



Geoheritage + dark cultural heritage= dark geo-cultural heritage. A platform for effective outreach and education?

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In cultural heritage studies the term ‘dark heritage’ – defined as the tangible remains of now unwanted, unsavoury, uncomfortable or unpleasant pasts – has attracted much attention. It has been noted that despite the problematic nature of ‘dark heritage’ sites (e.g. Auschwitz, Chernobyl, Robben Island), these attract large number of visitors and so serve as effective platforms of addressing the attendant issues. Consequently, many theoretical, conceptual and empirical studies of such ‘dark heritage’ sites have been conducted. In studies of geoheritage, however, most effort has so far been placed on unproblematic sites. In this paper, I suggest that previous work on dark cultural heritage could be wedded to the emerging notion of geoheritage to more directly address the dark side of geoheritage – or rather geo-cultural heritage – sites. This is particularly pertinent when it comes to sites of past natural hazards that have affected human communities, and to sites of environmentally destructive resource extraction. I draw on two examples (the Laacher See eruption 13ka BP in Germany and the former lignite mine of Søby in Denmark) to illustrate the approach and to make the argument that the insights of cultural heritage studies should be brought to bear on geoheritage matters. By bringing humans into the equation, education and outreach related to, for instance, natural hazards and the consequences of mining attain and increased degree of immediacy. Such an interdisciplinary coupling of geological and cultural heritage is particularly relevant in relation to the problems surrounding the Anthropocene and its associated proposition that humans are now an ecological and geological force in themselves.