that the root of this trend is a rise in digital narcissism, a tendency for people to put their interests and self-gratification ahead of sensitivity and empathy. The act of sharing these selfies on social media worsens the problem by turning these platforms into settings for amusement and personal stories. Hodalska observed that the public's responses to these selfies frequently reflect the contradictory feelings originating from DT, photography, and social media, ranging from disgust and indignation to laughter and curiosity.

On the other hand, Sharpley and Stone (2009) stated that whilst the implementation of entrance fees, gift shops or catering outlets may seem insensitive, it is significantly more acceptable if the profit is used to assist and employ locals. A thanatourism business does not need to be controversial or unethical if the local community supports the development of the business and the profits are in turn, used to benefit them. Furthermore, Sharpley and Stone (2008) argue that while thanatourism may not provide overtly positive experiences, the direct engagement with death can foster individuals' personal moral compasses and help them confront their mortality.

During Garcia's (2012) study on ghost stories and tours, she asserts that making a profit on the telling of macabre stories is considered to be unethical by many people as grief and suffering are being used to please tourists. However, ghost tours were seen as an activity designed for touristic entertainment. Thus, as they are providing a service, the managers believed that it is completely standard to charge money. While the managers

claimed that the ghost stories were based on real-life incidents, academics such as Uzzell (1989) suggested that these accounts might be fabricated to give visitors a more acceptable picture of human sorrow. The managers also stated that they keep their ghost tours ethical by completely basing their tour on facts, arguing that however horrible a real story is, it should not offend anyone, as talking about the past is a necessary part of history.

Conversely, dissonant heritage refers to the process of reinterpreting and commodifying historical sites into tourist attractions, sometimes with alterations and misrepresentations to enhance their appeal. Sultana (2015) states that DT sites can create an emotional response from their patrons, thus, it is important to find the correct balance between presentation and respecting what the site represents. It is crucial to preserve the site in its original state to retain its ability to elicit a sense of connection to its past. Sharpley and Stone (2009) claim that the main priorities of recent tourism management have been to enhance the accessibility, comprehension, and user-friendliness of tourism spaces. This is frequently done by introducing new pathways, modern interactive displays, out-of-place signage, as well as restaurants and gift shops. This introduction of modern adjustments may unfortunately reduce the auratic power of these sites.

Light (2017) posits that the debate surrounding the ethics of tourism has produced more questions than answers. While multiple critics of DT have pointed out the commodification or exploitation of sites of tragedy, few have been willing or able to suggest solutions. There have not yet been many attempts to develop a general code of ethics for thanatourism nor have many researchers involved the practitioners of DT in the conversation. Light (2017) asserts that the discussion on the morality of DT had mostly cooled off by the late 2000s and had moved on to other topics. However, the tourism industry in general has grown to better meet customer demands in terms of ethics. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2001) created a code of ethics for tourism practitioners that highlighted the important principles which needed to be followed. Unfortunately, the code does not apply directly to DT and is aimed towards tourism in general. Still, some of these regulations are very relevant in the current discussion, for example, a statement from the global code denotes that “tourism activities should be conducted in harmony with the attributes and traditions of the host regions and countries” (UNWTO, 2001, p. 4).

Despite the lack of concrete solutions to the ethical dilemmas of DT, an individual can look to sites like Auschwitz for guidance in developing respectful and sensitive approaches to the memorialisation of tragedy. The officials at Auschwitz ensure that all patrons are aware of their responsibility to always behave with the utmost respect and not forget the location's history. Their management believes that educating visitors and promoting respectful behaviour can eliminate bad conduct. One example is providing online lessons and other similar methods to prepare larger groups and schools for their visit (Agius, 2021). From the customer's point of view, the participants of Agius (2021)'s focus group stated that there should be more rules enforcing good behaviour at the site, as well as more constant supervision of guests.

2.6 Malta and Dark Tourism

In Malta, tourism is a major contributor to the economy, according to the Official Malta Tourism Authority website, tourism is “a major economic contributor of the Maltese economy ... rendering directly and indirectly approximately 30% of the GDP and employing a significant amount of people” (MTA, 2022) This makes Malta one of the top tourism-dependent countries in the European Union. Malta is a well-liked travel destination, however, the DT niche market and its potential is not well advertised or mentioned. Additionally, the three main destinations for DT in Malta are the Mdina Dungeons, the War Museum in Valletta, and the Inquisitors' Palace in Birgu. Smaller memorials, cemeteries, and other possible locations for DT are not included in this list.

While there has been extensive discourse about the ethical ramifications at an international level regarding DT, when one researches what has been written in the Maltese context, there are no studies which cater directly to the ethical aspect of DT. One can only find paragraphs in dissertations and mostly in passing, basically overlooking such an important aspect. As Malta develops its DT offerings, careful consideration of these ethical issues is crucial to ensure the experiences provided are both meaningful and respectful.

2.7 Conclusion

There has been extensive discourse about the ethical ramifications of DT. Several concerns have been expressed, including the potential for sensationalism and contempt,

the monetization of tragedies, and the effect on the sensibilities of local populations. Notwithstanding these obstacles, DT's potential to advance knowledge, comprehension, and cross-cultural interchange is becoming more widely acknowledged. Malta thus needs to develop a meaningful and respectful DT product.

3. Methodology

The overarching aim of this research is to discover how DT sites in Malta can be ethically managed. This chapter will discuss the philosophical background and rationale that have influenced the choices of the researcher when it came to choosing the methodology and methods to carry out this research. At the end of this chapter, the ethical considerations involved in this research will also be explained.

3.1 Rationale

The main aim of both qualitative and quantitative research is the same, as both aim to contribute to knowledge about a particular subject. Quantitative methods rely on using numerical data, to discover new statistics, while qualitative methods are more concerned with the detailed study of human phenomena. McLeod (1994) suggests that a researcher who wants to understand "What things mean to people" (p. 177), needs to choose a qualitative approach. The objective stance of the quantitative researcher would not have been the appropriate stance for the kind of data and information this researcher wants. This research is descriptive in nature, focusing on the experiences of managers and community members involved in the ethical management of DT sites. It aims to understand 'how' these managers navigate ethical challenges and 'what' specific issues they encounter in their roles.

Additionally, this research will address the managers' perspectives, challenges, and strategies in managing DT sites and delve into the motivations, emotions, and perceptions of laypeople who visit these sites as tourists. An inductive approach to research will be used to allow themes and insights to emerge directly from the data. This helps make sure that the findings are supported by the participants' experiences. Furthermore, this method is ideal for exploring this complex topic, facilitating the development of new theories and concepts based on the data collected.

3.2 Research Design

The three participants interviewed were managers or senior curators responsible for managing sites that can be classified as DT destinations. They were selected for their role as senior curators who are directly involved in the management of DT sites. Other variables such as age, gender or professional background were not relevant. However, for ethical reasons, all participants had to be adults. Their insights were necessary for gaining a detailed understanding of the specific challenges and strategies involved in managing DT sites. The participants were contacted through email with a brief explanation of the research objectives as well as a request for their voluntary participation in this study. To ensure that there were no external biases in the research, no incentives were offered for their participation. The emails also served as the primary means for obtaining the participants' written consent while informing them of any potential benefits or risks associated with the research (Appendix 2). Methods such as random sampling were not used as the small population size is unable to yield a representative sample. Additionally, quantitative forms of data collection such as surveys, were avoided because they might not capture the depth and detail of the insights that semi-structured interviews and focus groups might have achieved.

Purposive sampling was seen as the best fit for gathering the interview data. This non-random sampling method is usually used when participants are selected based on very specific criteria that would be relevant to the study (Campbell et al., 2020). While purposive sampling can create a degree of selection bias, it is particularly indicated when researching a niche population that is difficult to access. Douglas (2022) highlighted that purposive sampling is valuable when studying specific or rare subpopulations where other sampling methods such as probability sampling, may not result in enough relevant participants. Therefore, despite its limitations, this researcher believed it to be the most suitable method for this research, as it can provide targeted and relevant insights into the ethical management of DT.

For the focus groups, participants were selected based on their long-term residency in Malta, and their proficiency in both the Maltese and English language. To enhance the reliability and validity of this study, the participants were selected from various age groups and diverse backgrounds. These participants were contacted through a variety of different channels and provided with an explanation of this research's objectives. Before

commencing the focus group, a consent form was signed by each participant (Appendix 1). For the focus group, Snowball sampling was the chosen method of sampling. The participants in fact, helped the researcher collect more participants from their contacts and connections. This method of non-probability sampling was found to be very effective when studying sensitive qualitative issues (Waters, 2015). This is because it helps the researcher find subjects with common traits of interest, especially when more traditional methods of sampling are not indicated. For example, random sampling was determined to be inappropriate due to the challenge of finding enough participants willing to discuss sensitive topics. Some limitations may include difficulty in finding subjects and bias within a community of peers which may affect the result of the study (Chan, 2020).

3.3 Data Collection

As the first method of data collection, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. This allowed him to use a flexible mixture of predetermined questions and prompts according to the responses of the participants (Petrescu et al. 2017). This method is useful when the researcher is already knowledgeable on the topic yet is attempting to achieve a new insight provided by the participant. Semi-structured interviews helped this researcher create new relevant questions depending on the specific points that the participant would have mentioned. Furthermore, it also helped uncover certain underlying influences, leading to a more holistic understanding of the topic (Horton, Macve, and Struyven, 2004).

An interview becomes possible when the interviewees possess abundant knowledge that they are eager to share with the researcher in a thorough and detailed manner. The interviewer facilitates this process by demonstrating a willingness to learn by adamantly listening and providing prompts if deemed necessary (Flick, 2017). From the perspective of a researcher, a good interview involves thorough readiness, respect towards the interviewees, attentive listening by the interviewer, a detailed interview guide with short, open-ended questions, and the flexibility to adapt to the answers of the interviewee. Ezzy (2010) describes a good interview as an interview which is characterised by an absence of dominance from either the interviewer's perspective or the interviewee's agenda.

In addition to interviews, a focus group was held to gather the opinions and insights of the local population into the management and operation of a DT site. As a qualitative

method, this method is considered particularly valuable for its ability to encourage a rich, varied dialogue, as well as its ability to complement or contrast other methods of data collection (Gundumogula and Gundumogula, 2020; Gibson, 2007). Flick (2017) states that the process of sharing information within the group will create a dialogue on the similarities between participants, as well as provide an outlet for discussing their disagreements and differences in opinion. This can provide the researcher with not only the similarities and disparities but also an insight into why the participants think the way they do.

The focus group employed a mediator to facilitate the discussion and make sure that all participants remained on point (Prince and Davies, 2001). Their role was to guide the group's discussion and encourage participation from all participants. Size is also a crucial concern in the group composition of a focus group. Typically, they would range from five to ten people in size, however, for this research, it was limited to five people (Morgan, 1996). One of the main disadvantages of a focus group is that participants may take the discussion in a direction that is not considered productive for this study (Flick, 2017). To avoid this, the mediator was instructed to keep the discussion focused as much as possible. Additionally, focus groups may create a group dynamic where a more opinionated person might overshadow the rest. This can create an atmosphere where participants might conform to the loudest opinion in the room or remain silent. To avoid this, the mediator was asked to prompt all participants to speak and voice their honest opinions.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method of analysis used to identify, analyse, and describe patterns within the data collected. It provides researchers with an accessible, yet structured approach to data analysis which can be adapted to many different fields of study (Braun and Clarke, 2012). This researcher took the data collected from the interviews and focus group and identified any patterns, themes, or meanings within the data. The audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were anonymous and when quoting the participants directly, pseudonyms were given to further protect their privacy. The researcher then read the transcripts several times to gain a good understanding of the content. To be even more thorough, the transcripts were printed and systematically coded using different coloured

highlighters. Each colour represented a different concept or theme in the data. Additionally, the codes were then grouped into larger themes based on the similarities and differences observed within the collected data. Finally, the organised data was compared to the research questions, and theoretical frameworks found in the literature review.

3.4.1 Triangulation

The study employed a triangulation approach, cross-referencing and comparing data collected from the interviews, focus group discussions, and existing literature review to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Triangulation was used in this study to enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings ensuring a more well-rounded result for this investigation. Furthermore, this approach helped the identification of emerging patterns and themes and reduced the likelihood of any bias. As a result, the accuracy of this analysis was improved. Triangulation also strengthened the study's conclusions by viewing the results from multiple lenses, thus increasing the credibility of this research's outcomes (Leech et al., 2007).

3.5 Limitations of the Methodology

While this study provides valuable insight into the ethical management of DT sites, several limitations must be admitted. The use of purposive and snowball sampling methods may have caused some selection bias, as participants were chosen primarily on their accessibility, rather than randomly. This could accidentally cause the findings of this study to be less representative of the general population. Also, the small sample size, particularly in the focus group, may not have captured the different opinions of the wider community. The perspectives of other stakeholders who may have a role within DT, was not taken into account thus leading to only a partial understanding of the dynamics at play within DT management. With all qualitative research, there is a risk of researcher bias influencing the analysis of data. The researcher's own perspectives can inadvertently affect the coding process or the thematic analysis and hinder the objectivity of the findings. Moreover, the study only captures the participants' experiences and perspectives at a specific point in time. As DT practices and standards evolve, the relevance of these findings may diminish, thus limiting this study's long-term applicability. Finally, another limitation was the linguistic ability of the participants and the researcher. Participants were required to command a good level of both Maltese and English to ensure the collection of high-quality data, given the complexity of the topic and the detail

needed for a qualitative study. Additionally, since the researcher is limited to those two languages, other potential participants were not included in the study.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are a crucial part of any research, particularly when the research involves human participants. Many ethical precautions were considered for the safeguarding of all participants within this research. Participants were allowed to consent, both in writing through email, as well as verbally at the beginning of the interview thus ensuring informed consent. In addition, focus group participants were given a consent form (Appendix 1) to guarantee a clear understanding of their participation. Moreover, measures were taken to safeguard the confidentiality of any sensitive data, so that the participants' privacy was a priority throughout the entire research. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point during the research without any repercussions. Efforts were also made during the interview to ensure that the researcher provided a supportive and non-coercive environment for participants to openly share their experiences. Finally, it is important to note that the questions used in the interviews and focus group posed no risk to the participants since they were carefully designed to avoid causing harm or discomfort. A copy of these questions can be found in Appendix 3 and 4.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described the structured approach used to investigate the ethical management of dark tourism sites. By employing a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews and a focus group, and then applying a thematic analysis, this study aimed to understand the participants' experiences. The sampling methods used were justified based on the specific context of this research and were aligned with the research objectives. Methodology ensured that the data collected was useful, detailed, and directly relevant to the specific goals of this study. In The next chapter, the data collected and analysed is described so as to identify the key themes and patterns that will answer the research questions and objectives.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

This section will analyse the data obtained from the interviews and focus groups using the thematic analysis technique. Three primary themes emerged from the data: “Engaging Local Communities in Dark Tourism”; “Authenticity, Accuracy, and the Educational Value of Dark Tourism”, and “Juggling Ethics in Dark Tourism”. The second theme is subdivided into two subthemes, “The Role of Authenticity and Historical Accuracy”; and “Entertainment and Education in Dark Tourism”. The overarching theme, “Juggling Ethics in Dark Tourism”, permeates discussions of community engagement, authenticity, and the balance between education and entertainment. Each theme hereunder will include a variety of interwoven insights derived from the secondary data compiled in the literature review and the primary data gathered through interviews and focus groups.

4.1 Structure of Themes and Participant Data

Figure 1: This mind map demonstrates all the themes within the results, discussion, and analyses section.



Table 1: This table provides background information and the assigned code names for the participants.

Codename	Role	Male/Female/Other	Age Bracket	Interview or Focus group
Lena	Dark Tourism Site Manager	Female	30-39	Interview
Adric	Dark Tourism Site Manager	Male	30-39	Interview
Pablo	Dark Tourism Site Manager	Male	40-49	Interview
Francesca	IT Project Manager	Female	40-49	Focus Group
Wayne	It Manager	Male	40-49	Focus Group
Steve	Youth Work Coordinator	Male	20-29	Focus Group
Clayton	Front Office Receptionist	Male	20-29	Focus Group
Carmelo	Retired	Male	70-79	Focus Group

4.2 Engaging Local Communities in Dark Tourism

The first theme delves into the importance of involving the local communities in the development and management of a DT site. It describes how the active input and participation of locals ensures that cultural narratives are respected and that the authenticity and sustainability of a site are always prioritised. Community involvement also helps balance the commercial elements of a DT site with the preservation of local heritage, thus fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility.

Engaging local communities is crucial for creating an ethical and mutually beneficial tourism product as it ensures that sites are historically accurate. This involvement helps to prevent the oversimplification of complex histories and ensures that the site is properly reflective of the lived experience of those directly related. Community participation supports ethical tourism and enhances visitor experience as it may lead to new, creative ways of displaying history while preserving its integrity.

Community involvement and feedback were frequently cited by the interviewed managers as a key strategy in maintaining an ethical DT site. Adric stated that “creating the right

opportunities for the museum to collaborate with, with the community is in itself laudable and it should be one of the main goals of every museum”.

Comparatively, Lena stated:

And we have to also bring about the community engagement and empowerment that I had discussed before a sustainability as well and conservation and what I mean by this is the ethical development of of DT.

Lena emphasised community engagement and feedback as critical factors in the ethical success of a site. This perspective underscores the necessity of aligning tourism practices with the needs of the local community, thus ensuring that the cultural significance of a site is preserved. Furthermore, Lena suggested that community feedback can also be helpful towards site managers in creating an engaging, interactive exhibit for viewers:

And she gave this wonderful contribution, so we have something to add and it she brought a humanity as well to it because at times academics can be a bit clinical about history, which which is its nature to be fair, but this makes it a bit more humane, involving community of this sort (Lena).

Similarly, Pablo noted that involving the community can help the site collect stories and experiences regarding a DT site:

So we have stories passing from generations to generations, em or people who might have experienced the the episode at first place so em gathering these information from people rather than from books, yes, I think it em helps a lot (Pablo).

This perspective was mirrored in the focus group where the importance of community involvement was mentioned with regard to maintaining the ethical integrity of DT sites. One participant highlighted the importance of personal connection, directly stating:

It helps in passing on the message in a more direct and personal way, and if the community was obviously affected and their ancestors were affected, I mean there's more of a personal feel to it (Francesca).

This further accentuates the idea that community involvement adds more depth and authenticity to the narrative and environment presented at a DT site. Similarly, Steve stated that community involvement can counterbalance the commercial aspects of tourism, “It helps to counter the mentality of consumer-type tourism, which is just like the more people that come, the better”. He argued that when a site manager involves a community which is connected to the site, it creates a personal connection which elevates the experience from a mere tourist attraction to an authentic interaction with history.

Wayne also discussed the importance of the community in the management of DT sites, suggesting that:

First of all, the local communities should be involved... and secondly, uh, well obviously with the with the, with the influx of visitors, they would be the people who would and who would suffer (Wayne).

Wayne pointed out that their involvement is a necessary element in both maintaining historical accuracy, as well as preserving the emotional resonance of the site. Additionally, this provides members of the community the opportunity to make informed decisions on the management of the site, as well as voice their opinions on matters which directly affect them. Steve also mentioned the ethical necessity of involving the community, particularly in cases with traumatic events occurring within recent history. He stated, "I think you should involve the people who in some way have been affected by it". This perspective demonstrates the importance of designing tourism practices with the needs of those affected in mind.

Both the focus group and interview participants agreed on the importance of involving the local community in the management and presentation of DT sites to ensure that they remain respectful and historically accurate. Lennon and Foley (2000) raised concerns about the transformation of DT into a commodified product. Moreover, they questioned whether it is ethical to profit from a site which directly relates to death and suffering. Likewise, the focus group participants stated that by involving the community, site managers can reduce these risks by ensuring that all narratives are based on the experiences and memories of those involved with the site.

The existing literature on DT strictly emphasises the importance of authenticity when portraying historical events, for the sake of education and ethics. Additionally, Effective management of a DT site requires an overall understanding of the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts (Sharpley and Stone, 2009). Findings from the interviews and focus groups reinforce this by showing that involving local communities creates an authentic experience for visitors and ensures that the site can deliver a comprehensive educational journey. Furthermore, Sharpley and Stone (2009) argue that the involving locals makes the commercialisation of DT more justifiable, provided that profits benefit the local community. This strengthens the argument mentioned by Clayton, "they can be assistance assisted through this allocated fund", that profits from a DT business could be used to fund local communities in recovery or need of financial assistance.

Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned the risks that may be brought about by community involvement in DT. While involving and empowering locals may help them to directly address adverse consequences of tourism ‘overload’ or disruption, managers must be mindful of safeguarding the wellbeing of locals, even when they have volunteered to involve themselves in the management and development of a DT site. For example, Steve’s suggestion to involve those directly affected by the traumatic events that inspired the site’s development raises ethical concerns. Requiring victims to recount their traumatic experiences for the sake of a tourism attraction might trigger and re-traumatise them, creating a psychological toll that outweighs the educational benefits of firsthand accounts. The emotional and psychological impacts of DT are complex and go beyond trauma, thus the mental health of the community should be prioritised in the development of such sites (Zhang, 2021).

The effective ethical management of a DT site in Malta requires the constant mindful involvement of the surrounding communities, to ensure that these sites remain respectful towards the events they are commemorating. This will allow for any concerns regarding the commercialisation of the site and any potential touristic exploitation to be met. Furthermore, involving locals can aid in providing the DT site with new authentic narratives based on the first-hand experience of the locals. Moreover, using the profits to give back to the surrounding community or victims of a tragedy, will further reduce the risk of commercialisation. By keeping community involvement and engagement as a priority for a DT business, a site can honour the historical events they are representing while supporting the local community.

4.3 Authenticity, and the Educational Value of Dark Tourism

This theme, comprising two subthemes, “The Role of Authenticity and Historical Accuracy” and “Education and Entertainment in Dark Tourism”, is crucial to exploring how DT can keep its academic honesty while ensuring historical and cultural respect. The first sub-theme is about the presentation and management of a DT in a way that is authentic, respectful, as well as accurate to its historical narratives. The second sub-theme addressed the controversial discussion on the importance of compelling visitors without compromising the ethical integrity of the site. DT should aim to not only entertain but mainly to educate by offering visitors an interactive experience. This should provide a deep understanding of all the complex historical, social, cultural and political factors within the event. By focusing on both elements, DT can honour the importance of these sites, while respectfully enhancing visitor knowledge.

4.3.1 The Role of Authenticity and Historical Accuracy

This sub-theme will discuss the importance of accurately presenting a DT site in a way that shows the of historical events which transpired. Authenticity and historical accuracy are crucial factors in maintaining the credibility of a DT site. By focusing on historically accurate narratives they can remain as sources for remembrances, rather than simple commercial attractions. This sub-theme discusses how the truthful presentation of events preserves the academic integrity of a site, as well as the memory of those affected by it. Moreover, it enforces the ethical responsibility of site managers to create a balance between having engaging narratives and upholding accuracy and respect. By strictly upholding such principles, DT can provide visitors with a meaningful, educational, and engaging experience that increases their understanding of historical complexities.

The Managers interviewed frequently referenced the importance of authenticity and historical accuracy within the scope of a DT experience:

It's the importance of remaining truthful and not inventing so if something is unknown you have to state it is unknown or probable or possible, but not making something as fact which em in in reality you're not sure of (Pablo).

The most important thing I find is authenticity and by authenticity. More often than not, being uh as true as possible to sound historical research. (Adric).

Pablo highlighted the importance of fact-checking and accurate information, as presenting unbiased information is one of the key factors in creating an ethical DT product. Adric states that "you can invite them to be curious without the need to invent". In this quote, Adric posited that being honest does not affect a site's ability to be interesting, suggesting that the inherent power of real stories can be just as captivating, if not more so, than fabricated narratives.

Lena suggested that providing any alterations to the story is not only dishonest of a business, but might also be disrespectful to the victims of an event or site especially if any living relatives or descendants are still alive:

But if this is the case, this requires a careful consideration of how stories are told, language use, the inclusivity of different perspective, especially those of the victims families (Lena).

You have to be sensitive in how the interpretation is put forward as well, and because there was this general perspective before the 19th century, may I suggest

that you treat the past merely through tangible objects and note that this is really an extension of a culture. Even if a culture is no longer living, that doesn't mean we shouldn't treat it with respect (Lena).

Here, Lena accentuated the importance of providing an objective view of history to avoid ethical issues. She explained that understanding the historical context and cultural nuances is vital for respectful representation. While Adric's opinion is consistent with Lena's call to sensitivity, he places limits on touristic sites' historical accuracy, prioritising family-friendly measures instead, "Speaking of intolerance and the speaking of issues which might be somehow sensitive, particularly to younger audiences". Adric attempts to create a balance by stating historical facts while omitting their gruesome or shock-provoking details, practising mindfulness towards the potential impact of DT on different audiences, especially younger visitors or victims, who may have increased vulnerability to distressing content and risk re-traumatisation. This aligns with Kerr et al. (2021) and Wyatt et al. (2021) who explore how sites can be designed with children in mind through the concept of 'lighter dark' tourism, which prioritises edutainment and minimises graphic details.

These perspectives were mirrored in the focus group. Francesca restated the sentiment that DT sites should be as accurate and authentic as possible, strongly disagreeing with the inclusion of entertainment or light-hearted elements, as she argued it dilutes the reality of the experience "I strongly disagree with entertainment, putting in entertainment and DT especially, and those associated with tragedies and where a lot of people have suffered". Steve emphasised the importance of historical accuracy and creating an atmosphere that does not undermine the gravity of the events. He suggested managers should pay special attention to a site's feel and ambience:

And because for sure there is, when you go to such a place, there is a certain tone, there is a certain and a certain atmosphere and managers should be aware of what the atmosphere is and what what it should be (Steve).

Both interviewees and focus group participants repeatedly insisted on authenticity and historical accuracy being the foundation to ethical management within DT sites. For example, Pablo highlighted the ethical responsibility to present information honestly:

It's the importance of remaining truthful and not inventing, so if something is unknown, you have to state it is unknown or probable or possible, but not making something as fact which in reality you're not sure of (Pablo).

This sentiment was also present in broader literature, where many academics emphasized that DT sites should avoid unnecessary sensationalism or alterations that might take away from the educational aims or respectful purpose of the events being memorialised. This also matches with the wider discourse in DT literature which considers the accurate and respectful representation of history to be vital towards maintaining the ethical integrity of these sites (Sharpley and stone, 2009; Garcia, 2012). Similarly, Lena's statement regarding embellishments in storytelling risking dishonesty and disrespect to the victims is relevant to several studies. Her focus on the inclusivity of different perspectives, particularly of the victim's families resonates with many of the ethical concerns in DT. One such study is Duncan Light's 'Progress in DT and thanatourism research: An uneasy relationship with heritage tourism' (Light, 2017), which highlights the need for sensitive and culturally respectful interpretations of a DT event or site.

The discussions from the focus group further emphasised the balance between maintaining historical accuracy and the potential for commercial exploitation. Francesca's strong opposition to incorporating entertainment elements into DT reflected a large concern that any deviation from factual representation risks minimalising the experiences of those who suffered. Stone (2006) supports this by warning against the commercialisation of DT sites, which in his opinion, can lead to the dilution of their educational and memorial value. Steve observed the importance of a site's atmosphere and the need for managers to be aware of the tone they set. This repeats the concerns about the 'servicescape' of DT sites, where every element from physical surroundings to narratives presented adds to the visitor's understanding and emotional response (Magee and Gilmore, 2015).

4.3.2 Education and Entertainment in Dark Tourism

"Education and Entertainment in Dark Tourism" addresses the sensitive balance between maintaining their academic honesty and engaging their visitors. The biggest complexity lies in creating interesting, interactive narratives while also accurately presenting the historical value of these sites. Effective DT should aim to not only entertain but also provide their visitors with a better understanding of the historical events they are representing within their site. With this in mind, site managers must avoid the risk of commercialisation and sensationalism as this can completely undermine the educational value and ethical responsibility of DT. This sub-theme will explore the experience of how different managers have handled this challenge. Additionally, it will discuss the best

practices for achieving a balance between education and entertainment within the scope of DT.

While discussing the balance between entertainment and education, Adric stated that DT should “stick to sound research” and to avoid adding drama to historical events. He argued that there are “plenty of episodes in our history where you can create a sort of ‘wow’ factor without the need to invent or make things seem darker than they actually are”. Adric stated that it is important to remember that tools used to engage visitors should not hinder the efforts of a site to spread a message “Whatever means of interpretation is put forward, it is there to highlight the site's values, not to obscure them”. He emphasized that “as long as you're true to sound research...you can be as adventurous as it might get, as long as you're true to facts and solid research”. Thus, Adric insisted that all efforts to interpret history are grounded in historical accuracy, to ensure that they remain educational at their core.

While both Adric and Lena strive for historical accuracy, their opinions differed as Lena believes that it is important to add certain elements of entertainment and engagement to retain the interest of the visitors.

I believe it's how you deliver it as well as as a historian, I understand that sometimes we can be a bit boring. I'm the first one to admit it. Umm, we have to keep in mind that we're no longer in the classroom. We're just, we're not just lecturing here, but this is a museum. So we have to cater to different backgrounds, different ages (Lena).

Lena said that combining interactive displays with lots of opportunities for interaction and debate has been their most successful strategy. This approach not only increased visitors' understanding of a site but also made sure that their active engagement increased the site's instructional value. In addition to offering an immersive and engaging experience, the website retained a strong educational focus by allowing visitors to interact with the content and have important conversations.

There was a good engagement and discussion, and I think that deepened the impact of their visits. So again, I must say this part of participatory approach. It ensures that the entertainment value does not overshadowed educational and commemorative purposes of the sites (Lena).

Lena also expressed concern that incorporating too many entertainment elements could result in an insensitive product, particularly for those directly affected by the site in question: “And it's it's a juggling act for sure because you have to be historically significant

and sensitive at the same time”. Her caution highlights the need for careful consideration in balancing educational content with engaging elements: Similarly, Pablo stated:

The word ‘entertainment’ has to be used with caution. Em if the entity em providing these services, national agencies, heritage agency, it has to be careful with with what it it understands with the with the word ‘entertainment’, so yes, it can be entertaining, I’m not saying that so, for example, you can do reenactments, but again, you have to be as true as possible (Pablo).

This reinforces Lena’s opinion that while DT can involve entertainment features, this must be done with caution to ensure that it does not offend any of the involved parties.

From the focus group, participants had some concurring points of view. Steve reflected on the very specific role of entertainment within an educational setting, stating:

I think it depends also on the definition of entertainment... if you put a TV or a projector, which projects historical scenes, that might be a good thing to show because it is historical and people can learn from it (Steve).

However, Steve also cautioned that ‘other forms of entertainment might not be relevant or not appropriate for the specific type of DT location’. His perspective underscored the importance of context in such decisions This emphasises that any added elements must support the education aspect rather than detract. Similarly, Wayne also mentioned the importance of context when trying to create an entertainment element in this form of tourism, noting that “it all depends on the site”. While he acknowledged that reenactments and other interactive elements could enhance visitor engagement, he demonstrated concern that they could overshadow the site’s educational and commemorative purposes. This matches Steve’s perspective that while some forms of entertainment, such as historical reenactments or multimedia presentations, can assist visitors in understanding, they must be carefully and sensitively chosen to ensure they are appropriate for the site.

Francesca had a very polarised perspective, believing entertainment elements should absolutely not be included in DT, particularly with sites associated with higher levels of suffering and tragedy. She argued that “I strongly disagree with putting in entertainment in DT, especially those associated with tragedies and where a lot of people have suffered”. Similarly, Clayton emphasized the primary role of education in DT, stating that, “after all, people go there to learn about the place, to learn about the tragedy that occurred in that location”. He was also concerned about the over-prioritisation of entertainment in DT, stating that “if you overdo it...the place will lose the value and the interest...there will

be nothing left". His comments suggested that excessive focus on entertainment can strip a site of its significance, reducing its ability to teach visitors the history of the site.

Balancing the entertainment and educational elements of DT is a complex challenge requiring careful management to maintain the educational integrity of sites, while still engaging visitors. The literature frequently emphasises the dangers of sensationalism, trivialisation, and commercialisation, which can detract from the educational and ethical aims of a DT site (Sharpley and Stone, 2009; Light, 2017; Garcia, 2012).

Adric's emphasis on "sticking to sound research" agrees with the scholarly consensus, which advocates for the creation of compelling storylines, without the compromise of historical accuracy or educational goals. Stone (2006), agrees with this opinion, arguing that authenticity is critical to DT to ensure that sites are respected as places of reflection and more than just entertainment. Conversely, Lena advocates for the use of interactive displays and discussions to enhance visitor engagement, stressing that these elements must always prioritise education. This approach mirrors the best practices identified in the literature, where interactive and participatory approaches were recommended to deepen visitor engagement and understanding. This also stands to safeguard a site's educational and commemorative purposes (Magee and Gilmore, 2015; Agius, 2021). However, both Lena and Pablo have cautioned against the overuse of entertainment elements within sensitive contexts. They stated that this can trivialise significant historical events and even offend individuals with a personal connection to them. From the focus group, Clayton and Francesca argued that excessive focus on entertainment will diminish a site's educational value and significance. This is consistent with seminal studies which warn about the implications of commercialising DT, such as risking turning these sites into spectacles, rather than places of remembrance and learning (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Sharpley, 2005).

The participants of the focus groups noted the importance of context when adding entertainment elements to a DT site. For example, Steve and Wayne suggested that even though certain forms of entertainment such as reenactments or presentations can increase visitor engagement, the site managers must be careful to add to the educational aim of the site, not detract from it. Similarly, Seaton (1996) and Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) also argued that the primary purpose of DT should be educational, with entertainment only being inserted to assist visitors in understanding complex historical scenarios. Ethical DT management in Malta requires that this challenge is addressed by prioritising historical accuracy and only using interactive, participatory methods to

enhance visitor experience without overshadowing the site's educational value. By relying on these principles, sites can remain respectful and educational, offering meaningful experiences to their visitors.

4.4 Juggling Ethics in Dark Tourism

DT which involves visiting sites associated with death, tragedy and suffering, requires a multitude of ethical considerations. With its increase in popularity, managers must increase their focus on managing them in ethically viable ways. The theme of "Juggling Ethics in DT" discusses the complex responsibilities of managers running these sites. Furthermore, it will discuss the rules and principles that managers should use as guidelines for the presentation of DT sites. This will ensure that the memory of those affected is honoured, while also providing a positive educational experience for visitors. Examining these ethical principles, as well as the practical strategies suggested, this theme will offer a well-rounded guide for maintaining a DT site's integrity.

As mentioned in earlier sub-themes, Adric emphasised the importance of grounding all presentations in "sound research" to avoid sensationalism and the misrepresentation of history. Therefore, he argued that managers create a "wow factor" without needing to change or exaggerate any details. He insisted that DT sites should "stick to facts and solid research", thus ensuring that interactions with visitors remain educational. Adric explained that ethical management includes sustainability and preservation of the site itself. Ensuring that these locations are accessible to the public while still safeguarding their physical integrity is within itself a task that requires many precautions, plans, and sustainable practices. This role involves not only the physical conservation but also the ethical development of tourism practices with the aim of ensuring that the site remains meaningful and respectful to the surrounding community.

Lena emphasised the importance of following the "global ethical standards and best practices" in DT, explaining that these standards address issues such as "representation, commodification, and the local impact of tourism on communities and the environment". Furthermore, she pointed out that "it's not just the physical aspect of ethical standards, but also how they are delivered", enforcing the need for careful and sensitive implementation. Similarly to what Adric stated, Lena also stressed the importance of sustainability, noting that managing a DT can involve a "juggling act" where even minor changes such as "installing a light bulb", can have significant effects on the integrity of the site.

From the focus group, Francesca repeated the importance of respect and sensitivity, particularly in sites related to extreme suffering, such as Auschwitz. She stated that she 'wouldn't expect to see, for instance, a reenactment play in Auschwitz', highlighting the need for restraint in how history is presented to visitors. Francesca also suggested practical measures, such as limiting the number of visitors on a daily basis to allow the site to easily maintain the 'right environment and ambience'.

Another participant, Steve, reinforced the importance of context and atmosphere in managing DT sites. He pointed out that "when you go to such a place, there is a certain tone, a certain atmosphere", and site managers must be aware of this to aid visitors in fully understanding the historical significance of a site within its context. Magee and Gilmore (2015) echoed this statement by also insisting on the importance of having an appropriate environment and ambience that is designed for reflection. Moreover, Steve discussed the ethical responsibility present on those managing a DT site, and their responsibility towards the outer community. By involving the community and implementing community feedback, sites that evoke a "very negative memory" (Steve) can be ethically managed as was discussed within the first theme.

Moreover, Francesca addressed the financial aspects of DT management, underscoring the need for transparency and accountability for funds. She argued that "all public funds need to be audited" and that all the money allocated to the site's upkeep should be carefully managed and tracked. This is crucial for maintaining the ethical standards of DT and ensuring that the focus remains on education and preservation, not profit. Additionally, Wayne proposed that tours should be conducted by authorised guides to ensure that the information is well-presented, accurate, and respectful.

Unless, unless, visitors purchase tickets directly from this site itself, rather than any, any other tour or organized visit needs to be done by authorized guides (Wayne).

This approach is useful for protecting the integrity of these sites and ensuring that visitors receive a meaningful and accurate understanding of the historical events being commemorated.

The thematic evidence from the focus groups and interviews strongly aligns with the existing data on the ethical and managerial challenges of DT. The participant's emphasis on accuracy, respect, sustainability, and sensitivity reflects the broader concerns first

explained by key scholars within the field. Adric and Lena's insistence on grounding DT presentations in "sound research" and following "global ethical standards" aligns with the foundational work of Lennon and Foley (2000), who first conceptualised DT as a practice that is directly related to the rise of mass media and postmodernity. They frequently warned against the risks of sensationalism, and the potential for DT to be exploited by distorting historical truths. Comparably, Adric's caution against exaggerating details to create a "wow factor" is reflected by Garcia (2012), who found that the balance between education and entertainment is a crucial challenge for site managers, who must make sure that stories are kept accurate and respectful towards the victims.

The concept of a "juggling act" required to maintain a site's integrity, and its public accessibility is also stated in Stone's (2006, 2010) work on the 'DT Spectrum' of DT. Stone categorised them based on their degree of 'darkness', suggesting that the darker the site, the greater the need for careful management, maintaining that the primary aim of the site always remains on education. Adric and Lena's strive for sustainability and preservation of DT sites aligns with Magee and Gilmore's (2015) view of authenticity as essential to the success of these sites.

Steve's discussion about the ethical responsibility of DT towards locals reflects concerns raised by Light (2017), and Agius (2021). Light (2017) discussed the commodification of DT sites, adding that while they can attract significant funding and attention, they are also prone to becoming exploitative if not managed with sensitivity. This is further supported by Agius (2021), who examined the ethical debates surrounding the commercialisation of Auschwitz, highlighting the need for tourism practices that do not exploit tragedies for commercial gain, but instead contribute positively to the surrounding community.

Francesca agreed with Kelman and Dodds (2009) re concerns about transparency and financial accountability. These authors highlighted the dual-edged nature of DT, which can create financial help for the local communities but can also bring certain moral dilemmas. The risk would be that financial motivations could become the focus instead of the memorial aspects of these sites. Francesca insisted that public funds are audited to ensure they are used for upkeep and awareness raising rather than profit. This highlights the need for management practices which prioritise preservation and ethics before anything else.

Wayne's suggestion that all visitors should be guided through DT sites agrees with Hodalska's (2017) regarding digital narcissism in DT. Hodalska argues that social media has led to visitors often prioritising their personal enjoyment, over respectful engagement with the site's history. Wayne's suggestion that tours should be conducted by official guides to prevent any ethical issues from occurring could be viewed as a countermeasure towards this trend. The idea is to preserve the integrity and educational value of these sites, without compromising on their ethical or educational integrity.

The ethical management of DT sites requires a balance between preservation, education, and respect for the community it is in. The evidence gathered in this research, highlights the need for transparency, accuracy, and careful consideration of the cultural and historical significance of these sites. By using practices that align with established ethical standards, a positive contribution to the well-being of their surrounding communities can be made. In this way, site managers can also broaden the understanding of visitors, and create a respectful engagement with history.

4.5 Conclusion

This study described crucial insights into the ethical management of DT sites in Malta. It highlighted the significance of community involvement and maintaining authenticity. Community engagement was found to enhance the ethical management of these sites by ensuring that historical facts are preserved while reducing the risk of commercialisation. Key ethical challenges faced by managers included balancing historical accuracy with the need to attract visitors, as well as ensuring they do not commodify the site they are managing. This balance between providing educational value as well as respecting the site's historical significance was a constant recurring issue. The research also highlighted the importance of practical approaches to help managers navigate complex ethical dilemmas and ensure a respectful representation of history.

5. Final Arguments

This section gathers the study's key insights, implications, and its reliability and validity. Recommendations for future studies based on this project's findings and limitations will also be proposed.

5.1 Conclusions

Overall, the study determined that engaging local communities plays a significant role in the ethical management of a DT site as it ensures cultural sensitivity, historical accuracy, and authentic visitor experiences. Managers mentioned that through integrating the community, the risk of oversimplifying history can be mitigated and instead, a partnership based on the principles of mutual responsibility and respect can be created. On a structural level, ethical management involves adhering to global ethical standards such as those stipulated in the UNWTO guidelines and following best tourism practices, which advocate for education-first attractions. These findings are well-aligned with Sharpley and Stone's (2009) appeal for local involvement and critically balancing educational value with maximising profit.

The management of a DT site in Malta is riddled with ethical challenges as managers strive to avoid exploiting DT sites for economic gain. Furthermore, while the involvement of local communities hosts several benefits, managers must do their utmost to respect individuals' personal threshold when recalling difficult experiences, to ensure well-being and avoid psychological harm. Maintaining historical history and simultaneously creating an engaging visitor experience is another challenging feat, that risks sensationalism if not properly managed. This echoes Stone's (2006) premise that leveraging DT sites for profit may motivate managers to prioritise entertainment elements and minimise accuracy and educational elements. A final consideration is safeguarding the site and surrounding locality from the consequences of tourism overload and over-commercialisation.

Addressing the above issues requires a multi-dimensional approach that is guided by intentions to ensure well-being and avoid doing harm. Managers should develop ethical guidelines used to intricately balance receiving historically accurate and educational stories with caring for community members mental health. Furthermore, transparency

should be practised throughout and where possible, funds gathered should be explicitly stated and returned back to the community or the upkeep of the site. This perspective strongly emerged during the focus group discussion.

Ensuring that historical accuracy without bias is maintained while avoiding sensationalism was highlighted as one of the most important core principles of ethical management. This approach reflects the findings of Garcia (2012), who emphasises the need for DT to strike a balance between attracting tourists and preserving historical integrity, to avoid the pitfalls of over-commercialisation. Thus, careful consideration should also be given to the tone and atmosphere of these sites, to foster reflection and learning, rather than entertainment.

5.2 Implications of the study

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of ethical DT management in Malta by combining the perspectives of local communities with the experience of the site managers. Previous DT studies have focused either on the managerial perspective of running a DT site or the community impact (Shekhar and Valeri, 2022), making this research the first to incorporate these critical viewpoints and address a substantial gap. By proposing an ethical guideline rooted in authenticity, community involvement, and educational value, this study has made a valuable contribution to the tourism and business management fields. On a practical level, managers can incorporate these findings to ensure their DT site management remains ethical.

Additionally, global ethical standards such as those proposed by UNWTO should add a subsection that directly addresses the nuances involved in DT ethics. Another outcome could be developing a practical and culturally mindful toolkit that would help DT managers in monitoring and evaluating their ethical practices. These could be useful for fine-tuning policies to consider historical accuracy and stakeholder well-being.

5.3 Recommendations

Developing an ethical framework is crucial for ethical DT management rooted in respect, accuracy, and preserving the dignity of victims. This can be implemented by regularly checking, updating, and seeking advice from the local community, and historical and cultural professionals. Establishing a strong relationship between managers and the community ensures that sites are representative of relevant individuals' personal

experiences. Community members can take ownership by actively contributing to educational or awareness exercises that would further advance the site's authenticity. A DT toolkit may be applied by managers by providing useful checklists when an ethical decision needs to be made. This is also a starting point for standardising ethical DT management and creating a list of best practices.

Moreover, these findings suggest that policies need to be enhanced to directly address issues related to DT site management. Policymakers should clarify a number of ethical practices, such as financial transparency and limiting commercial activities that do not have an educational basis. Regular monitoring of DT sites should be conducted to ensure compliance to ethical policies and guidelines.

More research on ethical DT management should be carried out to generate new and up-to-date insights, procedures, and standards of practice. Where possible, future studies should gather community feedback and conduct research in different cultural contexts to investigate the cultural influence on DT management, visitor experience, and expectations. Longitudinal studies could also determine the long-term impact of involving community members on their wellbeing. As society becomes more technology-dependant, future research could also explore the role of technology and social media platforms on DT ethics, including authenticity, respect, viewer wellbeing, and privacy of individuals' narratives. This would help to understand how modern tools could enhance, rather than detract from, the educational and ethical goals of a DT site.

5.4 Evaluation and Trustworthiness

5.4.1 Evaluation

This study boasts several strengths, including the depth of the information gathered and the active participation of both site managers, as well as community members. By involving site managers, the qualitative approach was able to draw on their expertise and provide detailed insights into the ethical management of DT sites. Furthermore, the study fills a gap in local research, as few studies have focused on the local context. Moreover, the focus on ethics has been underexplored in existing literature, thus providing valuable contributions to the field. However, limitations included the participant selection, which focused mainly on managers and community members, leaving out the perspectives of visitors. This creates an opportunity for future studies to incorporate quantitative data and

offer a better view of public opinion on ethical practices. Additionally, while I hoped for more specific examples of direct ethical issues from the interviews, most were not able to provide as much detail as anticipated.

5.4.2 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the study is essential and comprises credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria are compared with validity and reliability for quantitative methodologies (Arslan, 2022). If a study displays good trustworthiness, it informs readers that its rationale, methods, and analysis are justified, valid, and consistent.

This study achieved credibility through triangulating methods and comprehensively combining insights from managerial interviews, a community focus group, and previously established literature. This resulted in a relevant and evidence-based analysis of DT ethical management. In addition, since the researcher provided rich descriptions of the research context, methodology, and participant demographics, readers may be able to transfer these findings to settings outside of Malta. This was further strengthened by a thorough discussion of the themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis, which may be applied to different DT sectors, such as issues of commercialisation, education balanced with entertainment, and including the community. This critical discussion and quality documentation provides an opportunity for researchers or managers to replicate or adapt the findings to their own circumstances.

By using a consistent and systematic approach to collecting and analysing data, the dependability of the study could be established. Likewise, a transparent research process was maintained throughout, documenting precise steps in data collection, coding, and analysis, alluding to the study's confirmability. The triangulation of data increased research validity and reliability. Since this research paid special attention to fulfilling all four criteria detailed above, one can say with confidence that the study has established and upheld a good standard of trustworthiness.

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7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 - Consent Forms for Focus Group

Information about the study

My name is Aidan Axiak and I am presently reading for a Bachelor in International Hospitality Management. I am currently conducting research as part of my dissertation entitled 'Dark Tourism Management: Facing and Addressing Ethical Issues', under the supervision of Mr James Sultana. You are being invited to take part in an online focus group that will take approximately one hour.

The aim of my study is to explore the ethical challenges and management strategies involved in Dark Tourism within the Maltese context. For this purpose, interviews with site managers and a focus group with the local community will be held to investigate the different experiences and opinions on the ethical management of Dark Tourism.

Your Participation

Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation would help contribute to a better understanding of community perspectives in dark tourism site management.

Should you choose to participate in the focus group, you will be asked to share your opinion and responses to a number of questions related to the ethical management of dark tourism sites. You will be sharing your responses during an online call with five other people, one of whom will act as a focus group mediator. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. During the focus group, you are free to not answer any questions. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from you will be erased unless the erasure of data would render it impossible or seriously impair the achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks (physical or otherwise).

Data Management

The online focus group data will be collected in visual and audio recordings which will be transcribed and then deleted. Identifiable information such as your name will be anonymised during transcription and pseudonyms will be used when discussing results. The data will be analysed and presented through key themes supported by anonymous participant quotes and critical insights combining the study findings with findings from previous literature.

Sensitive data will be encrypted and stored in a secure drive that is only available to my supervisor and myself. All data collected will be erased on completion of the study.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on the details provided below:

Aidan Axiak: aidan.axiak001@its.edu.mt

James Sultana: james.sultana@its.edu.mt

Participant's consent

- I hereby declare to have read the information about the nature of the study, my involvement and data management.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my questions have been satisfactorily answered.
- I declare that I am 18 years or older.
- I understand that should I have any further queries, I can contact Aidan Axiak or James Sultana on the contact details provided above.
- I agree to participate in this research study.

Researcher's name (in block)

Researcher's signature

Participant's name (in block)

Participant' signature

Date

7.2 Appendix 2 – Email Used for Contacting Interviewees

Dear _____,

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is Aidan Axiak, and I am presently reading for a Bachelor in International Hospitality Management (Honours) at the Institute of Tourism Studies.

I am currently conducting a research study for my dissertation entitled 'Dark Tourism Management: Facing and Addressing Ethical Issues' under the supervision of _____ Mr _____ James _____ Sultana.

In view of this, I am reaching out to you because of your esteemed position as the _____, a renowned dark tourism site. Your expertise and experience in managing such a historically significant and culturally sensitive location make you an invaluable potential participant in my study. The chief aim of this study is to gain insights from managers of dark tourism sites on how ethical issues are identified, faced, and addressed in their respective establishments. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study will help contribute valuable knowledge to the field of dark tourism management and ethical decision-making.

The interview duration is approximately half an hour and it would be conducted at your convenience. The interview may be conducted either in-person or through a virtual platform, depending on your preference. If you choose to participate, your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks (physical or otherwise). Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and all information provided will be anonymised. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data, which shall be

stored on a secure drive. In addition, you may skip over any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on the details provided below:

Aidan Axiak (aidan.axiak001@its.edu.mt)

James Sultana (james.sultana@its.edu.mt)

Sincerely,

Aidan Axiak

7.3 Appendix 3 – Focus Group guide for mediator with questions

- Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to each question, unless they choose not to while preventing a few voices from dominating the focus group discussion.
- Obtain audible consent from all participants for the session to be recorded and transcribed. Additionally, inform everyone that they have the right to skip any questions they do not wish to answer.
- Read this section to everyone first:

Dark tourism, sometimes called thanatourism or grief tourism, is a type of tourism that involves visiting places associated with death, tragedy, or suffering. These destinations can include former battlefields, sites of natural disasters like tsunamis or volcanic eruptions, concentration camps from World War II, memorials honoring victims of atrocities such as genocide or terrorism, or locations connected to notorious events or figures in history. The purpose of dark tourism is to explore and understand significant historical events and their impact on society. Visitors to these sites often seek to learn about the darker and more challenging aspects of our past. While some people see dark tourism as a way to reflect, learn, and honor the memory of those affected by these events, others view it as controversial due to concerns about exploiting tragedy for tourist purposes. While dark tourism can provide opportunities for reflection and learning, it also raises important ethical questions about how we commemorate and engage with sensitive historical narratives.

- **Questions:**

1. Based on the description of dark tourism provided, what are your initial thoughts or feelings about this type of tourism?
2. After learning about dark tourism, what criteria do you believe are important for ensuring that profits from these sites are generated ethically?
3. In your opinion, how much time should pass after a tragic event before it becomes appropriate to develop a dark tourism site? What factors should be considered when making this determination?

4. Given the nature of dark tourism, what responsibilities do you think managers of these sites should have towards respecting the memory and dignity of those affected by the events being commemorated?
5. Do you believe that specific rules or guidelines should be in place to govern the operation of dark tourism sites? If so, what kind of rules would you suggest to ensure ethical practices?
6. From your perspective, how important is it to involve local communities in the planning and management of dark tourism sites? What role should community input play in decision-making about these destinations?
7. In your opinion, what is the ideal balance between providing factual historical information and offering an entertaining experience for visitors at dark tourism sites? Do you think adding entertaining elements complements or dilutes the educational role of these historical sites?

7.4 Appendix 4 - Interview Questions with Prompts

1. Can you describe your role?
2. Do the sites you manage fall under dark tourism? How so?
3. What do you understand by the concept of dark tourism?
 - a. Could you give a brief description of dark tourism and whether you think it is a rising phenomenon or not? Why?
 - b. What contributes to the rising popularity of dark tourism?
4. How can dark tourism impact the local economy and community?
 - a. Do you think that dark tourism can positively affect the local economy and community? If yes how?
 - b. If your answer to the previous question was in the negative, do you think it can have a negative effect? And in that case, what potential negative side effects or consequences might dark tourism have on the local economy and community?
5. What are some commonly known dark tourism sites in Malta, and what makes them attractive to tourists and visitors? (what attracts tourists and visitors to these sites)
6. What do you think are the main ethical concerns that dark tourism needs to address? (What are the ethical concerns that dark tourism needs to address)
 - a. What criteria are required to generate ethical profit from a dark tourism location or attraction?
 - b. In your opinion, how much time needs to pass after a tragedy for it to be qualified as a dark tourism event?
 - c. What do you think is important to consider when managing a dark tourism site?
7. Do you think that there should be specific rules and procedures that managers working in dark tourism should follow to ensure that ethical practices are followed?
8. How important do you think community involvement is within a dark tourism project or initiative? Is community feedback important and why?
9. Could you mention an example of a dark tourism site which has faced and successfully addressed an ethical issue?
 - a. Maybe an experience in any of the sites that you manage that required extra sensitivity or careful navigation?

10. What in your opinion, is the ideal balance between providing factual historical information and providing an entertaining experience for visitors?
 - a. Do you believe adding entertaining elements complements or dilutes the educational role of historical sites?
 - b. What role does education have in promoting ethical behaviour and understanding in dark tourism sites?
11. Do you think that dark tourism will have a role to play in the future, and what can be done to make sure it develops ethically?
12. What advice would you give dark tourism managers on ethically managing their business and navigating the moral dilemmas of dark tourism?
13. Are there any further considerations, implications, benefits, or consequences to consider when setting up/managing a dark tourism site in the local context i.e. Malta that you might want to add?