

Dark Events of the Istrian Countryside: An Electronic Media Perspective

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This pilot research illuminates the connection and reflection of past traumatic events in contemporary dark events. The purpose of the research is to provide a basic understanding of what dark events and dark tourism mean in a specific regional environment – the countryside of the trans-border region of Istria. Consequently, the media-constructed social reality related to dark events was identified with the help of a quantitative content analysis; cross tabulation and descriptive analyses were employed to resolve three research questions. It was found that WWI-related memorial services dominate in all areas of the Istrian countryside; dark events, according to media, mostly occurred at memorials or internment sites; most of them were in small Istrian towns. Flower ceremonies and cultural programmes are essential elements of Istrian dark events in all areas. However, there is no statistically significant association between event type and different rural areas. Consequently, we are now (at least basically) familiar with current Istrian dark events, which offer an ideal basis for the development of dark tourism in the most developed tourist region of Slovenia and Croatia.

Keywords: dark events, dark tourism, thematic tourism, Istrian history, countryside, media

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Introduction

Contemporary tourists seek tailored tourist experiences with different immaterial qualities as a reaction to post-modern urban life (Robinson & Novelli, 2005; Šuligoj, 2018, p. 19; Trauer, 2006; Wong & Cheung, 1999). Consumers as tourists can thus encounter differentiated thematic tourism products as a reaction to tourist demand or as products which, in contrast, create demand (Douglas, Douglas, & Derrett, 2001; Kruja & Gjyzezi, 2011; Štetić, Šimičević, & Ćurčić, 2013; Trauer, 2006) and, consequently, 365-day tourism destinations.

It is worth mentioning that many terms are used in thematic tourism theory: ‘niche tourism’ (Robinson & Novelli, 2005), ‘selective forms of tourism’ (Štetić et al., 2013) or ‘special interest tourism’ (Douglas et al.,

2001). ‘Special interest tourism,’ as the predecessor of ‘niche tourism,’ which was conceptualised during the 1980s (Hall & Weiler, 1992) and is the complete opposite of mass tourism (Douglas et al., 2001, p. 2; Hall & Weiler, 1992) accelerated in the second half of the 20th century. It is part of the interdisciplinary system of the 21st century, which encompasses all elements of supply and demand in the broadest sense, including ‘political, economical, ecological, technological, and socio-economical and socio-cultural concerns, from the local to the global level’ (Trauer, 2006, p. 185).

Consequently, ‘special interest tourism’ can be related to the so-called *homo turisticus*, who is seeking experiential dimensions based on numerous possibilities of tourist services (Šuran, 2016, p. 69) and is aimed at increasing consumption. Tourists, among

other things, also look for interesting/exciting memorial sites with an (extreme) traumatic background that shapes contemporary societies only in a certain geographical area or wider on the international level, e.g., sites related to the Holocaust or other genocides and criminal acts. Interestingly, tourists, however, do not necessarily understand such sites or events (Kennell, Šuligoj, & Lesjak, 2018, p. 948). This is even more important if we consider the fact that visiting such sites is not necessarily understood, even among local residents as part of tourism, which Šuligoj (2016; 2017) found in his investigation among young residents in Croatia. However, many dark events and dark tourism sites were and still are interesting for the media. The media construct social reality through the explanation and interpretation of information (Nišić & Plavšić, 2014). Moreover, the media can generate a culturally distributed collective memory (Pavlaković & Perak, 2017, p. 301), and be the 'site of memory' (Mustapić & Balabanić, 2018, p. 439), 'the media plays a huge role when it comes to dark tourism as it contributes to the popularization of sites,' 'this could result in overcommercialisation of dark tourism sites and these sites becoming a spectacle' (Simone-Charteris, Kirkpatrick, & McLaughlin, 2018, p. 73).

This pilot research illuminates the connection and reflection of past traumatic events in contemporary memorial practices with some perceived tourist characteristics (or at least potentials for tourism development). The research aims to add a new dimension to social studies and humanities in providing a pilot analysis of history-centric memorial practices and dark tourism. More specifically, the purpose of the research is to provide a basic understanding of what dark events and dark tourism mean in a specific regional environment: the countryside of the trans-border region of Istria (Slovenian and Croatian part). A dark event, as a construct used in this research, concurrently reflects the memorial and dark tourism dimension and derives from the dark event typology of Frost and Laing (2013, pp. 36–42) and Kennell et al. (2018, p. 948).

According to the research purposes and after the finished state-of-the-art (see chapters 'Brief Theoretical Background: Dark Events and Dark Tourism' and 'Brief Historical Background: Traumatic 20th Century

in Istria'), we want to identify the media-constructed social reality related to dark events as a significant part of contemporary social life (which includes tourism) in Istria. In addition, the second objective is to identify contemporary types, time components, and locations where public history-centric dark (memorial) events take place in the Istrian countryside. Consequently, a content analysis as a useful methodological approach in social sciences, where its growing 'popularity' is evidenced in several top quality scientific publications (Neuendorf, 2017, p. xv, 4), was employed. Specifically, we refer to a quantitative content analysis, which is 'analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner' (Bryman, 2012, p. 290).

The coding unit was an article as an independent electronic media entity (e-newspaper). Each article was coded according to predetermined codes (indicators); see Tables 2 and 4. Codes represented categorical variables with no multiple responses allowed. The coding process was done entirely by one researcher. All quantitative methods (cross tabulation and descriptive analyses) were employed using SPSS Statistics 24.0.

Quantitative content analysis is most efficient when dealing with specific research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 291; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005, pp. 43–45), which led us to formulate the following research questions:

- RQ1 *What are the main characteristics of Istrian dark events that can be defined on a media basis?*
- RQ2 *Are dark events of different types associated with areas?*
- RQ3 *When do Istrian dark events occur or when do the media reports on them?*

This research builds on some of the previous research related to Istrian/Upper Adriatic memory, e.g., Ballinger (2002), D'Alessio (2012), Hrobat Virloget (2015), Hrobat Virloget and Čebon Lipovec (2017), or past commemorative practices, e.g., Klabjan (2010) and Cattunar (2012), including those focused on the legacy of Isonzo/Soča front, e.g., Kavrečič (2017), Toderò (2010) as well as to some other contemporary studies, e.g., Gosar, Koderman and Rodela (2015).

Brief Theoretical Background:

Dark Events and Dark Tourism

Tragic and morbid topics, in general, constitute a relevant reason for travel, which makes this activity a tourist activity within so-called dark tourism. Tarlow (2005, p. 48) described dark tourism as 'visitations to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continue to impact our lives,' while Preece and Price (2005, p. 192) defined it as 'travel to sites associated with death, disaster, acts of violence, tragedy, scenes of death and crimes against humanity.' However, the first definitions of Foley and Lennon (1996, p. 198) define it as 'the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites,' or as 'the visitation to any site associated with death, disaster and tragedy in the twentieth century for remembrance, education or entertainment' (1997, p. 155), or as 'tourism associated with sites of death, disaster, and depravity' (Lennon & Foley, 1999, p. 46). Very relevant and interesting are also two of Stone's definitions: dark tourism is 'the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre' (2006, p. 146) and later 'dark tourism is concerned with encountering spaces of death or calamity that have political or historical significance, and that continue to impact upon the living' Stone (2016, p. 23). All these definitions (and some others, e.g., Ashworth, 2008, p. 234; Robb, 2009, p. 51) indicate the breadth of the research area, as well as its essence, which is human death and suffering. Foundational monograph of Lennon and Foley entitled *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (Lennon & Foley, 2000) conceptualised dark tourism as a subset of cultural tourism and shifted it conceptually from heritage tourism (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Kravanja, 2018).

The term 'dark tourism' is not the only one to define the tourism-death connection. The following terms are also related to the connection between tourism and death, which are not fully synonyms: holidays in hell (O'Rourke, 1988), thanatourism (Seaton, 1996, p. 240), morbid tourism and an attraction-focused artificial morbidity-related tourism (Blom, 2000), sombre tourism (Butcher, 2003; Hughes, 2008), fright tourism (Bristow & Newman, 2005), atrocity tourism (Ash-

worth & Hartmann, 2005), grief tourism (Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2007), conflict heritage tourism (Mansfeld & Korman, 2015), genocide tourism (R. A. Dunkley et al., 2007), trauma tourism (Clark, 2006), war-related tourism (Bigley, Lee, Chon, & Yoon, 2010), post-war tourism (Wise, 2011), war tourism (Keyes, 2012), warfare tourism (Šuligoj, 2016; 2017), battle-field tourism (Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2011; Ryan, 2007), tourism of memory (Hertzog, 2012), or memorable tourism (Drvenkar, Banožić, & Živić, 2015; Kim, 2013), favela tourism, (Robb, 2009), atomic or nuclear tourism (Freeman, 2014; Gusterson, 2004) and dystopian dark tourism (Podoshen, Venkatesh, Wallin, Andrzejewski, & Jin, 2015). The term 'dark tourism' is the most frequently searched tourism-related keyword in the developed countries of North America, Europe, and Australia (see <https://trends.google.com>).

Kennell et al. (2018), in contrast, focused only on so-called dark events, which are not exclusively related to the dark tourism context. They adopted Frost and Laing's (2013, pp. 36–42) typology and listed: (a) dark exhibitions, (b) dark re-enactments, e.g., annual re-enactment of the battles, (c) national days of mourning or remembrance, (d) memorial services, opening of memorials, concerts, performances, (e) significant anniversaries, e.g., centenaries, (f) parades, marches, processions, (g) festivals. Moreover, Getz's (2008, p. 404), Frost and Laing's (2013, pp. 36–42), and Kennell et al.'s (2018, pp. 947–949) descriptions of commemorative events as one kind of cultural celebrations related to the traumatic heritage/past as well as to the typology of the related events were also relevant/interesting for this research. Such events are usually designed to remember victims and historical tragic events and are carried out close to the memorial (Rojek, 1994) or dark tourism sites; consequently, we link them directly to the dark tourism. Dark tourism sites, which are also event venues, are according to Seaton (1996) (a) sites of public executions, (b) sites of individual or mass deaths: areas of former battlefields, death camps and sites of genocide and similar, (c) memorials or internment sites, (d) sites/areas with the purpose of viewing evidence of death or symbolic representations of it and (e) places or events of re-enactments or simulation of

death. However, in general, events at these sites 'are often highly significant occasions for local communities and might not be understood by tourists' (Kennell et al., 2018, p. 948). In the Istrian case, contemporary memorial and dark tourism practices have not been investigated, and we also do not know how much they are present in the (regional) media.

Brief Historical Background: Traumatic 20th Century in Istria

After the ruin of the Venetian Republic, and finally with the Congress in Vienna (1815), the Istrian peninsula was annexed to the Habsburg Empire. In 1853, Vienna declared Pula to be the empire's principal military port, which changed the city from an unimportant and inconsequently fishing village to one of Europe's more prominent naval bases; none of the following regimes accomplished as much in developing the city (Duda, 2000; Marsetič, 2013, pp. 483, 484). All this development led to an intense militarisation as well as the systematic urban planning and economic development of Pula and the entire southern Istrian peninsula (Marsetič, 2013). In terms of culture and entertainment, Pula was also extremely advanced; see Kalčić (2016) and Duda (2000). However, Pula was differed from the rest of the region by presence of the army, cultural abundance, and economic prosperity, while the people of rural areas lived in poverty; see Knez (2010) and Marsetič (2014). The clash with the Kingdom of Italy in 1915 (WWI) halted the development of the city/region.

Shortly before the war, in the summer of 1914, a civil steamboat, *Baron Gautsch*, sank south of Rovinj after entering the minefield of the Austro-Hungarian Navy, which was intended to defend the Imperial Navy from the sea (Spirito, 2002). During the WWI, Pula was bombed 41 times by Italian military aviators (Mandić, 2006, pp. 210–212), while other areas of the peninsula were not endangered/damaged. Residents of Istria, especially in 1917, suffered from hunger, which combined with diseases and dangerous living conditions led to emigration/evacuation (Herman Kaurić, 2015, p. 14). According to the Treaty of Rapallo signed on 12 November 1920, almost all territory of the former Austrian Littoral, including Istria, was annexed to the

Kingdom of Italy (Lipušček, 2012; Šuligoj, 2015a). A great socio-economic crisis in the Pula and the whole peninsula (Marsetič, 2006b; 2006a), which, together with the state fascist terror, led to an increased emigration of the Slavic population and Italian antifascists (Dukovski, 2010; Hrobat Virloget & Čebren Lipovec, 2017, p. 47; Violante, 2009, p. 98); Slavic rebels as well as native local Italians of different political ideologies were persecuted by the fascists due to their common work in an antifascist coalition movement (Ashbrook, 2006; Violante, 2009). Moreover, systematic 'ethnic refinement' of the population was upgraded by the organised immigration of the 'true Italians' from other parts of the kingdom, which additionally influenced the change in the ethnic structure in Istria.

Resistance from the beginning of World War Two onwards was escalated and transformed into a severe armed conflict with the fascist Italian army. After the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, Istria became part of a German Province under the name of the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral (Ferenc, 1966). The tragedy of the occupation was also marked by the deportation of more than 20,000 Istrians to the Nazi-fascist concentration camps, from which more than 5,000 never returned; 5,000 Istrian Partisan fighters did not survive WWII (Jokić & Čudov, 1986, p. 417). The liberation of the Istrian peninsula was a military action of the anti-fascist resistance movement led by the Yugoslav Partisans (see Beltram, 2017, and Dukovski, 2001; 2011), which Istrians of Italian origin also were involved.

After WWII, pro-Italian forces launched a campaign to blame Tito and his followers for the violence and encouraged the Istrian Italians (both native to the area and those that had immigrated) towards emigration (Altin & Badurina, 2017; Dukovski, 2010; Kosmač, 2018). Mass executions of (former) fascists and their followers, capitalists, possessors, and Roman Catholic priests by Tito's army, mostly known as *foibe* (Altin & Badurina, 2017; D'Alessio, 2012; Radošević, 2010) (from the Italian word *in foibare* means throwing into the abyss) caused additional upheaval.¹ The victims

¹ Chasms and *foibe* are characteristic for the all Upper Adriatic karst landscape.

of the *foibe* and the socialist revolution were systematically denied up to the democratic changes of the 1990s.

On the international level, there were considerable disagreements in determining the Italian-Yugoslav state border (Kosmač, 2018). With the Paris Peace Treaties signed in 1947, Italy had to cede most of the Istrian peninsula to Yugoslavia; north of the River Mirna, including the province of Trieste, became the so-called Free Territory of Trieste (Dukovski, 2010; Kosmač, 2018; Rogoznica, 2011; Tunjić, 2004; Violante, 2009). The border issue with Italy was resolved no earlier than in 1954 and finally confirmed with the Treaty of Osimo (1975): the whole Istrian peninsula South of Muggia (Milje), was officially annexed to Yugoslavia (Tunjić, 2004). Istria in the (Second) Yugoslavia was divided between the two (socialist) republics, Slovenia and Croatia. The new political regime and the systematic immigration of Slavic people from other Yugoslav republics, significantly influenced the socio-economic development of the region (see Purini, 2012; Hrobat Virloget; and Šarić, 2015). Istria faced an imbalanced development of coastal and some other towns/cities (tourist and industrial centres) and the rural interior of the region. This resulted in the economic stagnation and depopulation of central Istria, where agriculture prevailed.

The last military conflict in the 20th century in Europe was the Yugoslav/Balkan conflict. The Croatian homeland war in Istria was not as intense and bloody as in some other areas. The Croatian part of Istria was 'liberated' by the end of 1991 without a serious direct military clash (Majušević, 2012, p. 446). The Slovenian ten-day war did not reach the scale of the Croatian one. However, there were three brief military confrontations of the Slovenian police and Territorial defence forces with the Yugoslav People's Army in the Istrian countryside: in the hamlet of Moretini, at the (then) Bivje intersection, and at the Škofije international border-crossing. These three confrontations resulted in five wounded and three dead Yugoslav People's Army soldiers (Filipčič, 2011, pp. 22, 23).

Istria, which was the leading tourist region as early as in the period of post-WWII Yugoslavia (Blažević, 1984, p. 5), has been maintaining status and still has

highly recognisable tourism products on the international level (e.g., sports events, cultural events, many secular and sacral buildings from the Venetian, Austrian and Italian periods, Tito's and other heritage on the Brijuni Islands, traditional gastronomy, the former *Parenzana* railroad track, and similar), what is, in terms of development from the 19th century onwards, described by Blažević (1984; 1987) and Šuligoj (2015b).² Concurrently, because of its geostrategic position, the multi-ethnic Istria was an area of constant conflict and an area with reinforced military presence. Today, in contrast, it is a recognisable Upper Adriatic area of peace, collaboration and coexistence, although, according to Cocco (2010), it remains deeply subjected to Central European, Roman and Balkan influences. It seems that the French slogan *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, is also alive in Istria in the late 20th century and especially at the beginning of the 21st century, although not without problems. Traumatic historical events of the 20th century with frequent changes in power affected Istria's residents in urban and rural areas. Consequently, this territory evolved over years to become the South-European hotspot. This creates different public memorial practices and different memorial sites, which offer typical examples, which are nowadays linked also to dark tourism. They are scattered around Istrian (coastal) cities as well as in the countryside, which is generally less overloaded with tourism, but traumatic situations (clashes, executions, torture, etc.) were taking place there as well. This offers new development opportunities for rural tourism. In terms of dark tourism, this has not been studied.

Contemporary Dark Events in the Istrian Countryside

After WWI, WWII, and after all totalitarian regimes, the events, heroes and victims of the Yugoslav/Balkan conflict in the 1990s are commemorated in Istria. As mentioned before, Istrian memorial and dark tourism practices have not been investigated, and we also do

² The roots of modern development date back to the Habsburg period; more can be found in Kavrečič (2009; 2011; 2015) or Baskar (2010).

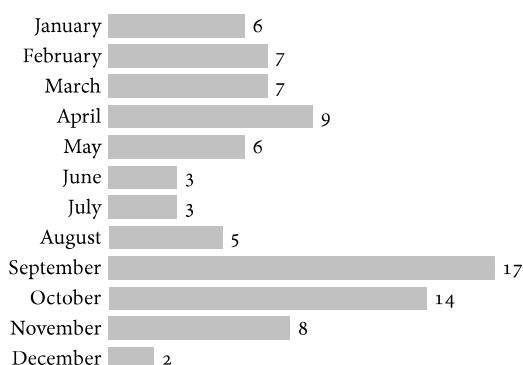


Figure 1 Dark Events Distribution by Months

not know how much they are present in the (regional) media. Thus, three leading regional newspapers were selected: *Primorske novice* in Slovenian, *Glas Istre* in Croatian, and *La voce del popolo* in the Italian language (all available in printed and electronic versions). They were selected on the basis of preliminary short informal interviews with eleven people of different ages in Slovenian and ten in Croatian Istria.

Regional media are more familiar with the local mentalities and historical moments than others are. All available articles from 1 February 2016 to 30 November 2018 were included in the analyses, which totals 126 articles. All articles were particularly focused on history-centric dark events; commemorations of 1 November³ or scientific events were not included. Basic characteristics of analysed articles are presented in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the time distribution of articles on dark events in the Istrian countryside. As we can see, they were unevenly dispersed throughout the year; from this point of view, they are not tourist-centric. Articles on off-summer season events (April, September, October and November) are particularly interesting.⁴ This is coherent with the idea of 365-days tourism destinations, if dark events link with the dark tourism context, as well as to thematic tourism theory. This finding provides an answer to RQ3.

In the following phase, all selected articles were

³ Known as All Saints' Day, All Hallows' Day or the Day of the Dead.

⁴ It should be noted that articles in electronic media are published on the day of event, or a day or two later.

Table 1 Characteristic of Analysed Articles

Category	Item	f	%
(Q1) Newspaper	Glas Istre	82	65
	La voce del popolo	30	24
	Primorske novice	14	11
(Q5) Report type	Short message	30	24
	A shortened version of the printed report	5	4
	Full text	91	72
(Q6) Number of photos	No photos	4	3
	One photo	92	73
	More than one photos	30	24
(Q7) What kind of photos?	Only old/historical	3	2
	Only new photos	118	94
	Both new and historical	1	1

coded (see introductory chapter) and then analysed. Table 2, which is result of cross-tabulation (χ^2 Test of Independence) analysis with Fisher exact test ($FI(x)$), shows that history-centric dark events (according to regional media) mainly occurred in rural areas ($\Sigma = 69\%$), if small old Istrian towns can also be classified as rural areas. Moreover, memorial services as an event type significantly dominate in all types of areas, for which dark exhibitions should also be mentioned as the second-largest type of event in Istrian media. Surprisingly, there are a small number of articles on events in the non-settlement area, although the main military clashes (and thus casualties) usually take place there; the already mentioned *foibe* are also located there; villages represent the second smallest group of event venues. Nevertheless, according to results in Table 3, based on media articles there is not enough evidence to suggest an association between event type and area: $FI(x) = 7.947$ and exact $p = 0.479$ (if $p \leq 0.05$ it is significant). This empirical finding gave us an answer to RQ2.

After the completion of the first analysis, a simple cross tabulation was employed for additional description of dark events in the Istrian countryside. As a result, Table 4 shows the main characteristics of dark events in the Istrian countryside. It is necessary to take

Table 2 Articles on Type of Area in Relation to Events Type

Event type	Item	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Dark exhibition	Count	4	5	3	0	12
	Percentage within event type	33	42	25	0	100
	Percentage within area	10	12	8	0	10
	Percentage of total	3	4	2	0	10
National day of Mourning or Remembrance	Count	5	5	1	0	11
	Percentage within event type	46	46	9	0	100
	Percentage within area	13	12	3	0	9
	Percentage of total	4	4	1	0	9
Memorial service	Count	27	30	32	9	98
	Percentage within event type	28	31	33	9	100
	Percentage within area	69	71	89	100	78
	Percentage of total	21	24	25	7	78
Significant anniversary	Count	3	2	0	0	5
	Percentage within event type	60	40	0	0	100
	Percentage within area	8	5	0	0	4
	Percentage of total	2	2	0	0	4
Total	Count	39	42	36	9	126
	Percentage within event type	31	33	29	7	100
	Percentage within area	100	100	100	100	100
	Percentage of total	31	33	29	7	100

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) city, (2) town, (3) village, (4) non-settlement area, (5) total.

Table 3 Statistical Significance

Item	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.604*	9	0.383	0.378
Likelihood Ratio	13.052	9	0.160	0.222
Fisher's Exact Test	7.947			0.479
Linear-by-Linear Assoc.	0.843**	1	0.359	0.389
No. of Valid Cases	126			

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) value, (2) degrees of freedom, (3) asymptotic significance (2-sided), (4) exact significance (2-sided).

into account once again that the following findings, as well as previous ones, rely on media-constructed reality in Istria.

Of the analysed regional electronic media arti-

cles, 44 report that dark events occurred at memorials or internment sites and 19 at sites of individual or mass deaths. Most of them were in towns. Events were history-centric with WWII as a background significantly dominating in all areas. It should be taken into consideration that WWII still represents the most extensive and traumatic armed conflict of the 20th century in Istria; events that relate to the victims of fascist terror could be added as well. Flower ceremonies, as a significant component of the programme, were pointed out in 54 articles, which clearly highlights their importance. Similarly, a speech, as the simplest event programme element, is reported in 43 articles, while more varied cultural programmes were found in 36 articles. They were the most frequent programme type in villages and towns where events occurred; see Table 4. These provide an answer to RQ1.

Table 4 Characteristics of Dark Events in the Istrian Countryside

Event type	Item		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Site category	Site of individual or mass deaths	Count	3	12	4	19
		Percentage	16	63	21	100
	Memorials or internment site	Count	22	18	4	44
		Percentage	50	41	9	100
	Site/area with the purpose of viewing evidence of death or symbolic representations of it	Count	3	1	0	4
		Percentage	75	25	0	100
Conflict	wwI	Count	3	4	1	8
		Percentage	38	50	12	100
	Fascist terror	Count	2	5	0	7
		Percentage	29	7	0	100
	wwII	Count	21	23	7	51
		Percentage	41	45	41	100
	Socialist revolution and Italian exodus	Count	5	1	0	6
		Percentage	83	17	0	100
	Independence war in the 1990s	Count	8	2	1	11
		Percentage	73	18	9	100
	Other	Count	3	1	0	4
		Percentage	75	25	0	100
Cultural programme	Just a speech	Count	25	14	4	43
		Percentage	58	32	9	100
	Varied cultural programme	Count	11	17	3	31
		Percentage	35	55	10	100
	Not specified*	Count	6	5	2	13
		Percentage	46	38	15	100
Flower ceremony	Yes	Count	23	24	7	54
		Percentage	43	44	13	100
	No	Count	8	3	0	11
		Percentage	73	27	0	100
	Not specified*	Count	11	9	2	22
		Percentage	50	41	9	100

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) city, (2) village, (3) non-settlement area, (4) total. * It was not clearly specified by the journalist.

Conclusion

Dark tourism studies focus on the relationships between still-living generations of visitors and sites of traumatic death. At these sites, dark events with simple or varied programmes occur today, which can be

a special type of thematic tourism. Consequently, according to the purposes of this research (i.e., to provide a basic understanding of what dark events and dark tourism mean in a specific regional environment) dark tourism and the Istrian history in the 20th century

were initially briefly described. On this basis, three research questions were defined. Six indicators (time distribution, event type, site category, conflict, cultural programme and flower ceremony) served as robust directions for the empirical analysis. It was determined that WWII-related memorial services are the dominating ones in all areas of Istrian countryside; dark events, according to media, mostly occurred at memorials or internment sites; most of them were in towns. Flower ceremonies and cultural programme are significant elements of Istrian dark events in all areas. However, there is no statistically significant association between event type and different rural areas, which also applies when the urban environment is considered. These results, which reflect the media-constructed social reality related to dark events, gave provide to all research questions (RQ1–RQ3).

The value of this pilot research is that different Istrian history-centric dark events reported in regional electronic media were identified and then described, which represents an original perspective in dark tourism studies (especially in the post-Yugoslav states). Consequently, we are now (at least basically) familiar with the present Istrian dark events, which offer an ideal base for the development of dark tourism in the most developed tourist region of Slovenia and Croatia.

However, this research has also certain limitations and weaknesses that need to be mentioned. First, the pilot research is done on the basis of electronic media, which include only limited indicators/characteristics, which means that this is not a comprehensive analysis. Second, dealing with categorical variables limits statistical analyses. Hence, the number of analysed research units can affect the results; furthermore, this analysis relies on the population. However, there was a possibility that some articles could be unintentionally overlooked. Nevertheless, there should not be a significant discrepancy between the real and the analysed number of articles.

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