

# THE NORTHEASTERN PART OF ALBANIA AS PART OF DARK TOURISM OFFER

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## **Abstract**

Dark tourism is a new form of tourism that can be widely applied in our country. This type of tourism has as its object the visit to destinations that carry great human drama, generally destinations related to death, fear and suffering. In scientific researches it is treated as part of cultural tourism.

Throughout the tumultuous history of the Albanian state we find many moments, which encourage everyone, to show, educate, transmit, gain historical knowledge and finally raise awareness, despite the fact that these moments evoke sadness, grief and even for a target group as young people, or foreigners, arouse curiosity. What are these tourist destinations? How are they offered? What are some exploration opportunities and how is their diversity expressed? These are some of the questions addressed in the study, which are answered by being concretized in natural northeastern region of Albania, in Kukes and its surroundings. It will assess the perceptions that residents of Kukes have the possibility of developing this tourist movement within the primary tourist offers of the northeastern part of Albania.

The methodology used for the realization of the paper is distinguished as: descriptive which describes the primary tourist observed offer; doing observations on the written literature in this the thematic; statistical analysis by statistically identifying perceptions on dark tourism in the sampled group. The study includes the analysis of a questionnaire which was attended by a total of 60 respondents asked mainly about their definition of this type of tourist movement, its identification in this region and the definition of tourist attractions regarded to dark tourism.

**Keywords:** Kukes, destinations, pyramids, underground, perception, cross border

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## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1. Dark tourism meaning and its importance*

Dark tourism is a new type of tourism developed in the form of a historical memory. There are different definitions of dark tourism, Lennon and Foley cited by Stainton (2020) define “Dark tourism as a presentation of inhuman action, where it is interpreted for visitors: Light (2017) states: “Dark tourism tends to be used as an umbrella term for any form of tourism that is somehow related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy or crime. As originally formulated, it is a phenomenon rooted in the circumstances of the late twentieth century”. "Dark Tourism" is the act of travel and visitation to sites, attractions, and exhibitions that have real or recreated death, suffering or the seemingly macabre as a main theme. Tourist visits to former battlefields, slavery-heritage attractions, prisons, cemeteries, particular museum exhibitions, Holocaust sites, or to disaster

locations all constitute the broad realm of 'Dark Tourism'. (Millán, Rojas and García, 2019, Stone, 2014).

There is a lot of discussion about dark tourism and the effects it brings to tourists. However, this form of tourism seems to be very well profiled in the context of cultural tourism and new tourism trends. In fact, dark tourism has an educational purpose and does not aim to encourage extreme actions, such as death. Every tourist who visits these places will be acquainted with the history, causes and factors why inhuman acts took place in that place. On the other hand the tourist becomes aware of the actions that are good or bad, right or wrong in the development of human society. Çakar, (2020) expresses in his study as: "While the sadness expressed by the participants was primarily seen as a negative emotional experience, learning about and understanding their history and developing their nation-state consciousness and cultural identity were seen as positive experiences".

Dark tourism is a form of telling the tragic events of history in another way, perhaps easier to be perceived by the visitor. The visitor of dark tourism is not a tourist anyway, but passionate about various historical events, wars, political developments which can certainly be accompanied by loss of life.

Fonseca, Seabra and Silva (2016) states that there are different types of dark tourism such as: dark tourism exhibitions, cemetery tourism, tourism in former conflict zones, concentration camps, battlefield tourism etc.

The history of the creation of the Albanian state is tumultuous and full of moments and events that raise questions: "Why did they happen? Why are there recurring events? What are its forms? Albania's 50-year dictatorial regime has left "a rich legacy" for this type of tourism.

The northeastern region of Albania is the region taken in the study, especially the area of Kukes and surrounding environment. It is located near the cross-border area with the former Yugoslavia, now with the states of Kosovo and Northern Macedonia. According to Light, (2017) "In the philosophy of the communist regime, it is stressed that the cross-border police should protect Albania from the imaginary enemy, an enemy who never came, but who in fact it became the hell of anyone who pretended to cross the border for a better life". These areas in Albania had a strategic importance at that time, they carried a heavy shadow, but also a terrifying history.

### *1.2. Opportunities for the development of dark tourism in the northeastern region, Kukes area*

Dark tourism in the Kukes region is a story beyond the imagination for today's youth, a memory of history and memory for the victims of that time, interesting for tourists. Dark tourism is seen as an opportunity for the Kukes region, where located at a crossroads between Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro tourists can return to enjoy not only the natural beauties of the region, but also those cultural ones which are part of dark tourism. White and Frew, (2013) emphasized that "The way this type of tourism will be offered within the tourist package of the region will affect the duration of the tourist stay in the region". This impacts into employment opportunities, increased income, improved social life, etc. Why is dark tourism evident in this region?

The geographical position as a cross border area, the Kukes region gave it a special status and together with it a great weight in the security of the country in the years of dictatorial regime. In

these conditions, this northeastern part of Albania contains elements that meet the criteria of dark tourism attractions. Some of them are as follow:

a) *Barbed wire clone* - Cami (2018) showed that “The clone was about 100-200 meters away from the state border line, or depending on the terrain. The border area had its own specifics. The land was cultivated to about 2.5 meters, where there was a path for the policy border unit and a birch fence was placed. Here were placed the pyramids on both sides of the border. The distance between the two pyramids facing each other was called the neutral zone and was inviolable”. The tillage was intended to facilitate the identification of traces of people attempting to flee the country. Wooden poles were placed there, staggered in a straight line according to the terrain and at equal distances from each other. Barbed wire was mounted on the poles and on them the thread that provided the connection (telephone line) with the border point. In the soft belt, about 1 meter wide, the ground was compact, so it was the road where the border unit crossed with the border dog, scrutinizing every sign of suspicion. Here were placed the pyramids on both sides of the border.

b) *Pyramids*. Pyramids are concrete blocks in the shape of a pyramid, 70 cm above the ground, located in the neutral zone of the border through the agreement between the two states. There were written the names of the respective states on the sides to which it belonged on each pyramids. The pyramids served as border tracks and belong to both states. The pyramids have been closely associated with the clone.

c) *The underground city of Kukës*. The underground city of Kukes is a unique city. It is clear evidence of the philosophy of the time, it was built. There are two main reasons for curiosity to visit it:

- the secrecy of its construction
- the analogy it has with the city on the surface.

The underground city represents one of the largest shelters in the region, fortified to withstand atomic explosions. The underground city has a depth of 30 meters below the existing one. For its construction, billions of ALL money have been spent for almost 20 years. It clearly distinguishes the entire structure of the city such as: A hospital for 300 beds, a bakery, and other spaces for the command post and many offices for the administration. The underground city was estimated at 20,000 or 30,000 inhabitants over a period of at least 4 to six months.

Labyrinth-shaped tunnels connect any space adapted for different functions. The entrance was in five different places of the city. Some of the palaces built in that period have at every level armored gates and entrance tunnels to the underground city. The gate is also for dormitories and educational institutions (Mema, 2019).

The way of construction is interesting, there worked a small team in number (30 workers and the engineer), who did not know each other. They work in different sectors. To identify the functionality of the underground city, during the 1980s, the authorities carried out regular maneuvers: for example, when the trumpets sounded, the entire population of Kukes had to go underground for seven minutes. The population was forbidden to move in the tunnel after entering because the underground communication and network were secret. The construction of the underground network was completed in 1989 after the installation of the water and energy network, but the commissioning was stopped with the fall of the dictatorial regime.

Currently, this city is of interest to locals and foreigners, in this context it can be turned into a tourist attraction. The creation of the Underground City Museum, which will be the first of its kind, requires a large investment.

*d) Memorial of Havzi Nela.* Havzi Nela was declared a dissident writer of the dictatorial regime in Albania. He refused to lose his freedom of speech during his activity. He expressed his opposition to the regime through his verses in poetry. Havzi Nela had graduated from the Higher Pedagogical Institute in Shkodra. He worked as a teacher in several villages. He was arrested and convicted on the charge of his escape to Yugoslavia. After 11 years he was released and interned in the village of Arrëz (**Kripa. 2018**). The regime did not tolerate such a thing and sentenced him to murder on August 10, 1988 in the middle of the city of Kukës. Havzi Nela was hung on a rope. His burial was even more macabre, to show the ferocity of that power: He plunged into the ground, standing in an open pit by the plucking of a pillar. The regime also denied him the right to a grave like everyone else. Ironically this fact of his life he had foreseen and one of his poems (Shahu R (2018), Palushi P (2000)):

*When you learn that I am dead,  
When you say "Sorry may have!"  
Do you know what I removed?  
Me, the ardent poet?*

*When you ask: - Where is the grave? -  
When you try to find it,  
Say: - He hated cruelty! -  
Say: Won't rest in peace!*



**Figure 1.** Portrait of Havzi Nela, in front of High School in Kukes city

In his honor, today the gymnasium of the city, bears his name "Havzi Nela" and the place where he was hung on the rope, is known as "Havzi Nela Square".

## **2. Methodology**

The study utilized an exploratory, quantitative and qualitative approach because such approach is a useful way to study any sensitive opinions, behaviors, on dark tourism during communism period in our country. Participants (n=60) were asked to answer a survey. Participation was voluntary. The aim of this survey was to understand the perception of the citizens on dark tourism as a tourist movement, to determine how it could be realized in the Kukes Region and what would be the dark touristic attractions. Demographic data of respondents were also collected identify their education, gender and age group. The questionnaires have been distributed and gathered online in August 2020. The snowball sampling is the used technique and the survey was performed in google form format. The data was analyzed quantitatively by computing percentage. Statistical analysis accompanies the study shown by graphic representations.

## **3. Results**

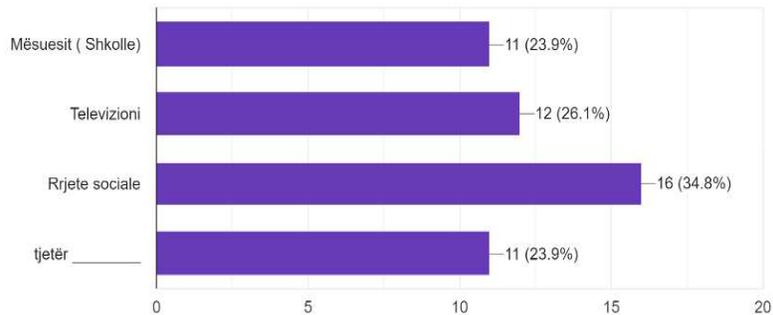
The study included 60 participants, of different age groups ranging from 15 years to 78 years. Where 33.9% are in the age group 31-46 years and 6.8% belong to the age group 47-78%. These age groups will represent an important partial witness to the dark tourism attractions in the Kukes region. 59.3% represent the new generation that "will live" the dark period through the tourist movement, in order to know the history.

The education of the respondents is different, where 43.3% of the respondents have higher education and 26.7% of the respondents have postgraduate education, the rest belong to pre-university education.

*Question 1. Have you ever heard about Dark Tourism?* 45% of respondents answered "YES" and only 17% of respondents answered "NO". The answers with YES are a good indicator of the support that the development of dark Tourism may have.

*Question 1.1. If yes, please specify how you get acquainted with it?* They answered that 34.8% of them had received this knowledge from social networks, 26.1% from television and 23.9% of them answered that they had known about it at school and other sources. An answer that highlights the fact that this form of tourist movement is little addressed in school curricula.

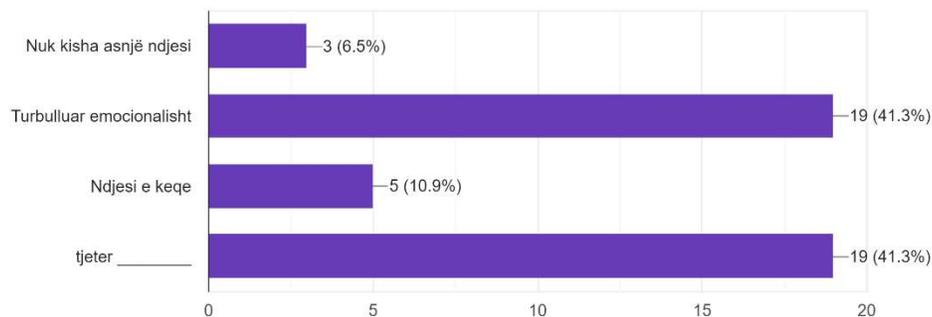
Nëse po, Ju lutem specifikoni se nga kush:  
46 responses



**Figure 2.** Specification of getting acquainted with dark tourism knowledge (mesuesit= teachers, television, rrjetet sociale=social network)

*Question 2. What feeling did you experience when you visited such a place?* The dominant answer was “emotionally disturbed” with 41.3% of the responses and “other” with the same percentage. 10.9% of them said they felt “badly” and only 6.5% of them said that had no sensation. "

Cfarë ndjesie keni përjetuar kur keni vizituar një vend të tillë:  
46 responses



**Figure 3.** The experience felt when visited such a place

*Question 3. Do you think that such itineraries on dark tourism can be offered in the Northeastern part of Albania?* Respondents answered 77.6% with YES and the rest said NO. This shows that the population of the region is open about the possibility of developing a new form of tourism. They will be hospitable to the tourists.

*Question 3.1. If so, which destinations would you recommend?*

The given responses were interesting and worth visiting as:

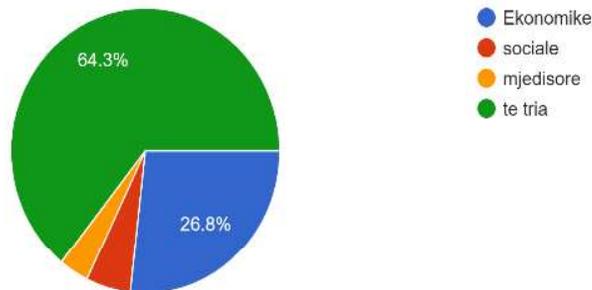
- Destinations of "Serbian Massacres" and Communism,

- The underground city of Kukes, cross-border areas, prisons, etc.
- Clone
- The square where Havzi Nela was hanged, his house, etc.
- Tower of Lumes, White Spring "Massacre of Buzmadhe", Cage of Dragobia, village Vlahen, Karakush neighborhood, Has, etc.

*Question 4. Do you think that this form of tourist movement will increase the length of stay of tourists in the Kukes Region?* 81.4% of them answered "YES", an important indicator for the future of dark tourism in this area, increase of tourist offer in cultural tourism, increase of cultural exchange between tourists and locals, etc.

*Question 5. What will be the benefits of the local population?* Among the alternatives they had to select 64.3% think that the benefit will be economic, social and environmental and only 26.8% of them expressed that the benefit will be more economic. From the answers it is understood that this area needs the development of tourism in a sustainable way, for the fulfillment of the tourist offer and in the aspect of cultural tourism.

Cilat do te jene përfitime e popullsisë lokale: Ju lutem perzgjidhni.  
56 responses



**Figure 4.** The benefits of locals (ekonomike =economic; social =social; mjedisore = environmental; te tjera = others)

*Question 6. What ways of developing dark tourism do you recommend?* Some of their answers were:

- *Increasing investments by the local government for the promotion of dark tourism and the development of tourist infrastructure. Initially, the municipality should become the instigator and promoter of this initiative in order to stimulate curiosity and the desire to visit something "dark" until today.*
- *Promotion of tourism through guiding, media, advertising on social networks, events with young people, etc.*
- *Carrying out studies, evaluation and tourism management of tourist facilities and destinations.*
- *Rehabilitation of tourist areas identified with early illegal practices in attraction and referral territories.*

- *Implementation of something that identifies the city I think would be something that would increase the interest of tourists, but also residents themselves.*
- *I think that everyone should be informed about the dark tourism in Kukes and surrounding nearby. This would increase the number of tourists. Investments should be done in such places and not to be neglected. Let's have guides for such undiscovered places.*
- *Maps must be created and be placed somewhere in the center of the city or at a certain point, may be checkpoint. They have to identify all the tourist destinations.*

*Question 7. Why should this type of tourist itinerary be promoted in Northeastern part of Albania?*

The answers of the respondents were different which are related to economic and social opportunities, increasing the offer of cultural and historical tourism, increasing the number of tourists, completing a piece of the puzzle. There is potential for the development of this type of tourism such as: underground tunnel, clone, museum house of Havzi Nela, Lapidaries for the Luma Battle against Serbs, etc. The Kukes region has several types of tourism and very beautiful places and even dark tourism would be a piece, without which this puzzle makes no sense.

## **Discussions and Conclusions**

Albania's tumultuous history offers potential for the development of dark tourism. It had one of the most brutal dictatorial regime in Europe. Kukës region has potential for the development of dark tourism, influenced by its geographical position. The concept of dark tourism is known in the Kukes Region, referring to the positive answers for the development of dark tourism by 45% and the opportunity they see to increase the length of stay of tourists in this region by 81.4%. The forms of obtaining information for the development of dark tourism are social media (34.8%), television (26.1%) and schools (23.9%). Dark Tourism remains a tourism of memory, whose feelings vary from one visitor to another. This form of tourism is seen as a complement to the tourist offer of the Kukes region and the connection of the tourism market triangle Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia.

Dark tourism in this part of Albania should be promoted through various activities: touristic guiding, advertising on social media, meetings with young people. Dark tourism destinations should become part of tourist itineraries. Training of people who will work in this sector remain one of the key to be done. Dark tourism would be part of school curricula and design modules to increase knowledge about dark tourism. Local government would increase investment by to promote dark tourism. The municipality would become a promoter of this initiative in order to stimulate curiosity and desire to visit something "dark" until today. It is needed rehabilitation of tourist areas. Also some tourism product may be created related to dark tourism that would identify the region and make it unique. Establishment of a Cross-Border Memory Museum like the one in Germany "Point-Alpha".

We propose three dark tourism itineraries:

1. First day: Underground Tunnel of Kukës - Square where Havzi Nela was hanged - Lapidary of the Battle of the River (Qafë e Kolesian)
2. The second day: The Square where the dissident poet "Havzi Nela" was hanged - Museum House of Havzi Nela (Novesej)
3. Day Three: Clone- Pyramids

We emphasize that the itineraries do not have the same difficulty:

The first route is characterized by a moderate mass of difficulty; the greatest difficulty is in the case of visiting the underground tunnel. There we must be equipped with the necessary tools such as: protective hats, flashlights, and boots.

The second route is considered as easy difficult and the destination is reachable by car.

The third itinerary has a moderate difficulty. This itinerary can be realized in the form of hiking along the entire clone.

The mapping of dark tourism destinations in the Kukes Region and placement in strategic locations in order to inform tourists and residents should be done.

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