



# A Stand Against the Dark Tourism Understanding: An Evaluation Based Experiences

## Hüzün Turizmi Anlayışına Karşı Bir Duruş: Deneyimlere Dayalı Bir Değerlendirme

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research is to first take a stance against the demand for dark tourism areas and then the supply. With this purpose has used the reviews of those visiting the Ulucanlar Prison in Ankara, Türkiye, which was converted into a museum under the same name. In line with the purpose of the research, 345 comments obtained from the Tripadvisor platform were evaluated under the themes of experiences, description of place and transfer of emotions. A discussion was conducted with the support of literature through selected comments presented within the scope of descriptive analysis. Finally, it is accepted that Ulucanlar Prison Museum is a significant dark tourism site for Turkish people, though not for international visitors, and an alternative is presented for the use of this place and other similar places.*

**Keywords:** Culture tourism, Dark tourism, Prison tourism, Museum, Ulucanlar Prison, Türkiye.

### Öz

*Bu araştırmanın amacı, hüzün turizm alanlarına yönelik önce talebe, ardından arza yönelik karşı bir duruş sergilemektir. Bu amaçla Ankara'da aynı adla müzeye dönüştürülen Ulucanlar Cezaevi'ni ziyaret edenlerin yorumlarından yararlanılmıştır. Araştırmanın amacı doğrultusunda Tripadvisor platformundan elde edilen 345 yorum; deneyimler, mekân tanımlanması ve duygu aktarımı temaları altında değerlendirilmiştir. Betimsel analiz kapsamında sunulan seçilmiş yorumlar üzerinden literatür desteğiyle tartışma yürütülmüştür. Son olarak Ulucanlar Cezaevi Müzesi'nin uluslararası ziyaretçiler için olmasa da Türk halkı için önemli bir hüzün turizm alanı olduğu kabul edilerek bu ve benzeri mekanların kullanımına alternatif sunulmuştur.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültür turizmi, Hüzün turizmi, Cezaevi turizmi, Müze, Ulucanlar Cezaevi, Türkiye

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## INTRODUCTION:

The fact that sites related to death and suffering such as execution, holocaust (Ashworth, 2002), assassination (Foley and Lennon, 1996), cemetery (Seaton, 2002), mass grave (Raine, 2013), prison (Strange & Kempa, 2003), concentration camp (Podoshen & Hunt, 2011) and battlefield (Miles, 2014; Farmaki, 2013) are visited has recently brought sites in this direction to the fore. Some researchers use the term 'dark tourism' for such visits, while the others refer to them as 'thanatourism' (Seaton, 2009) and this dilemma is open for debate. Most of the researchers have adopted the term 'dark tourism' put forward by Foley and Lennon (1996). Such that Lennon (2017) noted that concepts like grief tourism introduced afterwards could not go beyond serving the uncertainty of the situation. However, even before Foley and Lennon (1996), it is known that in 1993, Rojek used the term 'black spots' for these visits (Stone, 2006). In this research, it has been decided not to go into a discussion on finding the appropriate concept in order not to distract the subject and to adopt the term 'dark tourism' to act in line with the general acceptance. However, what is more important is that such visits were made long before it was stated. According to Stone (2005), participation in public executions under the auspices of the Roman gladiator games or in medieval times, or perhaps guided tours of morgues in the Victorian era, are early examples of dark tourism.

Dark tourism is full of darkness in many ways. There are many questions on the subject with no clear answers (Dann and Seaton, 2001; Seaton and Lennon, 2004; Biran et al., 2011). Furthermore, according to Sharpley and Stone (2009), these questions do not have simple answers, and the points on which researchers have reached an agreement are very limited. (Fonseca et al., 2015). In this direction, it can be stated that dark tourism studies have largely focused on the supply side and demand motivations have been relegated to the background (Stone and Sharpley, 2008; Biran et al., 2011; Fonseca et al., 2015). A framework could not be established for the motivation behind these visits. Nevertheless, the motivation of these people needs to be fully analyzed so that it becomes easier to answer many other questions. It is possible to find some theoretical explanations with regard to dark tourism demand, although we admit that they are ultimately not sufficient. The common point in many of these explanations is the curiosity about death, which is a phenomenon that is impossible to experience. An opinion in this direction is that human beings always think about death in different ways and times and these thoughts may also show up in their tourism practices (Biran and Hyde, 2013). From psychological point of view, there is also feeling of excitement arising along with curiosity. While Podoshen (2013) suggests that seeking excitement may lead people to dark tourism sites, Simone-Charteris and Boyd (2010) mention excitement-related drive factors such as empathy with the victims, overcoming childlike fears, risk-taking (dicing with death) and celebration of crime or deviance (bloodlust). One should keep in mind that there may be also well-intentioned motivations such as education and commemoration besides curiosity and excitement seeking. For instance, Slade (2003) asserted that Australian and New Zealander visitors visiting Gallipoli experienced a heritage discovery and had no interest in death. However, as the researchers, we must note that we believe that such examples are very low in number. Such that Seaton (1996) defined dark tourism as "actions or events that may be morally deplorable or repugnant which have considerable appeal as an audience experience" (Buda and McIntosh, 2013). Supporting this view, Collins-Kreiner (2016) also suggested that dark tourism focuses on the death of important individuals and groups and is typically associated with violent death. Moreover, considering motivations such as education and commemoration at the forefront brings it closer to heritage tourism. However, the association of dark tourism with brutality also distances it from heritage tourism. (Podoshen, 2013).

One way to make inferences about motivation factors is to focus on how and in what way visits to dark tourism sites occur. According to the significant researchers in the dark tourism literature, dark site visits are part of a whole. While according to Seaton and Lennon (2004), dark site visits are

usually a short part of the whole travel and Stone (2012) argues that these sites are promoted as a package along with other attractions. Lennon and Foley (2000), on the other hand, define these visits as opportunist attempts, where people seize the opportunity instead of taking a well thought out decisions. In line with this view, we should note that not everyone visiting the dark sites are dark tourists (Farmaki, 2013). Another factor supporting the creation of demand on these sites is the media. According to Stone and Sharpley (2008), the modern society constantly consumes death, and the media plays a driving role by fueling the sense of curiosity. This driving role is carried out through news, TV series, movies and documentaries. In fact, this situation is neither new nor recently discovered. Goldstein (1998) argues that themes about violence have always appeared in the media since the beginning of media history. Lennon and Foley (2000) use the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy and the Titanic accident as the most relevant examples on the subject. On the other hand, thanks to media, the postmodern man is no longer just a consumer, but also a producer. While people use media to access information, they also produce information for others using the social media.

Finally, whether the demand on dark sites is feeding the supply or whether the supply is feeding the demand is a tough question to answer. As Sharpley (2005) also put it, despite this fact, there is one thing obvious, which is people visit these sites. In this context, this text aims to develop a proposal for alternative use of these places by revealing that people face pain and similar emotions and realities in these places, and by approaching these visits and, by extension, the supply from a opposition perspective. Within the scope of research, the discussion will be based on the Ulucanlar Prison Museum in Ankara, which is one of the rare dark tourism sites of Türkiye. Before being converted into a museum in 2011, Ulucanlar Prison housed prisoners from 1925 until 2006. The prison has a memorable place in the minds of Turkish people because of the characteristics of the prisoners as well as the torture and executions carried out there. In the prison where people with various ideologies were sentenced, 18 executions were carried out in total, the first being in 1926 and the last in 1982. Among the prisoners and those sentenced to death, there were people from all walks of life, including soldiers, political criminals, clergy, and artists. Books, compositions, films and TV series about Ulucanlar Prison keep both the place and the events alive in the memories of the people of Turkey.

### **Critical Approach to Demand and Supply**

Durkin (2003) argues that contemporary society insulates individuals from death, but such isolation leads people to desire insight into death and related activities. At this point, the commodification of death and suffering comes to the fore, and this is where the great extent of the criticism of dark tourism activities lies. The Body Worlds Exhibit, which is marketed with the slogan “original exhibition of real human bodies” and has been visited by millions of people till now, is a very relevant example here (Stone, 2009). We can talk about an unpleasant opportunism in visiting dark tourism sites. Such that, according to Stone and Sharpley (2008), people who visit places of death seek a kind of ontological trust and want to face the phenomenon of death from a safe distance. While these people are unable to inhibit their sense of curiosity, they display a hypocritical behavior by still preferring to stay at a safe distance.

Although death is distant to people, the fact that it is the inevitable end makes people to want to know more about it despite their fear. Within this context, the interest in the moment of death and places where death takes place can be also associated with “voyeurism”. Such that voyeurism expresses an impulse related to the desire to know (Buda and McIntosh, 2013). People fulfill their desire to know, which results in voyeurism, through the situation of others. Such that, thousands of people would gather together to watch death in the past in these death sites which are visited by

tourists today. In places of execution, such as Tyburn in London, there are specially built tribunes where people could have a better view of the execution scene. These gatherings were a harbinger of today's dark tourism, and Sharpley (2009) compares the people attracted to such a thing to charlatans watching other people's tragedies. Although it is very hard to make a general assumption or even though dark tourists cannot accept or confess this truth themselves, we can also consider them within the scope of the concept 'schadenfreude', which is a commonly used German word. Schadenfreude, describes taking pleasure in the pain of others. Although it is criticized in this text, Tiffany Watt Smith (2018), in her book on the subject, tried to explain that **this emotion is natural** and human by showing with examples that the expressions describing the emotion in question are available in different languages (Kurtuluş, 2021). The narrative of an Englishman caught up in a civil war in Iraq, which he visited for a short time due to business trip, clearly shows that the feeling of taking pleasure in watching the suffering of others can also manifest itself in a tourist.

If you wanted out [of Iraq during the war], you could get out, but I was having a great time and I felt very safe. The beginning of the war was cowboy country and there were no rules, so if you knew how to survive, it was a GREAT deal of fun. [ . . . ] I admit that the first missile that came in was strange, but by the time I left, I'd had over 400 attacks in the places I was living. I had a few close calls for sure (Buda and McIntosh, 2013).

Ordinary deaths are not considered within the scope of dark tourism. Generally, the death of important figures and mass killings are packaged as dark tourism supply. In the case of mass killings, it would be appropriate to make a case-by-case evaluation. For instance, while visiting a battlefield such as Gallipoli may have a commemorative purpose, in case of places such as prison camps and prisons, if the visitors do not have any kinship or sectarian or similar affinities with those people killed, the doors of critical approach can be opened. Today, regulations introduced by states allow the battlefields to be opened for tourism, prisons to be converted into museums, prison camps and genocide areas be designed as attraction points. With these initiatives, states gain economic and political benefits through people whose tragedies they could not prevent or perhaps whom they caused to suffer. Such that, right after the September 11 attacks against the World Trade Organization, Mayor Guiliani said, "people from all over the world want to come here" (Lisle, 2004). Thereupon, a viewing platform was created that was visited by millions of tourists and was once one of the ten main tourist attractions of New York (Kang et al., 2012). Therefore, besides the demand, we can also argue that dark tourism supply has "transgressive, morally suspect and pathological" (Seaton, 2009) connotations. At this point, the criticism of the commodification of the pain comes about. Dark tourism turns the dead into modern commodities and paves the way for the sale of tragic memories (Hartmann et al. 2018). Within this scope, Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) states that there is no appropriate way for presenting the death and Sather-Wagstaff (2011) points out that an inevitable process of trivialization may occur.

## Research Method

The most common research approaches on the topic of dark tourism involves qualitative methods. (Wight, 2005; Light, 2017). According to Light (2017), online platforms are useful for exploring the motivations and experiences of visitors. By agreeing with this view, for the purposes of this research, it was decided to conduct the research based on the comments about Ulucanlar prison museum available on Tripadvisor, which is a hotel-holiday interpretation platform. The data collection process covers the period between 17.03.2023 and 20.03.2023, and a total of 345 comments were transcribed into a Word document and included in the research. As a result of the evaluation of all comments, the themes of experiences, description of place and transfer of emotions were determined, and a descriptive analysis was carried out on these themes. It was aimed to base the

research interpretations with direct quotations included in accordance with the descriptive analysis (Çelik, 2022).

## FINDINGS

The theme of what happened includes how visitors perceive the events that took place in the prison and those who experienced these events. Description of place is the theme that includes opinions about the physical properties of the prison visited. The theme of transfer of emotions is built on the comments made by the visitors explaining their emotional states during the visit.

### 1. Experiences

Under the theme of experiences, persecution and execution are prominent. Considering the research area, this is a fairly ordinary result. Such that Ulucanlar Prison is a place where significant people in Turkish history were persecuted for various reasons and 18 prisoners were executed. Therefore, the fact that these events stand out within the scope of the research can be explained as the reflection of an obvious reality in the comments of people. Comment of a visitor who is thought to have witnessed those periods of political unrest in Türkiye, emphasizing persecutions, are as follows.

It is a place where people like Nazım Hikmet and Bülent Ecevit, who are well known by all of us, were persecuted at the end of misfortunate series of events and which reminds us of very bad memories which we should never witness again. It is a sad place.

Visitors over a certain age are familiar with the events took place in the prison because they witnessed them themselves, whereas young people know the events through the narratives of their elders or the media and books. No matter how, the comments show that most of the Turkish people are aware of the things that happened in here. Furthermore, the execution of people at very different extremes in terms of political ideology is reflected in comments years later in the context of common pain. A comment goes as follows:

It is a place where young people, old people, bureaucrats, poets, writers and people from all walks of life passed through or even were executed, leaving bad marks on history.

After the prison was turned into a museum, the names of the prisoners were written on the ward entries and on their bunk beds. A striking decision is the list of those executed. The list shows the visitors that there are much more than they already know. Moreover, seeing those who were executed in the form of a list can have a shocking effect on visitors. This is also reflected on the comments, as can be seen below:

It was only when I went there that I learned that Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnönü and Yusuf Aslan took their last breaths there. There are really no words to describe the sadness of seeing the names of the people executed there. It gives you goosebumps while walking around, but still it should be seen.

In their comments about what happened in the prison, the visitors also included expressions describing the meaning they attributed to the people who were persecuted and executed in Ulucanlar Prison and the emotional state they experienced. These are expressions such as self-sacrifice, longing and victim. These expressions point out the importance of these people who went through these adversities in reaching the peaceful period that we live in today. One of the comments titled "The picture of Türkiye's democracy journey" states as follows:

This prison, where those who suffered and paid the price in Türkiye's democracy journey were also imprisoned, must be seen. It should be explored by taking your time and digesting in and feeling everything. People of all ages should see this place.

## 2. Description of place

As expressed under the theme of experiences, in Ulucanlar Prison, persecutions and executions took place, and the prison is imprinted in the minds of Turkish people with these connotations. It is understood that this facility, which was initially built as a military warehouse in 1923, was converted into a prison in 1925 with a conscious decision to host persecution and execution. To put it more clearly, the appropriate ground has been prepared for what will happen in the space design. The existence of dozens of single-person dungeons justifies this view. It is also said as a legend that the inner ceiling of the most prominent ward was made in the shape of a coffin by a German architect, and it is widely accepted. One comment on this is as follows.

There is a fine detail to pay attention to while wandering around. The ceilings of the wards are built in the shape of a coffin. This was perhaps the lightest psychological pressure on the prisoners.

The significant expressions with regard to the description of place are dungeons, where torments, persecutions and psychological pressures took place, sound effects, wax statues and gallows, which is a tool used for execution. Dungeon shows itself as the most frequently repeated expression in all comments. One of the reasons for this may be that the impact level increases when dungeons whose existence is already known are seen directly and entered personally. It seems that the visitors thought of themselves in the dungeons with their feelings of empathy and left a deep place in their evaluations by engraving it in their minds. A comment along these lines follows.

As you tour the dungeons, you will deeply feel the souls and experiences of the past prisoners. You must definitely visit...

The prominence of the expression 'dungeon' stems from their physical existence as well as the fact that they were frequently used at that time and that personalities deemed valuable by a large part of the Turkish society were placed in these dungeons. The dungeons were used as a tool for psychological pressure on these figures. A relevant comment is presented below:

Those dark, gloomy dungeons where valuable statesman, writers, revolutionaries and thinkers did their time. Persecutions inflicted on these people to the extent that they became ashamed of their humanity. The dungeons where legendary people from different ideologies, from Nazım Hikmet to Bülent Ecevit, from Deniz Gezmiş to Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, were sentenced are places to be visited with both excitement and fear. The four walls which witnessed history. May God not put anyone in there.

It is possible to explain the prominence of the gallows expression with the shock effect caused by the realities of execution, death, etc. that it evokes as a tool for executing people. In addition to reminding visitors of the unpleasant days of the past and feelings associated with death, the exhibited gallows also had a strong psychological effect, as it was the tool by which the figures, they considered ideologically close to were killed. A relevant comment goes as follows:

The gallows, where executions were carried out, deal the final heavy blow to the hearts right before you leave...

One of the things that visitors are most impressed with in the spatial context are the echoing sound effects and wax statues during the visit. Comments have been made that the sound effects, including the shouts of the guards, the screams of those subjected to cruelty, and the compositions made by or



on behalf of the detainees, support the impressiveness of the museum. Wax statues seem to have a similar effect. The success of these elements in reflecting what was experienced in prison was conveyed in one comment as follows.

Everything is described so perfectly. When you go inside, everything that happened here in the past flashes before your eyes like a movie strip, as if you experienced it yourself.

The expressions of darkness, cold and gloom, which will be evaluated in the context of the description of the place, can be interpreted in two ways. The first of these is the direct description of the place by visitors. The second is the associations created in people by realities such as death, persecution and execution, or the adjectives that people attribute to these realities. Under this theme, the first option falls within our area of interest. Below is a comment in which the expressions in question are used for the purpose of describing the place.

The dark, cold, and damp smelling wards make you think about how the prisoners endured the difficult conditions there.

### 3. Transfer of emotions

The theme of transfer of emotions essentially serves the exactly one of the points which this research wants to emphasize. As discussed in this text, visitors were exposed to intense negative emotions at their own will. Such that many of the comments include visitors expressing their negative emotions. When evaluated within the scope of emotion transfer, it is seen that expressions of sadness, grief and pain are preferred very frequently. From this it can be inferred that people feel sad because they feel pain, or they feel pain because they feel sad. Although it is thought that which emotion comes to the fore and triggers another will vary on an individual basis, it requires advanced psychological inferences rather than the subject of this research. However, it is possible to explain the frequent use of the expression pain in the comments in two ways. People used this expression to convey both their own feelings and the experiences of the people who were imprisoned there. For instance, in the comment "The prison that witnessed the painful days of many of those people who shaped the Turkish art and politics", it is understood that it refers to the pains of the prisoners.

It is seen that the expressions "shudder" and "I got goosebumps" are frequently used in the comments. It is quite normal for them to experience shudder in emotional situations that they describe with expressions such as scary, annoying, or embarrassing. Ultimately, it can be said that those who are the relatives to those imprisoned in the prison, those who believe in the same ideology with the prisoners or those who personally witnessed those restless times of Türkiye had a shuddering feeling. Below is the comment of a visitor, who we assume was a witness of the period, stating that even the name of the place sounds "shuddering".

Even the name Ulucanlar Prison is enough to give goosebumps to those who know that period.

It can be thought that young visitors feel a sense of shuddery due to their encounter with the realities they know from films, books, documentaries and their elders. Such that countless books have been written and films and television series have been shot about the place and what happened. In particular, the 1989 movie "Don't let them shoot the kite (Turkish name: Uçurtmayı vurmasınlar)", inspired by what happened in prison, made a big impact. Moreover, this place is used as a plateau for prison television series and movies that have nothing to do with Ulucanlar prison and what happened there. Therefore, it can be easily stated that the effectiveness of TV series and films in destination choice is also valid for Ulucanlar Prison. In the context of the subject, a visitor's comment is as follows.

Before you go, I recommend you watch the movie Don't let them shoot the kite and read a few books by those who stayed there. When you enter, you feel that it contains many more stories.

Elements that help young people confirm the information they have obtained from various information sources, such as sound effects, wax statues, and prisoners' personal belongings, have increased the impressiveness of the museum for them. Naturally, this situation is reflected in what they feel. A relevant comment is presented below.

Ulucanlar Prison Museum is one of those rare places you should see. You get goosebumps when you enter the place. Neither lives were lived nor pain was suffered. And those sound effects... they reveal all those pain suffered. It is impossible not to be impressed.

Finally, it is necessary to open a separate parenthesis for the gallows, which evokes feelings of shudder and sadness in people. Explanations were made under the title of place description about the shocking effect of the gallows. However, what shocks the visitors even more is that the gallows is displayed in an iron cage. Even though this practice is done due to security concerns, it seems to give goosebumps and hurt the souls of many visitors. It is possible to find many comments in this direction. However, what is more important on this issue is how the victims and even those whose friends were executed feel. The following is a relevant comment from interviews conducted with victims for another research by us.

The only gallows imprisoned in the world is here. They put the gallows in the cage. They did this out of fear that their message of exhibit would be lost. They commoditized the gallows.

## DISCUSSION

Like Alcatraz, which is a flamboyant consumption place with its stories for the world (Strange and Kempa, 2003), Ulucanlar Prison is in a similar position for Turkey. For those who are over a certain age, visiting such a place means facing once again the facts and pains of yesterday which they used to follow up closely back in those days; and for the young people, it means making concrete what they heard from their elders or what they read and watched about the prison. Nevertheless, it is understood from the comments that the visit was emotionally difficult for both groups of visitors. The museum authorities have been very successful in recreating the events that took place there, especially through the arrangement of the space, and this has been reflected in the emotional state of the visitors. The emotions pain and sadness are prominent for visitors. Although we accept the success of the museum authorities, these feelings do not come as a surprise considering what the prisoners had to go through there or the deep impacts of those periods on the Turkish people. At this point, an important question comes to the fore. Why do these people try to re-live these pains rather than trying to forget them?

In line with the literature, it is possible to state that the reason why visitors want to consciously feel pain and sadness is because they want to get closer to death. According to Walter (2009), there are many studies stating that dark tourism sites act as a bridge between the living and the dead. Within the scope of this research, many visitors expressed their empathy with the prisoners. However, it would be a superficial approach to consider this situation as a simple act of empathy. These visits are seen as a pain-oriented archaeological work, because the visitors are either people who followed the events closely at that time or who know a lot of detail about what happened through all kinds of media. Still, they are after for more. By visiting the place, they try to bleed old wounds, relive the pain and make it more intense. The fact that people have this desire has also guided the decoration of dark tourism sites. In the Ulucanlar Prison Museum, wax statues, persecution sounds and the



gallows used in executions, along with the personal belongings of the prisoners, were placed in the concept.

Those who visit dark tourism sites satisfy their desire to get closer to death by putting others between themselves and death (Sharpley and Stone, 2009). Korstanje and Ivanov (2012) also state that people's being drawn to others' pains and disasters is one of the most striking aspects of the dark tourism. This fact about visitors can be considered as an opportunistic approach to feel better. Such that in the dark tourism literature, the motivation to take pleasure from the pain of others has been expressed to a considerable extent, and Rojek stated that this is a common motivation (Wight, 2005). Similarly, based on the ideas of George H. Mead, one of the pioneers of symbolic interactionism, Korstanje (2015) states that a person resorts to suffering of others to avoid their own potential suffering and to feel better. The pains witnessed by the visitors acts as an anesthetic against possible pains (Ashworth and Hartmann, 2005), causing passive desensitization (Kottler, 2011). What happened in Ulucanlar Prison was something nobody would want to go through. Even in the representation of what happened, visitors were exposed to negative emotions. From this perspective, it is not a far-fetched idea that visitors have the desire to feel content with their current situation by witnessing what happened there, even if only representatively, and by coming face to face with negative situations and emotions. As Dobbs (1999) put it, visits to closed prisons show people the importance of freedom (Strange and Kempa, 2003). Many comments in this direction have been reviewed within the scope of this research. An example is as follows: Visiting this prison, which witnessed history and where significant figures of Türkiye were once imprisoned, may be a good choice to learn a lesson from. God forbid.

In Lennon's words, dark tourism sites offer various narratives about tragic events (Hartmann et al., 2018). Ulucanlar Prison was also covered thoroughly in media. Movies and documentaries have been shot and books have been written on what happened in the prison and on the prisoners. As many researchers point out (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Stone, 2006; Stone and Sharpley, 2008), media coverage seems to support the visits to Ulucanlar Prison. Moreover, for today's postmodern consumer society, visiting dark sites and being able to say "I was there" has become a valid reason to reopen the old wounds (Walter, 2009). When we look at the photos added to the comments, we see many selfies. What could this be other than giving the message of "I was there"? According to Dann (2005), because of the media, society can no longer separate itself from violence and we are all in the dark to some extent.

Much as we have a critical approach to the motivations of visitors within the scope of this research and talk about an archeology of pain, there are also opinions that do not attach much importance to the motivation of these visits. While Walter (2009) states that it is not possible to explain the motivation of dark site visitors, Korstanje (2015) points out that in studies carried out to understand this motivation, people interviewed do not respond honestly or are not familiar with the background of their own behavior. Moreover, there are also those who state that the demand for these sites is coincidental and exceptional (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Seaton and Lennon, 2004; Walter, 2009; Stone, 2012). Ulucanlar Prison Museum ranks fifth on the 277-item list of things to do in Ankara on Tripadvisor. If we try to explain this situation by saying that Ankara is a city/business destination and there are limited places to visit in the city, the above view will be partially supported. That is, visits to Ulucanlar Prison can be seen as a mandatory option. One comment supporting this view is as follows: Although it is a somewhat melancholic and sad place, you can consider it as an alternative to take your guests in a city like Ankara, which has limited cultural activities compared to its population. On the other hand, as can be understood from the comments, a significant number of visitors have wanted to visit this place for a long time. This can be explained through the fact that the events hold a very important place in the public memory of the Turkish people, and Raine (2013) reached the

conclusion that dark tourists literally plan their visits in advance. In this direction, Ulucanlar Prison Museum is a significant dark tourism site for Türkiye, although it is not on an international scale. Furthermore, since individual perceptions are critical for visiting a dark site (Ashworth and Isaac, 2015; Robb, 2009), it is not so easy to classify many of the sites as universal dark sites. Additionally, the visit of a relative of a prisoner executed in Ulucanlar Prison and the visit of just someone should not be evaluated on the same scale. Ultimately, it seems more accurate to evaluate the situation of visiting a dark tourism site willingly and with real motivation, based on the characteristics of the site, the destination, and perceptions about the experiences. Of course, we must not ignore the motivations ranging from the fascination with death to a simple visit, explained by Sharpley (2009) within the scope of the dark tourism supply and demand matrix.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although the debate about how and why it was done continues, it is normal for people to develop the idea of benefiting from related areas as a result of their curiosity about death. The first option that comes to the competent authorities' mind is to open it to visitors with various regulations. However, it is necessary to think a little about the innocence of these attempts. In this context, criticism perspective is that dark tourism sites are created by current administrations to spread ideological messages. According to Horne (1984), controversial commemoration sites not only provide visitors with information about the past, but also serve as a means of conveying present-day discourses to visitors and are used to justify certain aspects of the present or beliefs about how things should change (Wight, 2009). Hollinshead (1999) also sees tourism as a means of production in which clever narratives of past events are presented and states that tourists are manipulated by political forces to become involved in political structures (Wight, 2005). While Stone (2013) commented that even the utopian ideals of the former Soviet Union are still on the agenda again thanks to Chernobyl, Light (2017) pointed out that dark sites are important for nation-building projects. Places such as Ulucanlar Prison, as silent witnesses of what regimes can do to people (Strange and Kempa, 2003), have the potential to make people become aware of the importance of avoiding such events (Friedrich & Johnston, 2013). Such that the death sentences -especially the political ones- executed in Ulucanlar Prison still remain as major wounds of today's Türkiye. Many visitors stated that the prison was exemplary; one such comment is as follows: It was as if the voices of the people who had stayed there were engraved on the walls. It must be seen to understand the importance of freedom. What stories must be there behind those cold walls.

In addition to being criticized for being politically designed to express a message (White and Frew 2013), dark tourism sites can also be criticized for their commercial dimension. Such that the events experienced in those places, including death, are turned into a product for tourism and are commodified. Reenactments of tragedies driven by economic expectations (Strange and Kempa, 2013) have become a common feature in the contemporary visitor economy (Stone, 2012). In Ulucanlar Prison Museum, wax statues, personal belongings and most notably the gallows are exhibited and sound effects imitating prisoner voices are used. Ultimately, people who could not be protected by political and legal decision makers and who perhaps faced consequences such as execution due to the decisions of these figures are turned into a commodity to make money on their experiences in sites such as the Ulucanlar Prison Museum. So who has consent in this? The people who sacrificed their lives or their relatives? Has anybody asked for the consents of their relatives before creating these sites? Are the relatives who are still alive happy about these visits? Have they visited it themselves? Basically, the addressees of these questions are the relatives, not the representatives of the political power who decided to open the place to visitors. Ultimately, however, death and collective suffering seem to be used to strengthen the pillars of capitalism (Korstanje, 2015). It should also be noted that even in supply-side criticisms that are believed to have

both ideological and economic purposes, the incentive of demand should not be ignored. The incidental or conscious demand for these places motivates the supply side, that is, the state authorities, to open these places to visitors.

We should also point out that there are exceptions in this research, in which we criticize the visit-oriented opening of places by governments and the motivation of visits. Such that there are places where motivations such as commemoration and education, which are considered dark tourism motivations by some researchers (Dunkley et al., 2011, Fonseca et al., 2016), come to the fore. The best examples from Türkiye are Atatürk's mausoleum Anıtkabir and Gallipoli National Park. In this context, dark tourism spectrum researches are prominent. One of the leading studies of these was conducted by Stone (2006), and the researcher divided dark tourism sites into six categories, from slightly dark to darkest. However, it can be stated that visitor perceptions are relegated to the background as dark tourism spectrum research focuses largely on the characteristics of the sites. Whereas perceptions are an important determinant in defining the place as a dark site and naming the visitors as dark tourists (Smith and Croy, 2005, Biran et al., 2011). Based on this idea, it is possible to say that the Ulucanlar Prison Museum is a very dark tourism site, as mentioned above. Such that visitors know very well what happens here.

It must be admitted that the majority of visitors whose motivations were criticized were quite satisfied with their visit. However, there are two visitors who reflected in their comments exactly what was intended to be explained in this research. Sharing these comments is valuable in terms of both understanding more clearly what the research is trying to put forward and showing that there are people -even if few- who share similar thoughts with the researchers. The first comment is as follows: "Many old prisons in our country are opened to visitors as museums. I wonder what people will gain from opening abandoned buildings, which are a disgrace of the past, full of suffering and pain, every corner wet with tears, cold as ice, to visitors as historical monuments. If we want to learn a lesson, we had better visit cemeteries and pray". The other comment is: "The irony is that even visiting our shameful museums costs money. We turn our shame into a museum and charge a fee for entrance." Following these views which have our full agreement, we would like to conclude this paper with proposal of an alternative use for dark tourism sites. These places which are full of pain can be turned into places that serve as "thought platform" rather than being converted into museums or other similar visiting areas. In these places, scientific meetings on the sufferings of the past can be held, researchers, direct interlocutors of the period and young people can be brought together in order to prevent similar sufferings from happening again, and books, films and documentaries prepared on the period can be brought together with those interested. It can be stated that the presence of a library consisting of written sources about the period in the place will give more promising results for the future compared to pumping fear with gallows and dungeons.

### **Etik Standart ile Uyumluluk**

**Çıkar Çatışması:** [TR] Yazar / yazarlar, kendileri ve / veya diğer üçüncü kişi ve kurumlarla çıkar çatışmasının olmadığını veya varsa bu çıkar çatışmasının nasıl oluştuğuna ve çözüleceğine ilişkin beyanlar ile yazar katkısı beyan formları makale süreç dosyalarına ıslak imzalı olarak eklenmiştir.

[EN] The author(s) declare that they do not have a conflict of interest with themselves and/or other third parties and institutions, or if so, how this conflict of interest arose and will be resolved, and author contribution declaration forms are added to the article process files with wet signatures.

**Etik Kurul İzni:** Bu çalışma için etik kurul iznine gerek yoktur. Buna ilişkin ıslak imzalı onam formu, makale süreç dosyasına eklenmiştir.

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