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Dark Tourism in a Modern World: The Case of Commodification of Chernobyl

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Abstract

Nowadays more and more research involves dark tourism. Even though there are no official definition of it, the consensus is that it is visiting places that are initially associated with death, natural or man-made disasters, wars, battlefields, genocides. In addition, dark sites do not possess the same level of 'darkness'. As argued by Stone (2006), dark tourism sites can be better understood while using a dark spectrum. This and other ways of understanding dark tourism will be presented in later stages.

This thesis focuses on Chernobyl which is a rising top dark destination, more precisely – on the commodification and the kitschification of the site and to what extent it influences the tourist experience and opinions. In order to analyze that interviews with tourism officials as well as with the tourists have been done. In addition, an online survey was created with open-questions to analyze the processes of commodification and kitschification of Chernobyl.

A very important notion in understanding people's opinions is interpretation and authenticity. People interpret Chernobyl differently and there is no one absolute true of what authenticity is. Therefore, once the researcher looks through the eyes of the respondents of interviewees, their subjective reality is understood and not assumed. With 6 interviews (5 spoken and 1 written), 1 follow-up questionnaire and an online survey filled by 109 of the respondents this thesis seeks to examine how people perceive commodification of Chernobyl and to what extent it impacts their opinions and experiences.

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1. Introduction

People fear death but somehow are still attracted to it. We crave sensations and novelties and sometimes look for it in unusual places. Horror movies and novels are one of the most common examples of such a quest. The increasing scale of interest and engagement in dark tourism is a phenomenon that is often met with criticism and creates quite a new and fascinating research area for scholars. While there is no consensus of what dark tourism is and what it represents, the most frequent explanation is that it is “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre” (Stone, 2006, p. 146). It is important to mention that this phenomenon is not a new one – despite the fact that the term dark tourism was introduced in 1996 by Lennon and Foley the manifestation of such visits can be seen as early as the Roman Empire times where people would gather to watch the gladiator games. Philip Stone (2006), one of the most prominent researchers in the area of dark tourism, argues it to be the first site of dark tourism.

Nowadays the increasing interest in dark tourism results not only in visiting places of, for example, battlefields but also in sites where danger seems to be present. One of those is Chernobyl – the location where in 1986 the nuclear disaster took place and as a consequence caused the contamination of a large area and evacuation of approximately 50 000 people (Yankovska and Hannam, 2018). Chernobyl has been analyzed in the fields of health and environmental studies, less so – in tourism. The graph below shows the growth of tourist numbers

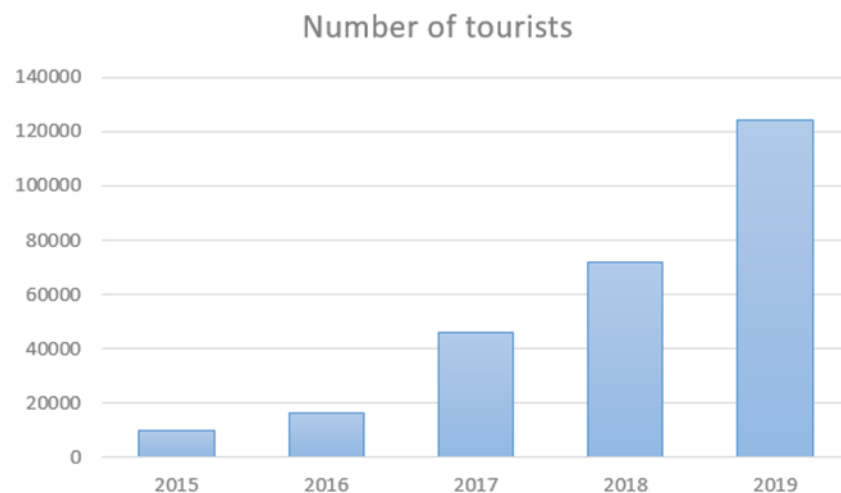


Figure 1: The growth of tourist numbers in Chernobyl. Applied by using information from SAUEZM.

provided by the State Agency of Ukraine (SAUEZM), proving that Chernobyl, as a destination is gaining more and more recognition. The place now faces the touristification as thousands of people visit it each year. It creates demand for certain changes and can be argued to be diluting ties with dark tourism further

enhancing commodification in that way. The goal of this paper is to examine the strength of commodification and kitschification (a term coined by Reimann back in 1930s) of Chernobyl and to analyze to what extent it influences the experiences of the tourists. Here it is crucial to point out that interpretation plays an important role the perception of these processes and the thesis puts dark tourism into a context of interpretation to better understand tourist experiences and the perception of commodification and kitschification.

2. Research methods

This chapter is meant to describe and explain the methodologies used in this paper. These methods were used in order to analyze to what extent does the commodification and kitschification of Chernobyl influence tourist experience while visiting. To start with, the philosophy of science will be introduced and later on the chosen paradigm will be explained in ontological, epistemological and methodological ways. Lastly, the qualitative research methods that were used will be introduced.

2.1. Philosophy of Science

Firstly, the notion of paradigm should be explained. Simply said, a paradigm is a perspective or a set of ideas of how the world is perceived. In research, according to Kuhn (1970) it is “a set of values and techniques which is shared by members of scientific community, which act as a guide or map, dictating the kinds of problems scientists should address and the types of explanations that are acceptable to them” (cited in Khan, 2014, p. 225). In short, it is a collection of thought patterns that are used throughout the research. In 1960s Glaser and Strauss (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007) introduced the ground theory method and since then, 3 paradigms have emerged. Charmaz (2011) described them as constructivist, objectivist and post-positivist. By using constructivist grounded theory the researchers “seek to get as close as possible to their data” (Matteucci and Gnoth, 2017, p. 56) and engage in reflexivity and relativity. Objectivist grounded theory is based on “a passive role in interviewing informants” (Matteucci and Gnoth, 2017, p. 56) and abstract categorization. Post-positivist is in between objective and constructive methods and its main difference from the two is that the researcher applies preconceived analytical framework to data (Charmaz, 2011). Moreover, it is argued by Matteuci and Gnoth (2017) that there are 2

additional paradigms: critical theory and participatory paradigm. For this thesis the constructivist approach was chosen because it is the most relevant to the research question that tries to examine how commodification and kitschification influences the tourist experiences.

2.1.1. Ontology

Ontological questions are those that examine nature and the structure of things (Guarino, Oberle and Staab, 2009). According to the constructivist approach, there is no one reality; realities are multiple and subjective. Also, constructivists seek to understand and examine people's feelings and thoughts. Levers (2013) states that "reality is human experience and human experience is reality." (Levers, 2013, p. 2) meaning that both of them are inseparable and in order to understand experiences understanding of the subjective reality is needed. In order to do that, 5 interviews and an online survey has been conducted. Understanding the subjective reality is essential to this paper because commodification processes and the perception of the strength of it differ and it cannot be described as good or bad.

2.1.2. Epistemology

Epistemology relates to "how" and "what" questions: what can we know and how can we know it (Liburd, 2012). It is connected to knowledge and the limit of it. The goal of constructivism is to "get as close as possible to their data" (Matteuci and Gnoth, 2017, p. 56). This is done by social interactions, such as observations or interviews, where the interviewer seeks to understand and later examine and compare the thoughts and beliefs of the interviewees. Common idea of constructivists is that the knowledge is formed as a result of subjective experiences (Boghossian, 2006) and there are multiple realities. As argued by Charmaz (2011), researches seek to see the studied phenomenon from inside. For that reason, besides of engaging in interviews, quoting and interpreting other authors and providing one's ideas is also crucial. It is important to mention that theory is used before, during and after data analysis.

2.1.3. Methodology

Methodology is ways of learning about the world (Matteucci and Gnoth, 2017). According to Hunter et al (2015), the constructivist methodology combines multiple research methods to have a better understanding of the phenomenon and the relationships related to it. Therefore, by using interviews and an online survey, more opinions can be analyzed and in that way a more reflexive paper is being produced. Since the constructive approach relies on the interactions it can be said that the researcher together with the interviewees is a co-creator of the subjective reality.

2.2. Collection of data

In this chapter the methods for the data collection will be reviewed. Those are namely netnography, semi-structured interviews and an online survey. To start with, the method of netnography will be introduced. Since social media is inseparable part of people's lives, the method of netnography was used throughout the thesis. The term of netnography was introduced by Kozinets (1997) and is an online research method that stems from ethnography. However, unlike the latter, netnography is faster and easier (Kozinets, 2002). It allows the researcher to use such social platforms as Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. Aside from that, in terms of academic literature review sites like JSTOR, Science Direct, Research Gate, Aalborg University Online Library were used with the keywords "dark tourism", "thanatourism", "Chernobyl", "commodification", "kitschification". The most relevant papers focusing on dark tourism and Chernobyl were analyzed.

Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility for both the interviewer and the interviewee. In total, there were 5 interviews conducted by using Facebook messenger. The interviewees are presented further: the first one – the director of a company organizing tours to Chernobyl called the Contamination Zone – Charlie Tango, a tourist from UK – Gary I., the co-founder and guide of Gamma Travel tour organizer – Nikolai Fomin, the tourist from United States named Jay M. and the tourist from Sweden – Asa D. In addition, an online correspondence with Jay M. as follow-up questions and questions with Italian tourist Simone B. were done. Due to Simone B' wish to do a written interview, the questions were sent to him. As per request of the

tourists their lastnames are not revealed. The first interview was conducted on 9th April 2020 and the last one on 28th May 2020. The goal of these interviews was to examine how professionals and tourists perceive Chernobyl, what is their experience there and also, how they comprehend the process of commodification of Chernobyl. None of the interviewees knew the questions in advance so there was a factor of spontaneity and it provided a chance for conversation to flow. The interviews were transcribed using denaturalized transcription method. By using this method the pauses, stutters and the words that are repetitive were deleted and the grammar was corrected. This was done in order to make the data more systematical and free of unnecessary words such as hm, um and similar. Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005) think that denaturalized approach lets the researcher to focus on the reflection because it is systematical.

The survey was a self-administered survey due to the fact that it is easy to share it online and it gives the responders some time to think of their answers. Even though surveys are categorized as quantitative research method, open-ended questions provide a chance to the respondents to give their opinion, so this survey can be seen as partly-qualitative. The questions were both open-ended and closed-ended as well as rating questions. The online self-administered survey provided anonymity and this is very important because the respondents had a chance to say what they feel think without thinking that their answer is somewhat wrong, like it often happens while conducting face to face interviews where people might say things that, in their opinion, the interviewer wants to hear. The aim of the survey was to examine whether people are familiar with the notion and phenomenon of dark tourism and how they feel about that as well as to explore the case of Chernobyl and the commodification related to it.

There were 4 sections in total. The first 3 questions of the survey were focused on demographics aiming to better understand how people perceive Chernobyl and the commodification of it. Those questions were age, gender and nationality. The survey was filled in by 109 people with the majority of females (57.8%) and males (42.2%). The survey has been shared through personal social network and also in Facebook groups such as Chernobyl Exploration Group, Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, Chernobyl HBO Fan Group. Age of the respondents vary from 17 to 62 with the average age being 28,9. It was found out that 1.8% of the respondents were underage. The number of people ranging from 18 to 25 made up 51,3% of the respondents making it the biggest group that participated in the survey. People aged 26-35 made

up 24,8% and 12,7% of the respondents fell into the age group of 36-45. People between the ages of 46 to 50 were 5,5%. The scarcest age group was people in their early 60s – it was 3,6%. Surprisingly, there were no participants in their 50s. The respondents were also asked to state their nationality because it is believed it might partly influence the way people perceive commodification processes of Chernobyl. The last question on this section was regarding familiarity with dark tourism where the respondents were asked to indicate if they are familiar with the notion of dark tourism or not.

Those that answered positively or were hesitant were directed to the second section involving further questions on dark tourism. The participants were asked to provide examples of dark sites and if they have been there (and if yes, their primary motivation was questioned as well). The last question of this section was an open-ended question regarding ethics where people had to write whether they think visiting dark tourism sites is ethical or not. It is important to mention that those who have not heard of dark tourism were immediately directed to the third section of the survey focusing on Chernobyl.

The third section of the survey was meant to explore how people perceive commodification of Chernobyl. Firstly, the respondents were asked if they know Chernobyl, if they have heard of Chernobyl tourism and lastly, if they have ever visited it. The last question was especially crucial in order to compare the answers and the perception of the commodification (can be found in the analysis part). Moving on, people were asked to describe 5 pictures in total. First one was a collage of 4 pictures from Pripyat and the others – souvenirs (namely ice cream, a t-shirt with a writing “radioactive wolf of Chernobyl”, a fridge magnet with a person in a hazard suit and the Atomic vodka. These were open-ended questions and it was sought to examine how people react to these signs of commodification. The results will be shown in the analysis part.

The last section of the questionnaire was made of 7 rating questions and one open-ended question seeking to explore whether the respondents have identified some issues related to Chernobyl tourism. The survey was conducted from 7th April 2020 until 14th May 2020 and the total number of responders is 109. Results of the survey will be presented later on and the example of it can be found in the appendix. To sum up, the main goal of this survey was to examine how well people are familiar with dark tourism and what are their thoughts regarding the commodification of Chernobyl.

2.3. Limitations and ethics

Chernobyl tourism is a very broad topic so it was chosen to focus on commodification of Chernobyl. For this reason, irrelevant information was not included. Despite the fact that an online survey was shared on Facebook groups such as Chernobyl Exploration Group, Chernobyl HBO Fan Group and a Lithuanian group of Impressions of Chernobyl Travels, where the majority of people have been to Chernobyl, the survey resulted in having only 21.1% of respondents who have been there. Therefore, the data collected from the survey relies on people who have not visited Chernobyl. Also, the survey was filled in by 109 of the respondents only. It is believed that more answers would have been more beneficial.

Due to not knowing Ukrainian and having a rather limited knowledge of Russian language, it prevented from finding data and conducting interviews with more people in those languages. For example, an interview with a Belarussian tourism representative (who organizes tours to the Belarussian Exclusion Zone) was not conducted due to not having strong level of Russian language. Having knowledge of these languages would have been beneficial not only in conducting more interviews but also in understanding the interviewees better while they speak in their native languages.

Moving on to ethics, all of the tourists who were interviewed asked for their lastnames not to be included. This let them to freely voice their opinions, however, as we were agreeing to have interviews a few days in advance, it can be argued that they could have thought thoroughly about what might be asked. It is important to mention that, however, none of the interviewees knew the questions in advance with the exception of Simone B. because due to his limited English he said it would be better for him to answer in written form. That can be said to be a little bit problematic due to the fact that as he had questions right before his eyes, it can be argued that his answers were not completely honest since he had time to think and maybe shape the answers in the way he thought was 'right'. Lastly, because I have chosen denaturalized transcription for the interviews, I deleted some of the words that were repetitive and phrases such as mhm, hmm that do not add value to the research. Also, small grammar mistakes were corrected (are instead of is and vice versa) and it can be seen as an ethical issue by some.

3. Literature review

3.1. In search of definition of dark tourism

“The traveler sees what he sees, the tourist sees what he has come to see” (Gilbert K. Chesterton) – these words by an English writer Gilbert K. Chesterton describe tourism perfectly. While tourism is usually perceived as a leisure-oriented phenomenon, there are many various layers of it. Below, the definition of so called dark tourism will be provided which is related to death, disasters and atrocities.

Like it was mentioned before, dark tourism is usually perceived to be a travel to places that are associated with death, tragedies and disasters. The term was first introduced not that long ago in 1996 by Lennon and Foley and since then researchers have referred to it by different names such as ‘thanatourism’ (Seaton, 1996), “Holocaust tourism” (Ashworth and Turnbridge, 1996 (as mentioned in Hartmann, 2013); Beech, 2000), “battlefield tourism” (Smith, 1998), “tragic tourism” (Lippard, 1999), “morbid tourism” (Bloom, 2000), “grief tourism” (O’Neill, 2002; Trotta, 2006), “genocide tourism” (Beech, 2009). Rojek (1993) has described dark tourism as “negative sightseeing” and MacCannell (1999) referred to it as “black spots tourism”. It is evident that there is a huge interest in dark tourism that “started to gain researchers’ attention since the early 90s” (Fonseca, Seabra and Silva, 2016, p.1). As Sharpley (2009) argues: “the meaning of the term has become increasingly diluted and fuzzy” (Sharpley, 2009, p. 6). However, even if the term was introduced only in 1996 and even though many associate dark tourism with contemporary way of travel, it is not a new thing. People have been engaging in dark tourism ever since they started travelling. A researcher of dark tourism P. Stone (2006) claims that the oldest dark tourism site is Rome Colosseum to which people would travel in order to watch executions.

Scholars cannot agree upon one definition of dark tourism, therefore, there are many attempts to explain not only the definition of dark tourism but also its aspects. Dann (1998) provides these categories of dark tourism (or as he called it “divisions of the dark”):

1. Perilous places – dangerous destinations from the past and present;
2. Houses of horror – buildings associated with death;

3. Fields of fatality – landmarks or areas that commemorate death (for example, battlefields, cemeteries);
4. Tours of torment – visits to attractions that are associated with death and murders;
5. Themed thanos – museums or exhibitions focusing on death and suffering.

Similarly, Seaton (1999) came up with his 5 dark tourism (or thanatourism – as he refers to it) categories. These are provided below:

1. Observing a public execution;
2. Travelling to sites of mass deaths (for instance, battlefields or genocide camps). These dark tourism sites are the exact places where disasters have taken place;
3. Travelling to places that hold a high sense of remembrance (like cemetery);
4. Travelling to places such as museums where there is a representation of death. These sites are located not in the actual place of a tragedy;
5. Re-enactments of death (the instance could be re-enactment of a battlefield).

3.2. Shades of dark tourism

Since dark tourism is very broad, it can be examined through many different aspects. For example, Stone (2006) introduced shades of dark tourism ranging from lightest to darkest (as can be seen in figure) and also provided 7 dark tourism suppliers. As a common trait for the lightest forms of dark tourism is the motivation of entertainment and since those places are primarily made for entertainment purposes they are usually perceived as inauthentic whilst the places that belong to the darkest forms of dark tourism are seen as authentic due to the fact that they are in the actual place of the disaster. The fact that also needs to be emphasized is that the

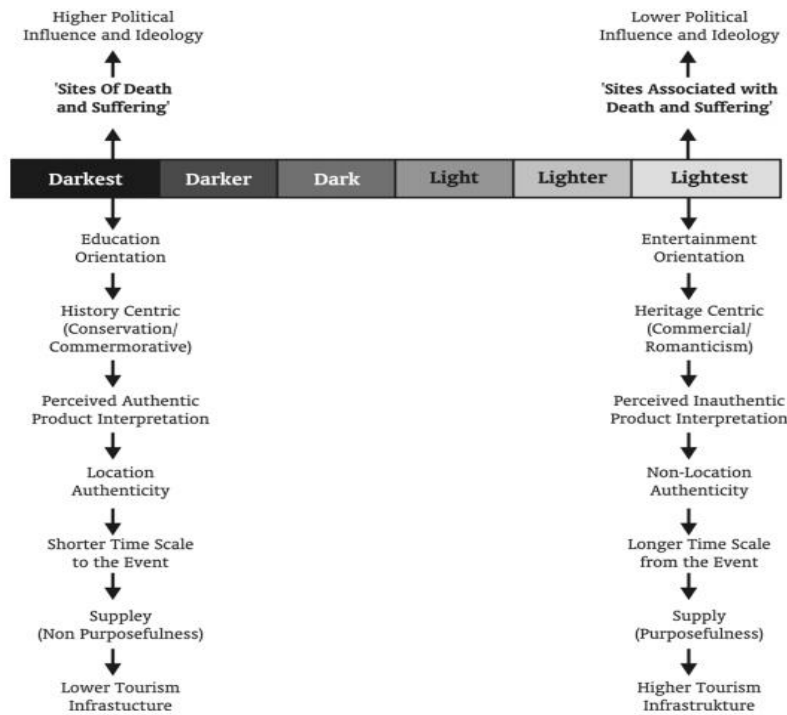


Figure 2: Dark tourism spectrum. Source: Stone (2006).

3.2.1. Light shades of dark tourism

The lightest form of dark tourism is considered to be places that primarily are made for entertainment and are profit-focused. These are called 'dark fun factories' (Stone, 2006) and the examples are dungeons or the attempted (and failed) plan to build a Dracula theme park in Romania. These examples are proven to be commercialized, with the focus on profit and are "perceived as less authentic" (Stone, 2006, p.152). Due to that, they are seen as the lightest form of dark tourism.

Lighter form of dark tourism are dark exhibitions which "offer products which revolve around death, suffering or the macabre with an often commemorative, educational and reflective message." (Stone, 2006, p. 153). Dark exhibitions, like dark fun factories, are made for entertainment, however, they have educational aspects as well. Therefore, they are perceived as more serious and seen as belonging to dark tourism. Examples of dark exhibitions could be Body Worlds, an anatomical exhibition of human bodies. There are permanent exhibitions in some places and also there are exhibitions that are travelling throughout the world. That proves that people's interest and the engagement in dark tourism is vast.

Dark dungeons refer to light notion of dark tourism and revolve around justice, prisons and courthouses. The purpose of these sites is entertainment as well as education. It is noted that dark dungeons “posses a relatively high degree of commercialism and tourism infrastructure, and occupy sites which were originally nonpurposeful for dark tourism.” (Stone, 2006, p. 154). Examples could be the Robben Island prison, Missouri State penitentiary.

In between light and dark tourism there are dark resting places. That refers to cemetery of famous people. Nowadays, people can participate in tours revolving celebrities and their death. For example, a tour operator called Dearly Departed and based in Los Angeles, USA offers various tours called “tragical history tours” that include places where celebrities such as Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Sharon Tate and many more have lived and died (www.dearlydepartedtours.com). The Arlington National Cemetery in Washington DC, USA is also an example of dark resting places. Mostly the cemetery is for military people, however, there are some graveyards of celebrities as well including Jacqueline Kennedy and John F. Kennedy (www.arlingtoncemetery.mil).

3.2.2. Dark shades of dark tourism

Moving on, the dark form of dark tourism is going to be introduced now. The dark form of dark tourism is called dark shrines. They are not made for tourism, rather – for remembrance. Dark shrines are made close to place of a death and are temporary, therefore, they possess a higher level of darkness. As Stone (2006) argues “these types of events dominate the media agenda for relatively short periods of time, hence attaching a higher level of political awareness and influence to a particular Dark Shrine site during the ‘media period’ ” (Stone, 2006, p. 155). These sites include Kensington Palace where princess Diana was killed. People going to dark shrines usually have an emotional attachment to a dead person or an event that happened. Some go there because of the ‘darkness’ of the site because, like it was mentioned before, the shrines are near the places of death.

The darker shade of dark tourism is dark conflict sites that are related to war, battles. The purpose of these sites is commemorative, educational, however, these sites tend to be commodified. It is important to mention that even though dark conflict sites refer to darker shade of tourism, it can also be a lighter form of dark tourism. For example, while re-enacting a war.

Then, it gets commodified and more focused on fun rather than the remembrance. Since there have been plenty of wars, there are many places of dark conflict, for example, World War I, World War II and many more.

The darkest shade of dark tourism is dark camps of genocide. Dark camps of genocide refer to suffering and atrocities done by people. They are ranked as the darkest form of dark tourism because of unbelievably high number of people who have died there. What makes it even more cruel and real is that those camps are at the actual place of a genocide. It is argued that “Dark Camps of Genocide are produced to provide the ultimate emotional experience whereby visitors ‘sightsee in the mansions of the dead’ (Keil, 2005). The sites of genocides are, for example, memorial of Holodomor (also known as the great famine) site in Ukraine, Kazakh genocide (also known as Goloshchekin famine), Cambodian genocide. The darkest dark camp of genocide is Auschwitz-Birkenau camp that shows the massive horrors of Holocaust.

3.3. Supply and demand perspectives

Dark tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon ranging from the lightest to the darkest forms and it cannot be defined in a simple manner. There is another perspective to look at dark tourism. It is through the supply and demand perspectives (Biran, Poria and Oren, 2011). The supply perspective emphasizes on people being at a dark tourism site while demand perspective focuses on various motivations of people who choose to go to a dark tourism site. Supply perspective neglects people’s motivations and because its focal point is the description of dark tourism, it is being criticized for being based solely on description. Even though demand perspective is looking at people’s motivations, it is not perfect either and is criticized as well because it “follows the hidden assumption that the presence of tourists at death-related sites reflects at least some degree of thanatouristic motives” (Slade, 2003). For instance, people going to Holocaust sites are not necessarily interested in death – they may go there because of remembrance, emotional heritage, family. Their motivations may not involve death factor at all. However, demand supply kind of denies that stating that even if person’s primary motivations are not death-related, it is, in fact, a motivating factor as well.

Another, integrated supply-demand perspective, highlights the fact that both supply and demand are tightly interwoven with each other and raises an argument stating that there is a need to re-think the link between them. In order to do that, Sharpley (2009) has introduced shades of dark tourism. They are explained below from lightest to darkest shades:

- Pale tourism – no interest in death at all or the interest is minimal to the sites that are not intended to be tourist attractions. Pale tourism usually occurs in visiting graveyards of famous people.
- Grey tourism demand occurs when people are interested in dark tourism visit unintended places of dark tourism.
- Grey tourism supply is when people visit sites that are made to exploit death. However, not all of the tourists going there are fascinated by death.
- Black tourism or otherwise called as “pure” dark tourism occurs when people with the great fascination for death visit sites that are purposefully created to cater for this fascination and profit from it.

People travel to dark tourism sites for different reasons and they have different motives. In the past years the growth of dark tourism has been seen. A great number of researchers believe it is due to the portrayal of dark tourism in the mass media (Seaton, 1996, Lennon and Foley, 2000; Minic, 2012; Podoshen et al, 2015; Lennon, 2017). Bowman and Pezzullo (2009) argue that:

“tourists are not so much ‘consumers’ of ‘products’ as they are audiences of multimedia, oral-dramatic events. By attending to the different genres, modes, and styles of these events we discover that ‘spectator’ – with its connotations of passive viewing – is a less accurate descriptor for the tourist than something like Boal’s (1985) ‘spect-actor’: an interactive co-creator of the performance who may take a more or less important role in it.”

(Bowman and Pezullo, 2009, p. 193).

Tuckova (2015) argues that dark tourism neutralizes death and at the same time “more than preparing us for dying, it teaches us to understand our lives, how something had happened and to learn from mistakes, so it is more about living than dead.” (Tuckova, 2015, p. 6). However,

it is still argued by some that dark tourism is immoral due to its representation of death and others' pain.

3.4. Different purposes of dark tourism

Dark tourism combines many types of subcategories, for example, slavery tourism, Holocaust tourism, post-disasters tourism, war places, tourism to suicide places, poverty areas, illegal tourism and more. Dark tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon and serves different purposes. It can be classified into the types provided below. This chapter is meant to explore it.

- Dark tourism as heritage;
- Dark tourism as education;
- Dark tourism as remembrance;
- Dark tourism as a key factor in formation of nationalism;
- Dark tourism as self-discovery.

3.4.1. Dark tourism as heritage

“A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” (Marcus Garvey).

Above-mentioned quote refers to heritage and why it is important. Thomas, Herva, Seitsonen and Koskinen-Koivisto (2019) argue that “traditionally, heritage studies have tended to prioritize or concentrate on monumental and aesthetically pleasing remains of the past, whereas dark heritage grasps the significance and meanings of “heritage that hurts” (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 2007), negative and unpleasant things inherited from the past, having an impact on the present in one form or another.” (Thomas, Herva, Seitsonen and Koskinen-Koivisto, 2019, p.2). Even though many people think of heritage as rather a positive collection of things, it should be not neglected that there exists a heritage that is unpleasant, however, it is embedded to a nation or country. This refers to wars, massacres and numerous deaths and is called dark heritage. Like dark tourism, dark heritage also has many different names such as “difficult heritage”, “contested heritage”, “dissonant heritage”, “negative heritage” (Thomas, Herva, Seitsonen and Koskinen-Koivisto, 2019). The authors also argue that “there is an increasing awareness that heritage comes also in

diverse “negative” forms, such as environmental pollution, social inequality, and poverty, inherited from the past and having myriad impacts in the present” (Thomas, Herva, Seitsonen and Koskinen-Koivisto, 2019, p.1).

As can be seen from the quote, it can be said that there is no control over heritage – it can be both glorious and positive as well as cruel and negative. Gonzalez Vazquez (2018) has argued that heritage tourism (or in his words memorial tourism) and dark tourism meet in a place called a convergent space (Gonzalez Vazquez, 2018). Even though both memorial and dark tourism have different incentives and motives, at the end they are profound in understanding the phenomenon of tourism. Gonzalez Vazquez (2018) also states that “dark tourism represents a more banal and empty practice than memorial tourism, and that this could perhaps represent the main difference between the two.” (Gonzalez Vazquez, 2018). The chart of interaction between memorial tourism and heritage tourism is provided below. It is also important to mention that while for some people some particular place serves as a heritage, for different people (mostly the ones that are not related or familiar with the place) it is a place of dark tourism.

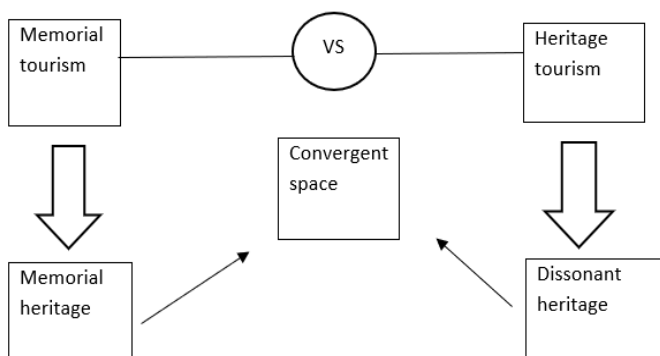


Figure 3: Convergent spaces between memorial and heritage tourism. Adapted from Gonzalez Vasquez (2018).

It can be seen that memorial tourism and heritage tourism are closely related. Stone (2006) notes that many of the tourists that visit these convergent places do not see themselves as dark tourists and would actually be afraid to be called like that (Stone, 2006). The figure shows the perception of convergent spaces and it is important to mention that for

different groups of people it might mean different things and they might perceive or remember it differently. As can be seen from the graph, heritage can be memorial or dissonant. Dissonant heritage is a term introduced in mid 1990s by Gregory Ashworth and J. E. Turnbridge (Hartmann, 2013) and relates to “heritage that hurts”. Balockaite (2015) argues dissonant heritage can be defined as unwanted past (Balockaite, 2015, p. 1) and McDonald (2006) claims that dissonant heritage is “heritage that the majority of the population would prefer not to have.” (cited in

Banaskiewicz, 2017, p.79). As Uzzell and Ballantyne (2007) claim “emotions colour our memories and experiences and thus our selective attention to information.” (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 2007, p. 1). This explains why some people see dark heritage as a more positive one – memorial, for example, reminding of a great times of a country (victory in a war, let’s say), while others view it as a loss of people, therefore, it is “a heritage that hurts”.

It is essential to mention that “heritage that hurts” may also refer to more negative narratives rather than just war. For example, the Holocaust concentration camps are related to memory and memorial tourism for Jewish people but perpetrators might see it as a dissonant heritage. Here, the term “hot interpretation” could be introduced for a better understanding. The term was introduced by Uzzell in 1988 as “a response to the failure of many interpretive designers and providers to acknowledge that visitors to heritage sites do not experience heritage simply as a cognitive experience.” (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 2007, p. 1). This approach is usually used in sites where controversial or highly emotional materials are. These are usually related to wars, however, this might as well be used in understanding issues such as environmental destruction and pollution, racial, sexual and religious intolerance and much more (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 2007). Hot interpretation seeks to emphasize that emotions play a vital role in how people perceive things and that heritage is felt not only seen or looked at. As the authors wrote: “issues which involve personal values, beliefs, interests and memories will excite a degree of emotional arousal” (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 2007, p. 1). Therefore, heritage can be perceived as a collection of emotions that are being transferred to people while on a visit.

Heritage is inseparable from the past and it is a way of the interaction between people and the past events. Heritage, be it a glorious one or dark one, relates to communities and understanding and accepting heritage might be of a help in understanding the present and future better. As Banaskiewicz (2017) note “heritage resonates for us because it is not only related to our past but it is an important part of our present and future” (Banaskiewicz, 2017, p. 79).

3.4.2. Dark tourism as education

Sadly, we cannot change the past and what had happened but we can learn from it. This could be the motto of dark educational tourism. As dark tourism itself is scarcely studied, there are even less researches done regarding dark educational tourism. Biran et al. (2011) claims that tourism research tends to neglect educational motivations to dark tourism sites because of the assumption that says that people visit dark sites because they are driven by their interest in death. In addition, Kerr and Price (2015) have noticed that dark tourism researchers focus on adults and not kids. Israfilova and Khoo-Latimore (2018) in their publication put a spotlight on kids and their experiences after visiting a dark heritage site in their home country of Azerbaijan. With this, a conclusion can be drawn that dark educational can be seen as dual: first, it serves as a history tool which shows what happened and secondly, it might be used in order to learn from the past.

A new term emerged in order to explain the vital relationship between learning and entertainment – edutainment. It is defined as “the joining together of educational and cultural activities with the commerce and technology of the entertainment world” (Hannigan, 1998, p. 98). It can be used in many spheres and is especially useful for children. However, kids are “traditionally a long-neglected group in tourism research” (Poria and Timothy, 2014). It is argued by Ivanova and Light (2017) that tourists can gain from edutainment to better understand mortality in both past and present tenses (Ivanova and Light, 2017). Light (2012) has previously argued that edutainment is meant to “help comprehend past methods of torture and incarceration, as well as learning about deeds of the disgraced dead” (cited in Stone, 2012, p. 1578). Edutainment combines education and entertainment making it an innovative means of experiencing tourism.

It is very important to know history and to be able to understand why certain things happened. Therefore, dark tourism can be a good tool in order to educate oneself. Although a very scarce research has been done on edutainment and tourism, it is believed to be helping in comprehension. For example, by visiting dark tourism sites a person can gain a history education (to understand what happened and why), personal education (that is to come to own terms, for example, to come face to face with mortality), also to feel “belonging” - this especially happens when people visit sites that are directly connected to them, their communities and nations. Some

might even feel pride, for example, when visiting a battlefield and knowing that their country has won the war. In short, education plays a vital role in dark tourism and the understanding of it.

3.4.3. Dark tourism as remembrance

“Remembering is the basis for reconciliation” (Hartmann, 2018, p. 473)

Memorial tourism is closely related to heritage tourism. Drvenkar, Banozic and Zivic (2015) argue that memorial tourism stems from dark tourism: “the phenomenon of ‘dark tourism’ provide a starting point for the study of memorial tourism” (Drvenkar, Banozic and Zivic, 2015, p. 65). It has been noticed by many (Kuusi, 2008; Alderman, Butler and Hanna, 2015; Yankholmes and McKercher, 2015) that people tend to visit dark sites that are related to their heritage and identity. A search of identity can be seen in the Holocaust tourism (Brown, 2014; Hermanova, 2015; Sion, 2017), slavery tourism (Alderman, Butler and Hanna, 2015; Yankholmes and McKercher, 2015). It can be seen that it is also tightly connected to identity and collective memory. Moore (2009) claims that “the current interest in memory and memorialization is typically traced back to World War II and the Holocaust.” (Moore, 2009, p. 49). Stone (2012) argues that dark tourism serves as a mediation between death and collective memory and that it might change over time. Dark tourism, or more precisely, collective memory and commemoration can bring a certain group of people closer. However, as Stone (2012) adds, the collective memory can be changed and shaped according to people: for example, the first generation of Holocaust who was directly affected by it, will remember it differently than the second generation who only knows the atrocities from narratives (Stone, 2012). Collective memory shapes the society and it is vitally important to know the history of one’s community. Therefore, dark tourism is important in terms of remembrance and memory.

Closely related is so called phoenix tourism. Phoenix tourism is going to places where horrible things took place but the places are now going towards peace, rejuvenation and rehabilitation. These places might be related to genocides, wars, natural disasters. Miller, Gonzalez and Hutter (2017) argue that “visitors are able to see and experience the “come back” and rejuvenation of an area, while the former images of devastation destruction and darker images are re-imaged, re-packaged and re-sold with a recovery narrative.” (Miller, Gonzalez and Hutter, 2017,

p. 200). The points of phoenix tourism are rebirth, rehabilitation and even though it relates to war, genocide places and tragic events it cannot be considered as part of dark tourism (Miller, Gonzalez and Hutter, 2017). Engaging in phoenix tourism might let communities come to terms with its past.

Overall, it can be argued that people who engage in dark tourism, do so because of their wish to learn about history and past events as well as to gain a better understanding of the events that once took place. As remembrance and memory are important to people, dark tourism helps them to not only understand what happened but also to come to terms with the past and move forward.

3.4.4. Dark tourism and the formation of the nationalism

The sense of nationalism and being proud of one's nation is tightly related to heritage tourism. However, there are some links between nationalism and dark tourism as well. It was noticed by Light (2017): "a range of research studies have explored the relationships between identities and visits to places of death or suffering. These studies have argued that such visits can be a means to affirm and reproduce particular identities (at individual, family, national and transnational scales)." (Light, 2017, p. 288). Of course, it can be argued that the sense of nationalism and identity are more related to lighter forms of dark tourism. For example, battlefields and as an example the battlefield of Grunwald (1410) could be provided. Located in contemporary Poland it reminds both Polish and Lithuanian people of a glorious past of Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the victory against the Teutonic Order back in 1410.

Another good example of how engagement in dark tourism develops sense of identity and nationalism is "Mission Siberia" – an annual event where a few of volunteers from Lithuania travel to Russia, to be more exact to Siberia, where thousands of Lithuanians were exiled during the times of Soviet Union. The participants have to prove their physical well-being as well as their strong motivation in order to be selected for the project. According to Light (2017) "visiting dark places can also be a means of defining or affirming collective identities." (Light, 2017, p. 288). This can be seen from the "Mission Siberia" example where collective memory is an important factor.

Collective memory and dark heritage can bring a nation closer together. It can also be perceived as a factor in forming of the nationalistic feelings of belonging to a particular group. The past of the nation is what makes a nation unique and in visiting sites related to a nation's past and heritage one might feel a sense of belonging.

3.4.5. Dark tourism as self-discovery

Dark tourism is important as an education factor and a heritage. In addition to that, Kang, Scott, Lee and Ballantyne (2011) argue that dark tourism also serves as “an emotional tourism experience, conveying important messages related to gaining knowledge of past events” (Kang, Scott, Lee and Ballantyne., 2011, p. 258). The authors also emphasize the fact that dark tourism can serve as a therapeutic function. However, different sites provoke different reactions: for example the darkest dark tourism sites such as Auschwitz evoke different feelings than some lighter dark tourism sites which are primarily made for entertainment. It is common for a person to feel anger, sadness, helplessness and even vengeance after visiting Auschwitz and for instance, after visiting so called dark fun factories that possess dark elements but are mainly entertainment-focused, it is not that common.

As everyone understands and feels the same place differently, it is understandable that experiences and felt emotions differ. The interpretations and the way someone understands the place are very crucial because through them the site is being communicated. Wight (2009) argues that “museums can prefer to portray tragedy in particular, selective ways” (Wight, 2009, p. 12). Here, the conclusion can be drawn that even though people visit the same site, their experiences and opinions may vary to a great extent. A sense of being is important here – when a person connects to the place through experiences, he gets a better understanding of himself, the environment and the place. In that way, a person gains some new insights that may lead to a self-discovery. In addition, Seaton (1996) claims that dark tourism “allows individuals to confront and contemplate their own mortality through some kind of thanatopsis by gazing upon macabre illusions and images (Seaton, 1996). Similarly, Sharpley and Stone (2008) argue that “within dark tourism, death once again becomes a “real” for the individual (Sharpley and Stone, 2008, p. 589).

It can be said that a person faces the fear of death by visiting dark sites and in that way reflects oneself.

As can be seen, dark tourism is a complex phenomenon that can be perceived in different ways. Different motivations and experiences gained in the sites also vary accordingly. In the upcoming chapter dark tourism and death in the context of ontological security and neutralization will be analyzed.

3.5. The concept of death in dark tourism

3.5.1. Death and contemporary society

A distinctive trait of the contemporary society, according to Giddens (1990), is what he calls the ontological security. That is a sense of order and continuity and relies heavily on interpersonal relationships and trust. It is argued that people use institutions such as family, community, religious organizations to protect themselves. As Giddens stated himself: “To live our lives, we normally take for granted issues which, as centuries of philosophical enquiry have found, wither away under the sceptical gaze.” (Giddens, 1990, p. 37). This ontological security is often threatened by chaos or the possibility of disorder. Death can be said to be one of those chaotic factors and because of that is met with the denial. However, it is now argued that the society is moving from death-denying to death-defying with the improving medicine and an emphasis on health sciences. Nowadays, death is like a private world of doctors and nurses (Minic, 2012) and in this way it becomes further from the rest of the society. However, it is not possible to isolate from death completely and with the help of media, death is being mocked and commercialized.

Since death shatters the state of everything being in order and brings chaos and anxiety, it is natural to define it as an issue of both individual and the society. Following Giddens’s (1990) thoughts it can be said that people are supposed to deal with death, yet, because they are a part of a society and they are trusted not to cause chaos, they are expected to continue their day-to-day lives at the same time. This vicious circle enables death-denying. As stated by Berger (Stone, 2010), “death is an unavoidable characteristic of the human condition, and one that all societies, contemporary or otherwise, inevitably have to address.” (Stone, 2010, p. 141). Wong, Gesser and Reker (1994) have a more positive outlook towards the acceptance of death. The

authors have defined three types of death acceptance approaches or as they call it – the Death Attitude Profile. These are: neutral, approach and escape. They are characterized respectively as follows:

- Neutral death acceptance occurs when a person understands death as an inevitable and inseparable part of life. A person “neither fears death nor welcomes it” (Wong, Gesser and Reker, 1994, p. 126) and tries to make the most of life. The one who acknowledges the neutral outlook is well aware of own mortality and is not afraid of it.
- Approach acceptance is the belief in an afterlife and relates to religion. There are many disputes of whether there is a direct relationship between religion and the fear of death. Wong, Gesser and Reker (1994) argue that “it appears that people who are firm believers in either afterlife or nonexistence beyond death have less fear than those who are uncertain.” (Wong, Gesser and Reker, 1994, p. 127).
- Escape acceptance occurs when a person sees death as a better alternative than life that is full of fear and suffering. Here, the escape acceptance is not the glorifying of death or thinking of death as a positive thing, it is rather seen as a saviour from a negative life (Wong, Gesser and Reker, 1994). So the emphasis is on the negativity of life.

Consequently, if death and mortality are not dealt with, not only it endangers the individual but also whole community and therefore, ontological security. Here, the paradox is created – people avoid dealing with death because it threatens their well-being and the social role they have but at the same time if death is not dealt with it might enable even bigger chaos to happen. This chapter was meant to explore death in the context of contemporary society and how it is perceived.

3.5.2. Neutralization of death

Death can be seen on television, news, films, art. Shortly, it is unavoidable. Nowadays death is often mocked, ironized, even commodified by the popular culture. This way it is also being neutralized and thus, less intimidating (Durkin, 2003). Bryant and Shoemaker (1977) argue that death is a topic that causes anxiety and is traumatic so in order to deal with it better it needs to be neutralized (noted in Durkin, 2003). Stone (2009) draws upon Tercier’s (2005) idea stating that even though nowadays people are exposed to death more than any other previous generations, they

choose not to confront it too much by saying that “we see death, but we do not “touch” it.” (Stone, 2009, p. 33). This means that people are aware of deaths because they acknowledge it (see it), yet no touching means that people are left to look for “their own resources when searching for meaning to cope with the limits of individual existence” (Stone, 2009, p. 33). For this reason some turn to dark tourism in order to face the mortality. It can be argued that when a person engages in dark tourism and experiences a death of “other”, he confronts his own fear of death in a way that is socially acceptable.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, there is an absent-present paradox that results in the privatization of death (due to its medicalization meaning that it is like a private world of doctors and other medical staff) and resurgence of death through the media. Gorer (1965) argues that what was oppressed in real life comes back in the media as “pornography” (Gorer, 1965). He used two key things that can be explained as follows: repression occurs to those things that are thought to be not suitable for public and are seen as a factor that can cause distress, therefore, is forbidden. Pornography here is a portrayal of death that is made public, yet, uncomfortable. Absent-present paradox can explain the neutralization of death in a way. Since death is kind of “privatized”, it is removed from the society but still finds a way to interact with it but since people “do not touch death” its existence remains but people are looking at it neutrally.

While it is true that some people prefer to look at death in a neutral way, it is also true that the more death is portrayed in the media, the more it is being accepted by people. They then see it as an inevitable factor in life and come to terms with it. However, the overexposure and the excessive use of death in the media might result in people being much less sensitive towards death. It can be argued that dark tourism is both the acceptance of death and the influential factor in people thinking less sensitively about death. In first case, while engaging in dark tourism individuals might feel like they are facing their own fears regarding dying and in second case there is a threat of forgetting the atrocities that happened in the sites of dark tourism due to the neutralization.

3.6. Authenticity

Authenticity is an important notion in tourism. MacCannell (1973) has emphasized the importance of authenticity in tourism and since then it has been a significant topic in social

sciences, mainly in tourism. There is no one definition of authenticity, however, many scholars describe it as something real and genuine (MacCannell, 1973; Salamone, 1997; Cohen, 2004; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006). In order to better understand the notion of authenticity the term can be explored using theories of objective, constructed and subjective authenticity.

Objective authenticity is inherited and is linked to museums (Wang, 1999). It is independent from the perception because objective authenticity involves things that are confirmed to be authentic (Heuermann and Chhabra, 2014). The most prominent scholars to have explored authenticity using this theory are Boorstin (2012) and MacCannell (1973). Boorstin (2012) claims that tourists do not seek authenticity and are well aware of the fact that they are being presented “pseudo-events”. These are planned events that are meant to be reported. As Boorstin (2012) states: “its success is measured by how widely it is reported.” (Boorstin, 2012, p. 11). It is similar to MacCannell’s (1973) theory of staged authenticity where he states that there is a front stage that is seen by tourists and back stage that is something that tourists usually do not see. Differently from Boorstin, MacCannell (1973) argues that tourists want to experience authenticity by going to the back stage and seeing how life is really lived. MacCannell (1973) also distinguishes 6 stages of authenticity that are presented below:

- Stage 1 coincides with Goffman’s front region theory presented in 1956. The tourists try to get past this stage.
- Stage 2 relates to a touristic front region that has been decorated in order to resemble to the back region. Usually the changes are small and are used to make a place look more authentic.
- Stage 3 is a front region that has been changed drastically so that it looks like a real back stage.
- Stage 4 is a back region that is open for tourists.
- Stage 5 is a back region that is changed a little bit and the tourists are allowed to visit occasionally.
- Stage 6 again coincides with Goffman’s theory and is a space that is never visited by the tourists. It is an ultimate back stage and according to MacCannell (1973) it “motivates touristic consciousness.” (MacCannell, 1973, p. 598).

To sum up it can be said that objective authenticity relies on the actual heritage and its locations. It does not depend on the perception of the tourist. However, it can be corrupted by fake authenticity. Judging from MacCannell's 6 authenticity stages it can be seen that authenticity can be easily altered and therefore deceitful.

Examined by Wang (1999), Olsen (2002), Cohen (2004) constructed authenticity focuses on people's perceptions. According to the idea of constructed authenticity, authenticity of a certain place or a thing varies from person to person. That means that there is no absolute truth of what is and is not authentic because people look at it differently: what is authentic for one person might not be perceived as authentic by another. Cohen (2004) argues that studies focus on individuals and are not concerned with the collective perception of the authenticity (Cohen, 2004). The author also provides a notion of emergent authenticity meaning that things that were not seen as authentic are being perceived as authentic (Cohen, 2004). Constructed authenticity focuses on people and their perception rather than on an object or a place. People choose their factors of authenticity and whether something is authentic or not.

There is no one definition of subjective or existential authenticity. Wang (1999) connects it to activity and while people are engaging into it they feel authenticity. Brown (1996) says that it is related to tourists having a good time (mentioned in Wang, 1999). Pons (2003) argues that it is related to tourists being bodily involved with the World (mentioned in Rata, 2012). Existential authenticity involves self-realization. Similarly like Boorstin and MacCannell, Taylor (2001) argues that authenticity can be real or fake: real authenticity is when the hosts are sincere with their visitors and if they are not it is dishonest and does not spend much time with them is viewed as a staged authenticity (Taylor, 2001). In short, existential authenticity is experienced by engaging in activities, for example, talking with the locals on dancing a traditional dance of a particular country there. It also relates to self-realization because people feel authenticity through the action of doing something themselves.

Chhabra (2010) adds two other authenticity approaches (Chhabra, 2010). These are negotiation I and theoplicity. Here, negotiation I is a balance between objective and constructed authenticity. This happens when sites have authentic objects but present them in a way that is commodified to a certain extent and the object is "not extensively compromised". (Heuermann and Chhabra, 2014, p. 2). Theoplicity or negotiation II was first introduced by Belhassen et al

(2008). According to the authors, authenticity is formed by belief, place and activities and is experienced by engaging in certain activities. Chhabra (2010) argues that theoplicity is “a negotiated approach between essentialism and existentialism.” (Chhabra, 2010, 794). All of these notions show that authenticity is hard to define. Many scholars define it as something genuine and the opposite of fake. Authenticity can change according to people and their perceptions.

3.6.1. Cool and hot authenticity

The concept of cool and hot authenticity was introduced by Tom Selwyn in 1996 (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). Cool authenticity, sometimes called cold, is related to the tourist’s wish to gain knowledge and search for it. Selwyn identifies hot authenticity as a quest for an authentic self and others. For him, existential authenticity is hot because it involves self-realisation and a person engages in some particular activities in order to find the true self. In short, it can be said that cool authenticity is related to facts and science while hot authenticity focuses on social aspects such as live experiences of a person and participation in various activities.

Cohen and Cohen (2012) have expanded these notions a little bit. For the authors cool authenticity is formal and official, a statement of a thing or a place to be real and genuine. Cool authenticity might be based on scientific or personal knowledge, expertise (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). However, it is important to mention that in order to be perceived as genuine a thing or a place needs to be certified meaning it needs to have an evidence of authenticity. In tourism that usually happens with the accreditations such as the Blue Flag or the Green Globe. However, these certifications seek to accredit destinations according to the certain standards rather than to prove and verify its authenticity. As with any type of authenticity, the issue of faking is evident here as well. It is what Dorson (1973) has called fakelore back in 1950. He described it as “a label for spurious goods posing as folklore.” (Dorson, 1973, p. 199). Fakelore is anything that is said to be genuine and made by locals and it can also blur the lines between real and fake. In conclusion, cool authenticity is based on facts, proof and knowledge.

According to Cohen and Cohen (2012), hot authenticity is “an immanent, reiterative, informal performative process of creating, preserving and reinforcing an object’s, site’s or event’s authenticity.” (Cohen and Cohen, 2012, p. 1301). Since it relates to existential authenticity, it is

based on belief and emotions. It also includes a sense of commitment. The examples of hot authenticity are rituals, offerings and other participation in events. Here, unlike in cool authenticity, the involvement of public is strong. Therefore, it can be argued that a person is a part of authenticity and its formation due to the direct participation. Hot authenticity requires partaking in various events and the investment of one's time. It is not based on facts but on belief and feelings. By engaging in activities a person not only experiences the genuineness but also practises self-realisation.

To sum up, the main difference between cool and hot authenticity is their belonging to different types of authenticity. The first one refers to objective authenticity due to the fact and evidence of genuineness that cannot be contested. The second one relates to existential authenticity because it does not revolve around facts and requires participation of people who experience genuineness by engaging in activities. Authenticity can be counterfeited and imitated to look as if is real.

3.7. Commodification of dark tourism

Commodification goes hand in hand with authenticity. Cole (2007) argues that “tourism turns culture into a commodity, packaged and sold to tourists, resulting in a loss of authenticity.” (Cole, 2007, p. 952). Indeed, most of the times commodification refers to intangible experiences (Cole, 2007, Grebenar, 2018), for example, rituals and events, however, it is also often seen in tangible form, such as souvenirs and clothing. Although commodification is perceived mostly as phenomenon of nowadays, it is important to mention that its roots are thought to be as early as Christian pilgrimages where people would take something that belonged to a saint (Swanson and Timothy, 2012). Up to this day souvenirs are the most noticeable act of tourist consumption and brings lots of profit.

As seen in the figure from (Swanson and Timothy, 2012), the relationships between tourist and supplier interfere. For example, as referred to tourist commodities, these are souvenirs and other things that tourists take home as a reminder. It is important to mention that it might be

intangible (memories of events, places) and tangible such as souvenirs. However, souvenirs are

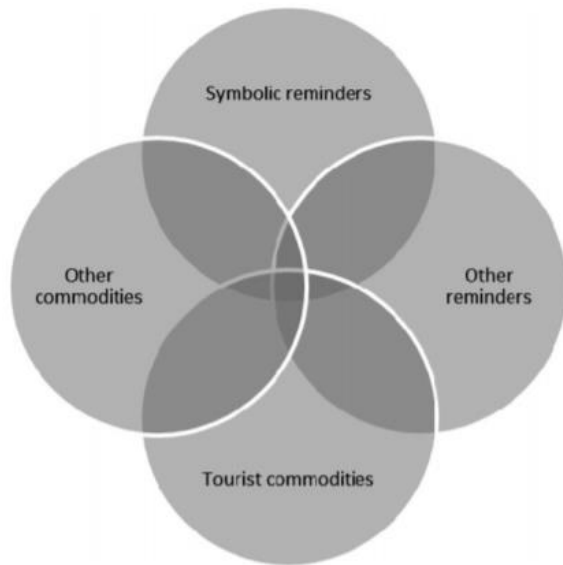


Figure 4: The classification of souvenirs. Source: Swanson and Timothy (2012).

the most common practice of tourist consumption and it also serves as a reminder of a particular place and other tourist activities. Other commodities refer to things that mainly were bought not as a souvenir but as a “forgotten item” (Swanson and Timothy, 2012). That is, for example, clothes or hygiene products that tourists may have forgotten to buy before travelling. Consequently, those things are brought home and while being used remind of a travel experience. Here, it is important to mention that these goods are not sold as souvenirs but they are made into them

later.

In terms of dark tourism, commodification is a transformation from the disaster to mass or niche tourism sites that can accommodate tourists. Johnston’s (2011) suggestion of how a dark site is turned to commercialization is provided below. As can be seen, after the occurrence of a disaster visits to the site are perceived as a form of sadness and support. This can be referred

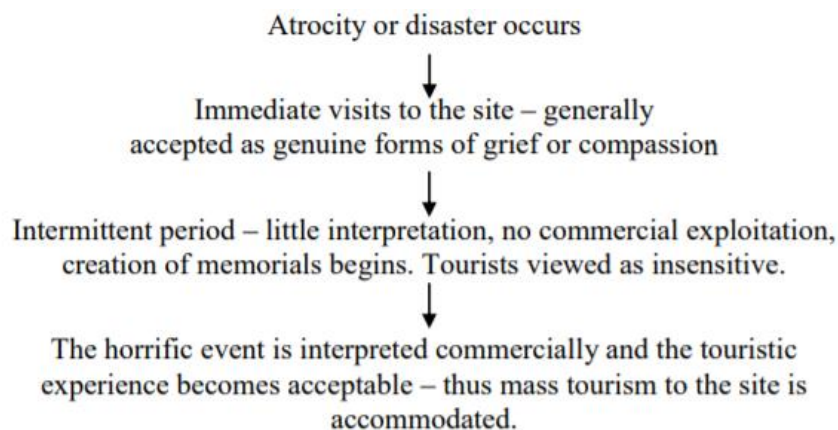


Figure 5: The construction of dark sites. Source: Johnston (2011).

mostly to Stone’s (2006) classification of dark tourism and its shades, falling to the type of dark shrines. As a reminder, dark shrines are made to places nearby the place of death. Even though they are temporary, it can be argued that they fit here

because visits to dark shrines are seen as a form of grief and are perceived to be genuine. On the third phase the site is “being prepared” for visits. Finally, either mass or niche tourism is acceptable and the site can be argued to be commodified to a certain extent. As can be seen from the figure

above and drawing on Johnston's (2011) ideas, it is evident that the researches that have been done regarding dark tourism focus more "on the construction of sites from the supply side, rather than the demand." (Johnston, 2011, p. 101).

Just like any other form of tourism, dark tourism can also be commodified, usually through souvenirs. Cave and Buda (2016) believe that souvenirs related to dark tourism give people stronger feelings than those that do not have the ties with dark tourism. That is because, overall, tourists have deeper feelings while visiting dark sites and purchasing souvenirs further enhances it. Cave and Buda (2016) also argue that souvenir-buying is a socio-cultural and emotional event because it "connects the material not only to the social, but also to the emotional and affective implications of souveniring." (Cave and Buda, 2016, p. 713). Therefore, dark tourism souvenirs serve not only as a memory of a trip but also possess a high emotional value as a reminder of a disaster. Hashimoto and Telfer (2007) draw on a term of geographically displaced authenticity that "refers to a souvenir that represents a different geographical location from the one being visited." (Hashimoto and Telfer, 2007, p. 201). Online sites such as Amazon, Ali Express and others could be argued to engage in this phenomenon due to the fact that, for example, various souvenirs can be found online and therefore, a person does not need to visit a certain site to get a souvenir related to it. As an example Chernobyl t-shirts that are sold online can be argued to be a kind of generally displaced authenticity.

In short, commodification is a culture that is turned into things that can be sold and purchased. However, it is not only intangible. Tangible items, mostly souvenirs, also are an example of commodification and play a big role in tourist consumption. They, too, can be intangible and tangible. The mass consumption of souvenirs lead to the process of kitschification that will be introduced in the following chapter.

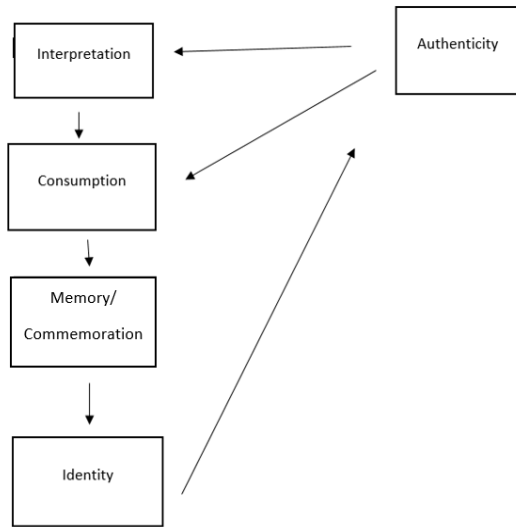
3.8. The process of kitschification and irony

The word kitsch derives from German language and is related to bad taste (Dorfles, 1969). Even though earlier it was used in the description of art, now it is used more broadly. The word kitsch can also be described as a process of making something cheap and it relates to commodification and is often associated with a lack of taste. Stone and Sharpley (2009) note that

kitsch can be associated with childhood and unsophisticated taste (Stone and Sharpley, 2009). As in the case of dark tourism kitschification is well seen in souvenirs and is met with lots of „moral criticism“ (Potts, 2012). It is because various souvenirs reduce the scale of disaster by making it look less serious. Potts (2012) describes people who are drawn to kitsch as „the worst of all consumers: unthinking and incap“ (Potts, 2012, p. 238). Various souvenirs serve as a reminder of one's journey and are entertaining, however, their purpose of informing or telling the story of a dark tourism site are doubtful. This way, with the help of souvenirs, the history is transformed into a tourist attraction and touristic attributes.

On the contrary, it could be argued that souvenirs are as a „coping mechanism“ for people to deal with the stress and that it also serves as a reminder of a disastrous event. Yet, even if this is the case, it still softens the disaster and makes it look more „comfortable“. Potts (2012) draws on Sturken's (2007) notion of „teddy-bearification“ that relates to „the development of a kitsch 'comfort culture' “(Potts, 2012, p. 234). As it was mentioned before, it can be said that souvenirs act as a soothing factor for some. The process of “teddy-bearification” poses a threat of erasing some parts of the history or even changing the history. Thus, the collective memory might also be altered.

Kitsch can be perceived as an irony or a joke (Potts, 2012) and not entirely as commodification. They are of an entertaining nature and attract people's attention so it might be argued that people are informed about the atrocities of the site to a certain extent. Yet, it is still questionable whether tourists are actually informed through the souvenirs. Another question that is raised is what is the extent of this irony. The important notion here is interpretation because not only it shows the relationship of people and the site and their opinions towards it but it also is a key factor in understanding the kitschification and commodification. Since people think differently, it is clear that interpretations of the same destination and experiences there differ as well. That means that history can also be altered according to different people and their interpretations. As in the figure, consumption influences the creation of identity and the identity



*Figure 6: Interpretation and authenticity in dark tourism.
Source: Sharpley and Stone (2009).*

itself creates an authenticity. It is important to mention that the consumption of dark tourism is not solely based on factors of remembrance and commemoration because some people engage in dark tourism to confront their fear of death, for example. As can be seen from the figure as well, there are links between authenticity and interpretation and authenticity and consumption. Interpretation is a key factor there and depending on it dark tourism sites can be perceived differently: for example, if interpreted appropriately, the experience of the tourist will be meaningful

and important to him but if the site is interpreted in a misleading way then the tourist can be argued to not have understood the essence of the dark tourism site and therefore, did not understand the tragedy and atrocities that have happened there. In the first case a person gets not only a dark tourism experience – the appropriate interpretation serves as a tool to a better understanding. In the second case with the misleading interpretation not only does a person not understand the essence of the site but also the misleading interpretation is like an obstacle which corrupts the experience (Sharpley and Stone, 2009).

In conclusion, this chapter was meant to introduce the research that has been done in regards of dark tourism. Drawing on theories of commodification, kitschification and authenticity the case of Chernobyl will be analyzed further.

4. Analysis. Dark tourism in Chernobyl

4.1. Introduction to Chernobyl and Pripyat

There is probably no one who has not heard of 26th April 1986 Chernobyl disaster. It is, by far, one of the biggest nuclear and technology disasters in the mankind. Chernobyl power

plant was located in Northern Ukraine near the city of Pripjat, close to border with Belarus and approximately 133 kilometres away from the capital Kyiv. It happened “as an accident during an experiment allegedly due to inexperienced staff and a weak security backup system.” (Yankovska and Hannam, 2013, p. 1) and as a result “the roof of the reactor came off due to an explosion, which soon turned into a radioactive cloud spreading over Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and most of Europe.” (Yankovska and Hannam, 2013, p. 1). Hryhorczuk (2013) argues that employees were not informed regarding the safety experiment and adds that “the Chernobyl Unit 4 reactor was scheduled to be shut down for routine maintenance on April 25, 1986” (Hryhorczuk, 2013, p. 9).

Despite of being “the third largest nuclear power producer in the world” (Potter, 1990, p.3), the Soviet Union did not have any nuclear safety laws (Yaroshinskaia, 2006). Other countries, for example United Kingdom or Unites States have had their nuclear safety laws since 1946 (Nuclear Legislation in OECD and NEA Countries, 2003; epa.gov). The Soviet Union, however, had a draft and a plan to implement safety laws two years prior to the Chernobyl disaster but it never happened (Yaroshinskaia, 2006).

Despite the fact that 50 000 people were evacuated (and later were not allowed to come back) in the following days of the explosion, the Soviets were trying to hide the incident (Hryhorczuk, 2013). It all came to light when employees at Forsmark, a second largest nuclear power plant in Sweden, noticed high levels of radiation (europarl.europa.eu). At first, they thought that Forsmark itself caused the radiation, however, after thoroughly examining the clues, it became clear that it was not Forsmark’s fault. Swedish Radiation Safety Authority was informed regarding the matter, in fact, it got news about high radioactivity from other plants as well and “they charted the course of the wind and saw that it had originated in the Southeast. Chernobyl was one of the points they plotted on the map.” (sverigesradio.se). It is important to note that:

“That day, Swedish diplomats were in touch with Moscow inquiring about whether there could have been a nuclear accident there. But the answer they got was “no”. Sweden warned that they were going to file an official alert with the International Atomic Energy Authority, and it was only then that the Soviet Union admitted that there’d been an accident at Chernobyl.”

(sverigesradio.se)

The town of Pripyat was changed drastically – from a city built especially for the workers of the power plant and their families, where the average age of the population was 26, to an abandoned area with high contamination levels and memories of the people who have lived there.

4.2. Introduction to dark tourism in Chernobyl

In 2011 Chernobyl was officially opened to tourists (Bordun and Komar, 2014). Even though many are sceptical and concerned about the radiation, the most dangerous part of visiting Chernobyl are the buildings. Since 2012 entering the buildings in Pripyat has been forbidden due to safety reasons such as the collapsing of a building and the wobbly structures of them. Charlie Tango has expressed his feelings by stating that many people “think it’s like a theme park or rollercoaster. In rollercoaster you feel like it’s dangerous but the truth is, rollercoasters are very safe. In Pripyat, in Chernobyl it’s real danger and people don’t understand this.” He continues by saying that “the problem here is in Pripyat there is very dangerous buildings, there is lots of holes in the ground.” However, despite that, some do not obey the rules and go inside the buildings. Here, the clash of opinions occurs. Jay M. says “you could easily enter any building that you wanted to” (Appendix 4, p. 112) and Tango argues that:

Maybe you already know that entering buildings has been illegal since 2012. If you’ve looked at my website or my Instagram or the group on Facebook you will see everybody goes inside buildings. But this is only possible in the small trips like I do, not in the big group trips. Because it’s just like a few people, you can hide and sneak. And you’re always trying to avoid the police and the military when they do their patrols. It would be nice for some buildings to be permitted for you to go inside. But it will never happen because it’s not safe.

(Appendix 1, p.89)

Despite the fact that Chernobyl was officially pronounced as a tourist destination in 2011, people have been visiting way before that. In the graph below a figure of visitor numbers can be seen. What needs to be emphasized is the fact that visitors were visiting before 2008 as well. That means that people were going to Chernobyl even in early 2000s. Those were usually photographers, journalists doing research on nature and so called stalkers (people who are

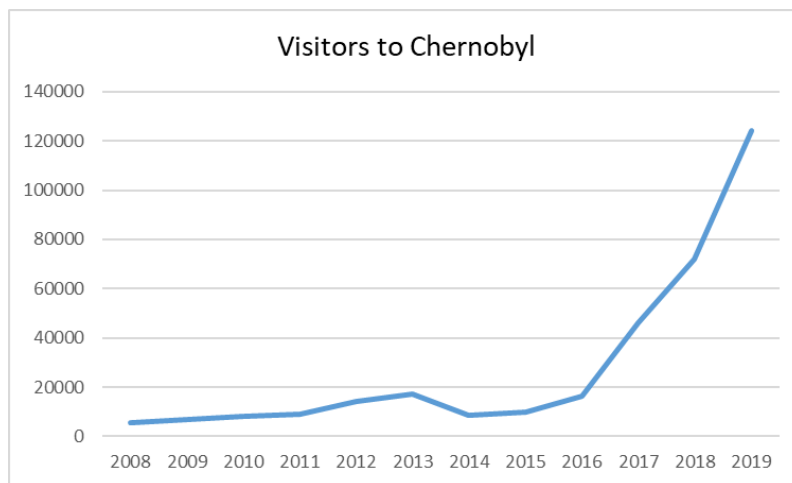


Figure 7: Tourist numbers to Chernobyl. Applied by using information from SAUEZM.

interested to see the abandoned Chernobyl). It is said that the number of visitors to Chernobyl in 2004 did not reach 1000 (Bordun and Komar, 2014). The important fact is that in June 2011 the Exclusion Zone was suspended and in September the same year the Zone was closed due to governmental disputes. It resulted in the creation of State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone

Management and in December 2011 the Zone was opened again for tourists. The newly launched agency was not only responsible for issuing the permits to visit but also for dealing with other problems such as taking care of the radioactive waste, dismantling Chernobyl nuclear disaster and supervising the construction of a New Safe Confinement (Banaskiewicz, Kruczek and Duda, 2017).

However, numbers have been growing gradually up until 2014. Then in 2014 the numbers of tourists have dropped significantly to approximately 8400. This can be explained by the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia. The dispute directly affected the numbers of tourists. Then, since 2015 the numbers have started rising again. This can be explained by the approaching 30th anniversary of the nuclear disaster. In 2016, the year of the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the numbers of tourists are said to be 17 500 tourists. The rise of tourist numbers in 2019 is related to HBO's "Chernobyl" TV series. It can be also be a consequence of a new finished sarcophagus which was completed in the same year of 2019. In conclusion, the steady growth of number of tourists is evident.

4.3. Chernobyl – a taste of toxic tourism

Pripyat, now known as a “ghost town”, town of Chernobyl and approximately 180 nearby villages were evacuated due to the explosion (Yankovska and Hannam, 2013). Despite the fact that the area is still sensitive and contaminated, old inhabitants of Chernobyl have returned to their homes and continue living there up until now. Yannitel Reinhardt (2017) argues that this is due to having trust in authorities and the feeling of belonging there. Indeed, the people who have returned to live in the area are mostly women who used to live there before the nuclear disaster. However, there are also people who are running from war in the Eastern Ukraine and as one of the inhabitants of the Chernobyl area says “radiation may kill us slowly, but it doesn’t shoot or bomb us. It’s better to live with radiation than with war.” (Bezpiatchuk, 2018). In a similar manner, tourists are also interested in visiting the site. Bordun and Komar (2014) note that in the middle of 1990s the first tourists travelled to Chernobyl. This was after the levels of radiation have fallen down.

The case of Chernobyl sparks different opinions: for example, Russian officials and media claim that Ukraine does not have enough resources to solve the social and technological problems of Chernobyl (Russia Today, 2016). At the same time, Ukrainian officials claim Chernobyl to be a safe place and express a wish to promote it as a tourist destination (Ukraine Crisis Media Center, 2016). Indeed, there are many tourism agencies that offer tours to the Chernobyl exclusion zone. One Lithuanian travel agency – Magelano keliones – provides quite a positive outlook: “Get away from daily world and feel satisfaction while walking through the streets of this abandoned city where 50 000 people have lived before the disaster.” (magelanokeliones.lt). Other agencies describe tours to Chernobyl alike: “a unique opportunity to see the remains of the nuclear power station” (justgorussia.co.uk); TourKiev.com offers not only “regular” tours but also exclusive ones. The exclusive tours are called “Private Maxi Chernobyl Tour” or “Tour Inside the Power Plant”. The first one is an extended and private tour which may last accordingly three, four or five days. The latter one invites tourists for a three or four hours long tours to the control room of second or third reactors and there is also a possibility to visit the infamous control room of the reactor 4 (TourKiev.com). Another site Chernobyl-tour.com presents Chernobyl air tour or HBO TV series “Chernobyl” tour. Chernobyl air tour has no age restriction meaning that even underage people can join the flight above the city of Pripyat and the Chernobyl

exclusion zone. HBO TV series “Chernobyl” tour offers a visit to places displayed in the series such as the basement of the Chernobyl nuclear plant, the fire department, the hospital, the bridge from which, as shown in the series, people watched at the fire coming from the power plant. The tour also provides an opportunity to “ride in an armored patrol vehicle, in which the liquidators in 1986 made a radiation reconnaissance” and “try a real lunch of power plant employees in the canteen of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant” (Chernobyl-tour.com).

The conclusion might be drawn saying that most of the people come to Chernobyl because of an adventure but Nikolai Fomin (Appendix 3, p. 102) gives quite a different opinion stating that people that come to Chernobyl are “all different age, different, like a social position, you know, mainly it is a common, like the majority of our guests. They are about 30-40 years old. And they're mostly men.”. Drawing on his personal experience he claims that:

there are a couple of things they're interested in, for example, the history. Because the place has a very unique, unfortunately sad but very if you like famous story, so it attracts people. Also, it's quite an amazing nature reserve itself, I mean the area. So it attracts people who like to observe nature, wildlife and so on. There are many people who come with the purpose of photography. So, I mean, starting with the hobby photographers, people, just for fun and ending with a high end class photographers that actually make international exhibitions and print photo books

(Appendix 3, p. 102)

Going back to the theory, Yankovska and Hannam (2013) share their findings stating that there are two groups of Chernobyl tourists. They describe the first group as a fun-seeking, young people up until the age of 28 who visit the site of Chernobyl mostly because of “fun, fear and thrill” (Yankovska and Hannam, 2013, p. 6). It can be argued that among those people are also the ones that are interested in toxic tourism. The second group consists of people who are over 28 years old and their primary reason behind the visit is remembrance. They are mostly the old inhabitants of Pripyat or other people that were touched by the tragedy directly. Similarly, Hutchings and Linden (2018) argue that Chernobyl and its tourism can be perceived in different ways: for example, “as a medical and financial crisis, a tale of government mismanagement, a warning to humanity or an ecological success story.” (Hutchings and Linden, 2018, p. 210).



Figure 8: Reasons for visiting Chernobyl. Made from the data gathered on the survey.

Drawing on a conducted online survey the average age of people who went to Chernobyl is 36 years old. This resonates with the experiences of Nikolai Fomin. In addition, the findings echo the ones that Yankovska and Hannam have made because, according to an online survey, the most popular reason to go to Chernobyl is interest in abandoned places and that falls into “fun, fear and thrill” factor described by them. With a slight difference interest in

history and heritage ranks at second place proving the point of Fomin.

4.4. Authenticity in case of Chernobyl

Drawing on theory of authenticity it can be said that Chernobyl possesses traits of objective, constructed and existential genuineness. Because of the tragedy that took place there it is an actual evidence of Chernobyl being authentic. Chernobyl is a back stage of a nuclear disaster that serves as a time machine. According to MacCannell’s (1973) idea Chernobyl and the authenticity of it can be perceived as a stage 4 – a back stage that is open for tourists. Here, the quote of Tango can be used: “You don’t come to Chernobyl to go in a hot tub and a spa and have a massage in a hotel” (Appendix 1, p.82). The conclusion can be drawn that since the hotel is simple and with the basic facilities only, it prevents the site of being touristified in a way.

If viewed from a constructed point of view, the site can be both authentic and inauthentic. Depending on the tourists’ views the site is understood differently: some might think that due to the fact that the nuclear disaster happened there, the site is authentic, others, however, can argue that since tourists are allowed, the site cannot be fully genuine. One respondent of the survey wrote that “people are moving things to manipulate photos and not representing the

reality.”. In this case, it is evident that the authenticity is corrupted. Jay M. (Appendix 6, p. 127) had a different point of view and described his experiences as follows:

Staying overnight allowed us to fully explore Chernobyl Exclusion Zone without having to rush and visit all the landmarks in one day. I suppose it would have been different if we didn't stay at a hotel because the abandoned area is actually quite huge and tour guide had a lot of stories to tell. There is a lot of history (and mystery) behind this place, therefore spending several days is recommended. Like I said before, the fact that you can actually stay overnight is a game changer, gives you a much darker experience, at least this was my case. If I have to elaborate on that more I can say that it had a huge impact on my trip, I mean made me feel like I was having a stronger experience. Like going to Chernobyl is already a big deal but staying there overnight is even a bigger deal you know.

Moving on to existential authenticity, it occurs when there is self-realization and participation in various activities involved. In case of Chernobyl it can be argued that while engaging in tours people experience authenticity. During such an adventure a person might come to terms with his mortality, for example. Furthermore, Asa D. experienced authenticity while talking with local people in the Chernobyl area and eating the food that they made: “we eat food of the family and we eat food from the ground. [...] Because here where they live they have no radiation.” (Appendix 5, p. 120). Tango says that due to his interest in “urban exploration of abandoned buildings and cities”, Chernobyl “was like somewhere I had to visit.” (Appendix 1, p. 80). Similarly, Simone B. argues that “my interest sparked after I saw some documentaries about it many years ago, when I was still a child. I think I always had some love for Chernobyl story. The reason that led me there? I went there to see with my eyes what is Chernobyl exclusion zone, and what it means to be in an entirely abandoned city” (Appendix 7, p. 129). He also expresses that dark tourism is “almost a religion” (Appendix 7, p. 129) for him. Therefore, just like for Tango, Chernobyl was something that needed to be visited. It can be seen from these examples that both of the interviewees view their experiences as an ultimate experience due to the fact that they had felt that this was the peak of dark tourism and its authenticity. As for Asa D., she has also had an authentic experience due to the fact that she engaged in an activity that was not usual. It is argued

by Taylor (2001) that “as a general rule, the more structured the event and the shorter the visit, the less opportunity tourists have to make “sincere” contact with local communities.” (Taylor, 2001, p. 15). Asa D. said that she did not know that she would meet the locals so drawing on Taylor’s ideas it can be said that the visit was unstructured and unplanned and since she “spoke so much” (Appendix 5, p. 120) with the locals, her experience can be said to be sincere and therefore authentic. As argued by Wang (1999), “people feel they themselves are much more authentic and more freely self-expressed than in everyday life, not because they find the toured objects are authentic but simply because they are engaging in nonordinary activities, free from the constraints of the daily.” (Wang, 1999, p.351-352). It matches well with Asa D.’s, Tango’s and Simone B.’s feelings as well. By going to Chernobyl they found themselves in unusual environment and since they had been wanting to go there, they experienced self-realisation by finally doing so.

Like it was mentioned before, negotiation I is a balance between objective and constructed authenticity. Here objectivity means that the site is proved to be genuine (because it is an actual site of the nuclear disaster), yet, at the same time it is corrupted to a certain extent with the souvenirs such as keychains, t-shirts, fridge magnets and others. The place itself stays authentic and real but the representation of it is rather not. Cohen (1988) argues that certain intellectual individuals look at authenticity more seriously than others, therefore, their criteria for authentic things are higher. In the conducted survey the majority of people said that, for example, a t-shirt with a wolf and a writing of “radioactive wolf of Chernobyl” seemed inappropriate: “Silly t-shirt and no one who ever read about Chernobyl would wear it.”; “I think it is insensitive. If they make t-shirts at least they should make it sensitively. I don’t know, maybe put a nuclear power plant there and write something like “never forget”? “. Someone else has shared an opinion that “if you want to make money out of tourism, sell books about the event or even postcards so other people can see what it looked like before or how it currently looks. That’s informative at least.”. It can be seen from these examples that most of the people do not identify t-shirts and other souvenirs as authentic. Simone B. confesses he feels that authenticity in Chernobyl is being challenged:

When I have been there, in 2016, Chernobyl was surely authentic, but I use to see that tourism was slowly spreading in there... I’m pretty sure that if I should come back this summer, I would be deluded, because I’m sure I would find the most expensive prices, more people and maybe also more fake things, such as reconstructed or restructured houses, just to show them to the people. Like a kind

of “Las Vegas of abandoned cities”. It should be preserved more, but as it is, just natural, for the next generation, to never forget the heavy lesson.
(Appendix 7, p. 130)

He also adds that “when I was there, there was only a very little shop, selling basic necessities, and merchandising was almost zero. I remember that my friend took a couple of beers for the rest of the trip and he bought a shirt with the name of the city. I don’t remember any other merchandising shop.” (Appendix 7, p. 132).

Revilla and Dodd (2003) state that sometimes producers make their goods look authentic and exclusively found only in the particular place. It could be argued to be the case of Chernobyl. Even though some souvenirs such as badges, commemorative coins, fridge magnets and such can be found to be purchased online on sites like Amazon, Ali Express and similar, it does not hold any power connected to the tourism experience because people who did not even go there can buy it. It is also important to mention that even though souvenirs serve as a reminder of a trip most of the times, it can form interpersonal relationships as well and not be tourism-related at all. For example, if a person goes to Chernobyl, purchases a souvenir there and later gives it to a friend, a souvenir does not revive memories of the place simply because he did not go there. Rather, it enhances the relationship between the giver (the tourist) and the receiver (the friend). In this case, even though the souvenir was bought in Chernobyl and can be said to be authentic to a certain extent, it loses its authenticity due to the fact that the receiver does not hold any memory of Chernobyl experience.

4.5. Commodification of Chernobyl

Souvenirs are inseparable part of travelling. As Fomin argues “when I go somewhere, I always buy some fridge magnets.” (Appendix 3, p. 107). Souvenirs can also be found in places such as Chernobyl and other places associated with dark tourism. That creates tensions between the managers and the consumers. It can be also called a clash of profit and ethics. According to Tango, Chernobyl has become:

like a tourist attraction. You’ve seen the Chernobyl ice cream. [...] They sell condoms that glow in the dark. [...] They make it tacky, like Disneyland. If you

come to the Zone you will see they have gift shops where you can buy t-shirts and it's... It's not good. This is over-commercialization. Not because visiting is a bad thing but because they don't care about teaching or... They don't care if people learn something.

(Appendix 1, p. 86)

The lack of education and the provided information regarding Chernobyl is emphasized. Besides that, Tango stresses the negative impact of souvenirs to the destination.

Jay M. looks at it from another perspective:

I saw some souvenirs. But it personally did not make me feel uncomfortable. But I understand why for some people it would. Obviously there are so many people who have negative associations with his place. And might experience PTSD maybe or things like that, but I'm personally not against the souvenirs. You can literally find souvenirs being sold at 9/11 Memorial in New York City or in places in Berlin. So I think it's okay to sell souvenirs.

(Appendix 4, p. 113)

Jay M. also expresses that:

I did buy several souvenirs, despite them being a bit overpriced. I've seen some before and some of them seemed quite odd and even insensitive (e.g. mutated Matryoshka dolls), but I believe there is nothing wrong with the fridge magnets or postcards that are being sold there. I mean literally every place sells them. So I guess it's a normal practice but everything has its limits.

(Appendix 6, p. 127)

Nowadays, as many tourist sites can be seen on television, people perceive souvenirs as an inseparable part of tourist experience and purchase them in order “to show national and cosmopolitan solidarity with the dead and to confirm the ‘reality’ (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p. 21). Jay M. provides examples of other dark destinations and says that souvenirs are being sold there as well and that is an international phenomenon. Unlike Tango, he does not feel that souvenirs are a negative factor on tourism itself because it is intertwined with tourism experience. This view

resonates with Swanson and Timothy's (2012). The authors call buying souvenirs a "routine activity" of tourists (Swanson and Timothy, 2012, p. 489). However, some individuals might react to Chernobyl souvenirs more harshly or sensitively than others, especially if they had a direct past with it (those might be the liquidators, the old inhabitants of Pripjat and neighbouring villages) especially when it comes to souvenirs as Jay M.'s stated mutated Matryoshka dolls.

Simone B. hesitates that souvenirs are "maybe a little bit" of a commodification. He states that: "I don't judge them. A lot of people living in Ukraine are not very rich, so if they can make money in that way, good for them." (Appendix 7, p. 132). His expressed view regarding souvenirs and commodification is often an ethical dispute of tourism researchers as well as tourism managers and tourists themselves. As Cave and Buda (2018) puts that: there is "a tension of economic opportunities to earn income with difficult choices about whether sales diminish the significance of the dark event by miniaturization and symbolism." (Cave and Buda, 2018, p. 720). Simone B. acknowledges that souvenirs might be a sign of commodification, yet, feels empathy towards local people and can be said to be feeling torn between these two factors to a certain extent.

Gary I. describes his experience in Chernobyl in regards with souvenirs by saying that:

Basically, when okay, well, I came up Chernobyl I bought like obviously like some fridge magnets. Before we left there I bought two fridge magnets, I bought like obviously like a gas mask [...] And basically I bought a hat as well. I bought the Chernobyl hat like with a logo one and like, obviously I bought a bag as well. So I did buy a few souvenir things from there.

(Appendix 2, p. 95)

Similarly, Fomin argues that: "For some people, it's just a nice piece of memory they can take with them. So I think there is nothing bad in that. And if people like to send postcards from Chernobyl or buy a little memory, I think that's a great thing." (Appendix 3, p. 106). Fomin's view resembles the one that Jay M. expressed since they both do not identify Chernobyl souvenirs as being a bad impact to the destination. Gary I.'s example supports the idea of Swanson and Timothy (2012) who argued that buying souvenirs is a typical activity for tourists. Furthermore, the ideas of Fomin and Gary I. align with Swanson's (2004) who has stated that "the purchase of

a souvenir by a tourist serves as tangible way of capturing or suspending in time an otherwise

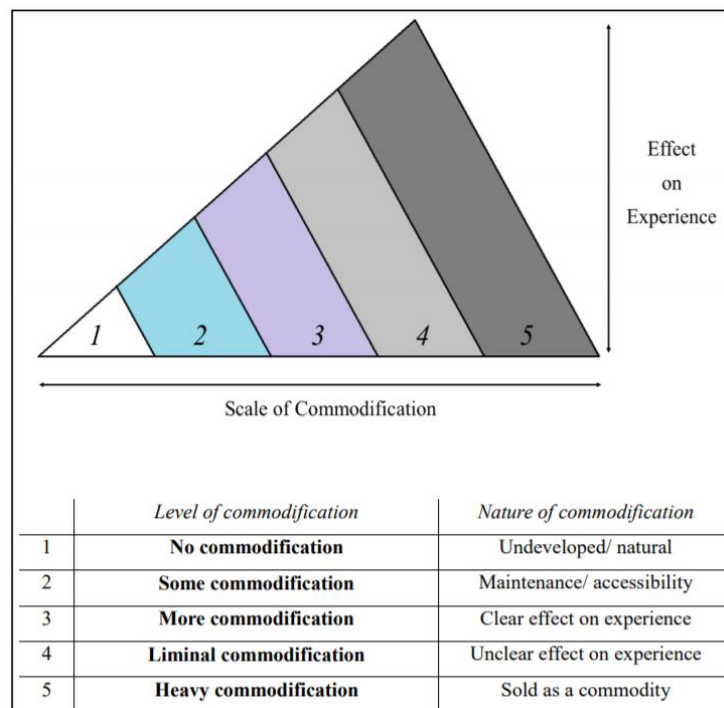


Figure 9: Relationship between commodification and the tourist experience. Source: Grebenar (2018).

is dependent on the level of commodification. The more the site is commodified, the more impact it has on tourist experience. In case of Chernobyl the accommodation can be perceived as a part of this process because it lets tourists stay inside the Exclusion Zone at night, that way enhancing their involvement and experiences. There are 3 hotels in the Exclusion Zone in total. Asa D. who has stayed at the hotel in Chernobyl for 2 nights says that “of course it is different because this is a special place.” (Appendix 5, p. 118) and does not mention commodification. Similarly, Jay M. said that he and his friends “actually spent one night in Desyatka hotel” and shared his views:

One of many reasons why most tourists visit Chernobyl is the desire to immerse themselves in a dark historic environment, therefore living in a hotel which has a “creepy vibe” (i.e. poor WiFi, strange food, barely working showers) could possibly add some charm to their experience and make it feel more authentic. When people go to Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, they do not expect to find comfort in the first place.

(Appendix 6, p. 127)

intangible experience.” (Swanson, 2004, p. 363). By selling souvenirs the place can be more up-to-date and therefore, make the tourist more interested and involved (Cave and Buda, 2016).

Moving on, commodification manifests not only in souvenirs but also in overall tourist experience. The scale of commodification is provided (Grebenar, 2018). Judging from the figure it can be said that the effect of commodification on tourist experiences

However, he does not identify the emergence of hotels as commodification. According to him, “commodification is a bold statement!” (Appendix 6, p. 128). He continues explaining:

What I think about commodification is this, if they opened a hotel in Chernobyl, called it i.e. Atomic or Nuclear, staff wore hazard suits or masks, reception phones were shaped and coloured yellow to resemble Geiger counters, that would be what we call commodification. But now there are just nice, quiet hotels. They are simple and the only difference from other hotels outside of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone is that they are located in that Zone.

(Appendix 6, p. 128)

This view mismatches the ideas of Grebenar (2018) who argues that all touristic factors allowing tourist experiences to happen combine and form the process of commodification. The author also argues that the touristic factors such as infrastructure, marketing and such are vital in the way of how tourists experience the site. To sum up, Chernobyl is an authentic place, however, like any other destination due to increasing tourist numbers it faces commodification. Fyall and Wanhill (2008) argue that gift shops and other facilities made for tourists are “often diluting the ‘purity’ of the attraction product, but they are essential for meeting the requirements of the average visitor.” (Fyall and Wanhill, 2008, p. 314). While it is true that Chernobyl is being commodified, judging from the interviewees’ quotes it can be said that it does not really affect the tourist experiences.

4.6. Kitsch of Chernobyl

Kitschification can be perceived as a consequence of commodification (Grebenar, 2018). In case of Chernobyl there are many examples of kitschification: Chernobyl ice cream, canned air, vodka, Geiger counters to measure radiation levels, fridge magnets, t-shirts. All of these souvenirs are entertaining but it is doubtful if they tell the story of the Chernobyl disaster. Jay M. claims that “I actually believe is just a gift shop trying to make some money.” (Appendix 4, p. 115). Similarly, in the previous chapter it was said that Tango describes this process as “over-commercialization” (Appendix 1, p. 86) stating that some companies care only about the profit.

This kitschification can also be perceived as an irony or a joke and not purely as a commodification and should not be taken too seriously. If this is the case, it is then unknown what is the extent of the irony and a question whether the story of the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl can be told through it.

The kitschification of Chernobyl might be perceived not necessarily as a commodification, it could be argued that the souvenirs, as controversial as they might be, actually tell the story. For example, maybe the Chernobyl ice cream is meant to explain that the food in Chernobyl (vegetables, fruits, various crops, milk and more) were contaminated and radioactive or another instance – maybe Chernobyl vodka can be seen as a symbol of a revived nature and its triumph (Chernobyl vodka is made from the grains grown in the Exclusion Zone and then distilled, scientists have said that vodka is safe to drink). If souvenirs are perceived this way then the kitschification might as well be perceived as a process of telling the Chernobyl story. However, none of the interviewees said that, in their opinion, souvenirs tell the story of Chernobyl.

Tango argues that:

There are many different types of people who visit Chernobyl. Some people are already... Some people are interested in the abandoned buildings and exploring and being on the rooftop in an empty city. Some people are interested in nuclear power and will want to get the special permission to go inside of the reactor buildings and inside the power plant. But there are also people who... They just want to take a selfie for Facebook. They just want some Instagram pictures.

(Appendix 1, p. 80)

In a similar manner, Fomin states that one of the main reasons why people visit Chernobyl is “just a curiosity” (Appendix 3, p. 102). He also mentions that the place “attracts people who like to observe nature, wildlife and so on. There are many people who come with the purpose of photography.” (Appendix 3, p. 102) and that “mainly it's history. It's just a common interest.” (Appendix 3, p. 102). His thought regarding social media and Chernobyl tourism resonates with Tangos' ideas: “They just want to spend time some and they just go to the Chernobyl Zone and then take some pictures, put it on the social media. There are many bloggers as well that come to make some video reports and just take beautiful footage. So it's rather popular too.” (Appendix 3, p. 103). Simone B. says that “I think people visit Chernobyl because that kind of places are very fascinating and attracting. It's the irresistible instinct of something Unknown,

mysterious and dangerous. If something is partly prohibited, I absolutely want that” (Appendix 7, p. 129). Drawing on his own experience he mentions that he and his friends “often visit abandoned places, such as churches, factories and asylums. Chernobyl is probably the world top destination for dark tourism lovers. I also like to explore contented territories, all over the world, especially in Eastern Europe, such as Kosovo, Crimea or Abcasia, but this is more a political issue.” (Appendix 7, p. 129). As for Asa D., her “interest in Ukraine and Chernobyl has been very long time and the accident triggered it more.” (Appendix 5, p. 125). This was due to Ukrainian sportsmen that she knew. As can be seen from these examples, people visit Chernobyl for various reasons and that also shapes how they are perceiving their experiences.

Interpretation then leads to consumption – the way how Chernobyl is used. The latter “use” Chernobyl not just as a tourist experience but also as an emotional and spiritual experience and the ones who go there only for the pictures themselves deny a chance to get a better understanding and therefore, they might not receive the same experience. Rather, their experience can be a little bit distorted and corrupted. It is clear that interpretation is extremely important in experiencing the site. According to the interpretation, tourism site is perceived and felt. Tilden (1977) argues that the goal of interpretation is not only to inform but also to provoke. The souvenirs found in Chernobyl, for example, are really provoking and with this, it can be argued that the essence of them lies in the wish to provoke and shock people and to make them not forget the nuclear disaster.

As argued by Potts (2012), souvenirs soothe individuals. In some cases they can even serve as an aid in order to come to terms with the disastrous events. However, this creates a process called “teddy-bearification” that can cause the development of kitsch as a “comfort culture” (Potts, 2012). It is important to mention that none of the interviewees or participants of the survey expressed similar views. For them, souvenirs were either a reminder of the trip (Fomin), a source of profit (Jay M., Simone B.) or a sign of commodification (Tango).

Commodification and kitschification is a threat to all of the destinations, however, it hits dark tourism sites the hardest. It is due to the fact that the latter are already complicated because of their relation to deaths, disasters and other atrocities. Commodification and kitschification make a dark tourism site even more contraversional. Chernobyl deals with the great amount of kitschification and commodification as well. Both the commodification and kitschification have impact on people’s interpretation of Chernobyl and therefore it also influences the tourist

experience, understanding and memory of the disaster. It can be argued, however, that kitsch souvenirs are a way of dealing with the Chernobyl disaster. People who buy them, for example, a magnet can be said to be reminded of the disaster on the daily basis. Therefore, souvenirs can be argued to be not just kitsch but also a coping mechanism to process the disaster and its consequences. Yet, with the site as sensitive as Chernobyl it should be thought very carefully whether souvenirs such as t-shirts and magnets are an appropriate way to serve as the reminder. Books and photo collections of before-after might be a better solution because of their educational nature.

4.7. Interpretation in terms of Chernobyl tourism

Interpretation plays a vital role in how individuals perceive the phenomenon of Chernobyl tourism. As argued by Sharpley and Stone (2009) the appropriate interpretation of a dark site results in the creation of a meaningful tourist experience, whereas the misleading interpretation is said to be a failed attempt at understanding the atrocities that took place there. It is important to mention that in the first case a tourist not only gets a better tourist experience but also gains understanding of the disasters that happened there. According to Fomin:

I heard these opinions that some people call it dark tourism. Whatever. I probably disagree on this. Because it really depends on the guide. Because when you get to see for the first time, you see it through your guide, you know, so it really depends how do you present history and the value of all this. So, I would say it's rather educational tourism.

(Appendix 3, p. 105)

Firstly, he contradicts the fact that Chernobyl is related to dark tourism and provides his own definition of Chernobyl tourism: "it's not actually classic tourism. There are many restrictions you need to follow. There are many rules and you need to comply with them because that's your safety. So I would not call it classic tourism, but again, it's more like adventure tourism and education." (Appendix 3, p. 105). It is clear that Fomin sees Chernobyl as rather educational tourism. In his opinion, the guide serves as a mediator between tourists and Chernobyl and plays a very important role in how people interpret the site. This matches with Sharpley and Stone (2009) in a way. Both Sharpley and Stone (2009) and Fomin agree that in order to get a deeper experience people need to interpret the place in a correct way, in case of Chernobyl that is not forgetting the

nuclear disaster victims and people who had to leave their homes due to the spread radiation. Fomin argues further:

I try to educate people as much as I can and I try to pay a lot of respect to the place itself. Because, yeah, it's a sad, very sad event that unfortunately took place 34 years ago but at the same time, we need to learn from it. And I always tell people to treat the place with respect. And don't, you know, make fun of it. And then so far it works. I mean, normally, if you try to tell people, the historical facts and all other details, it really works and people get engaged and people take it as a history lesson.

(Appendix 3, p. 105)

However, Asa D. does not completely agree with it:

Many people, he said to me, it is many people who come and I stopped to speak with them about what have happened and everything around and they don't want to listen. They don't want to listen, they only asked me to go so they can do photo. That I think it is sad. Because I am very interested in the history of Chernobyl and Ukraine.

(Appendix 5, p. 119)

By saying he, Asa D. means the guide. So here there are two different interpretations of Chernobyl. The first one as described by Fomin is consistent with Sharpley and Stone's (2009) appropriate interpretation. Fomin identifies the guide as the link between Chernobyl and the tourists whose main function is to provide the appropriate interpretation. An example provided by Asa D. is the opposite as she talks about people who just want to take a picture. Drawing on Sharpley and Stone (2009) it can be said to be a misleading interpretation and therefore, it results in people not understanding the essence of Chernobyl and they do not understand the atrocities of it as well. To sum up, interpretation plays an essential role in the perception of Chernobyl and even more than that – the way that people act and how they comprehend the processes of commodification and kitschification.

4.8. Results of the survey

As it was mentioned previously, the majority of respondents were females (57.8%). In total, there were 39 different nationalities listed in the survey with the majority of them being Lithuanians, followed by British and Americans. All other nationalities were listed mostly 1 or 2 times. The graph of nationalities can be seen below.

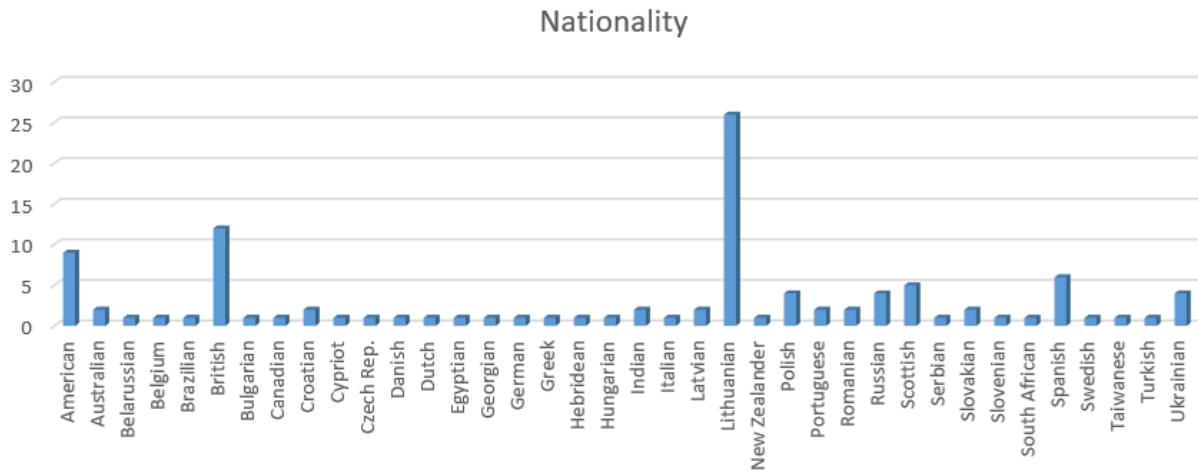


Figure 10: Nationalities of the respondents. Made from data gathered on the survey.

Since Chernobyl is a dissonant heritage of Ukraine and has affected many countries, the nationality was an important factor in order to analyze how respondents look at Chernobyl and its tourism.

4.8.1. Familiarity with dark tourism

The second section was made in order to examine to what extent people are familiar with dark tourism. Most of the respondents (62.4%) said they are familiar with dark tourism and 21.1% and 16.5% respectively said that they either do not know anything about dark tourism or are not sure about that. The later survey was divided into 2 parts according to people's responses. Those who said that they are familiar with dark tourism or were hesitant were asked to provide some examples of dark tourism sites, whereas those who replied negatively did not get that and the later questions regarding dark tourism and were immediately directed to the section about Chernobyl. Almost all of those that were asked to name some instances of dark tourism sites have listed Chernobyl and Auschwitz concentration camps. Fukushima, Hiroshima and 9/11 Memorial

Museum were mentioned quite a lot as well. Madden (2019) states that 9/11 Memorial, Auschwitz, Hiroshima Peace Memorial and Chernobyl are among the most popular dark tourism sites. As mentioned by Stone and Sharpley (2008), Seaton and Lennon (2004) argue that due to the coverage of dark tourism sites, the individuals' interest in them is ignited. Drawing a conclusion from this, it can be said that people are familiar with the most popular sites because of the media.

Reasons for visiting a dark tourism site

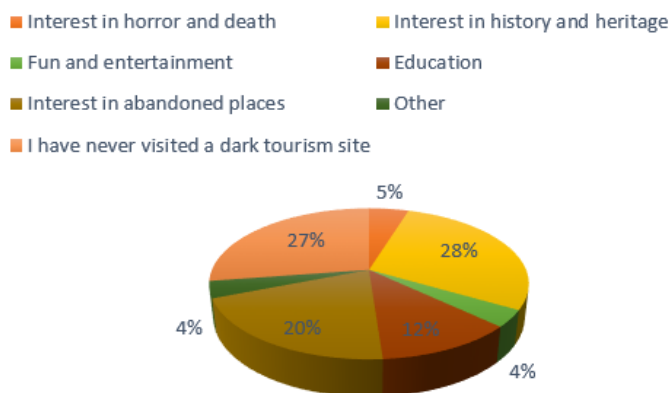


Figure 11: Reasons for visiting dark sites. Made from data gathered on the survey.

Having in mind that the majority of respondents were Lithuanians, there were quite a few dark tourism sites mentioned that are located there. For example, KGB Museum in Vilnius, a Cold War Museum (used to be a Soviet missile base), Grutas park (a Soviet statue park). An abandoned former Soviet military city of Skrunda (that in a way resembles Chernobyl due to the abandoned buildings and is also called a ghost town of Latvia) was also mentioned a few times. More than half of the respondents (54,7%) confirmed they have visited a dark tourism site and 32,2% and 8,1% respectively said they have never visited such a place or were not sure if they ever did. To better illustrate the motivations of visits to dark tourism places a figure below can be seen. It is evident that, opposing to researchers such as Seaton and Lennon (2004) assuming that dark tourism sites are primarily visited for reasons related to death, the actual number of those visits make up only 5%. The most popular reasons of visiting are interest in history and heritage and rather unexplored interest in abandoned places. That resonates greatly with the views shared Tango and Fomin. Moving on, 27% of respondents said they have never been to a dark site. That can be explained by the fact that although dark tourism is popular, it is a niche tourism and the associations that it has might make this kind of tourism seem unattractive to some. That is evident because of the fact that dark tourism is often met with descriptions such as “immoral” or “unethical”. Called “abnormal leisure” (Rojek, 1999) or “deviant leisure” (Stone, 2013), dark tourism is perceived as an activity that goes against the moral

norms of the society. Similarly, on the survey it was mentioned that “some people seeking this type of destination (but not all) could hide some sort of mental instability, which shouldn’t be promoted and encouraged.”. It is clear that the respondent identifies dark tourism as abnormal or deviant leisure.

Coming back to the results of the survey, education is a main reason for visiting dark tourism sites for 12% of respondents and fun and entertainment and other reasons each make up 4%.

Ethics is inseparable notion that follows dark tourism. For this reason on the same section a question regarding ethics was asked. In order to get a better understanding of people’s opinions whether dark tourism is ethical or not, respondents were asked to provide their thoughts. After having analyzed the answers, some evident topics emerged. Firstly, the respondents emphasized the importance of acting respectfully. For example, some of the respondents wrote that it is ethical to visit dark tourism sites “if you pay respect and just watch” and “if you are respectful then yes – but I’ve seen people taking selfies in Auschwitz gas chambers and that is not cool.”. Another commentator has voiced the same opinion stating that:

I think it is important history is told. That being said, there is a right and wrong way to visit these places. When I went to Auschwitz there were people taking selfies in front of the wall where people were murdered. It was disgusting behavior. I think if you do visit dark tourism sites you have to understand the tragedy that occurred and act accordingly and respectfully.

Moving forward, the majority of respondents said that there are ethical and unethical ways to visit dark sites. One of the respondents wrote that “I think that every place in the world can be visited, it’s not a question of ethics. In contrary, doing something while visiting any dark tourism site might be ethical or non-ethical”. Other people shared similar opinions as below:

I think visiting itself is, as you are making sure these events and people who suffered are not forgotten, and by informing yourself and spreading the word, you can contribute to ensuring we learn from these events and that they never happen again. However, one should be informed well-enough before visiting these sites so they

know how to behave appropriately. What I think is far less ethical is posing for pictures at such sites.

I guess it really depends on the purpose of your visit and how mature you are. If you visit these sites because you're making a research or you're just deeply interested in it and behave properly at such sites, then yes, why not? But if you visit such sites because it's "cool" or "popular" and take selfies of yourself smiling in front of concentration camp (actual case), then no, that's definitely not ethical.

Here, respondents acknowledge not only the importance of respect but motivations for visiting as well. This was a reoccurring theme throughout the survey and another respondent agrees that "it depends on your motivation. If being interested in history and bringing enough respect for those places it can be.". Yet another commentator mentioned that it is ethical to visit a dark site "as long as you respect the site and its history and don't treat it like a trip to Disney world".

4.8.2. Chernobyl

The third section of questions was about Chernobyl. The goal was to examine how well the respondents are familiar with the phenomenon of dark tourism in Chernobyl. 98,2% of people have heard about Chernobyl and 93,6% have also heard about tourism there while 2 people (1,8%) did not know Chernobyl and 6,4% were not familiar with the phenomenon of Chernobyl tourism. 2 people that did not know Chernobyl were from United States and India. There is no explanation here such as why. It could be argued that maybe it is due to young age and the fact that maybe it did not affect them directly and was only seen in history textbooks. Another reason of why it is that those people did not know about Chernobyl is that United States and India are far away. Still, these are only speculations since no clear explanation can be provided for this.

The larger part of respondents have not visited Chernobyl and 21,1% of remaining did. Like it was said before, dark tourism is a niche tourism and even though it is quite popular, there are many questions regarding ethics and in case of Chernobyl – a lot of fears of safety and

radiation so it can explain why Chernobyl was visited only by the smaller part of respondents. Respondents who have not visited Chernobyl had more negative opinions towards the souvenirs that will be presented later. Those who have been to Chernobyl split between thoughts that

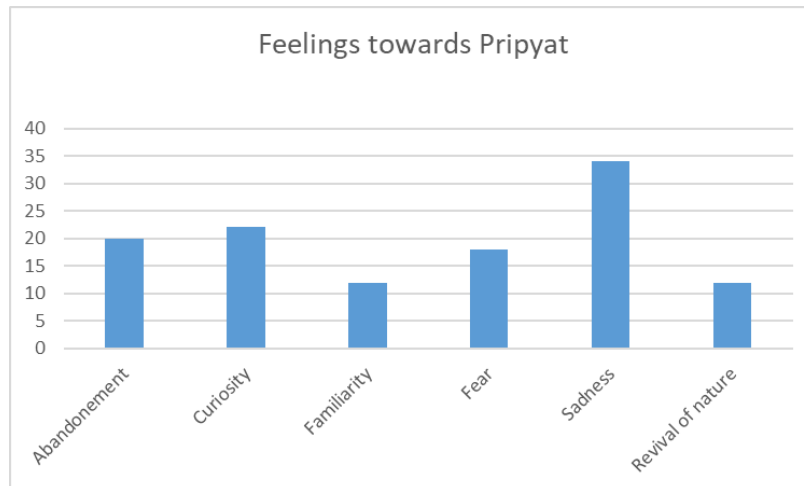


Figure 12: Feelings toward Pripyat. Made from data gathered on the survey.

souvenirs are humorous and fine and they are looked at as profit for locals and the opinions depicting souvenirs as a commodification, nonsense and some wrote that the souvenirs invoked anger. Later on, people were asked to describe 5 pictures in total. First one was a collage of 4 pictures from Pripyat and the others –

souvenirs. The most emergent themes while reacting to the first picture are shown in the graph. Researchers such as Krakover (2005), Baldwin and Sharpley (2009) argue that the most common emotions while visiting a dark tourism site are sadness, horror, anger and grief. Disgust and shock are also described as feelings related to dark sites (Podoshen, 2018, Martini and Buda, 2018). As seen from the figure, sadness was mentioned the most. People have expressed their ideas saying that “It seems very sad an empty. Quite creepy and heartbreaking to imagine what that place and the people within it have been through”, “Sad and terrified, in strength of catastrophe”, “Sad due to the fact that 50.000 had to leave their places with just a couple of personal items. And thousands of people died due to the liquidation process or got sick.”. Judging from the quotes it is evident that it agrees with the researchers’ thoughts regarding emotions that are ignited during a visit on a dark site. As argued by Korstanje and George (2017), people have to face “a sad acknowledgement of the loss” (Korstanje and George, 2017, p. 16). By doing so, people accept what has happened.

“Death has come to occupy a central place in society’s consciousness.” (Craig and Thompson, 2012, p. 180). The authors emphasize that curiosity and the interest in death have become a main factor to visit dark sites in some cases. It can be argued that curiosity is also encouraged by the media. In case of Chernobyl, for example, HBO’s “Chernobyl” TV series was a reason for highly increased tourist numbers back in 2019. Having in mind that interest in

abandoned places plays a crucial part in Chernobyl tourism as well, it is evident that after seeing pictures like abandoned buildings in Pripyat certain people are drawn to it. One respondent on the survey wrote that after looking at pictures of abandoned buildings in Pripyat, “intensifying wish to visit this abandoned historical place” emerged. Another respondent mentioned that “it is like using a time-machine to see how things used to be in my country.”. Others, however, were more interested in the response of the nature saying that it was “pretty interesting to see the decay of a city and how it is responding.”. It is clear that the curiosity is not only death-related, individuals also want to see the past and the nature changes in Chernobyl.

Interestingly, the pictures invoked familiarity to some: “I know these places well, the zone is like my second home”, “I have been there twice and would love to go again.”, “I used to have (and I guess still have) an interest in the Chernobyl NPP explosion and its story, so these pictures invoke a feeling of familiarity”, “This is my bellowed place on Earth, I was there 19 times.”. Someone else has noticed “that the blocks of flats are reminiscent of today's neighborhoods in many Eastern European countries which belonged to USSR.” and that “the first picture looks like it is in Lithuania”. Drawing on Cohen and Cohen’s (2012) work, familiarity with the buildings in Chernobyl can be perceived as hot authenticity. From the quotes provided above, it is evident that people’s perception of Chernobyl is related to the invoked emotions as well as the commitment. Coming back to Cohen and Cohen (2012), they argue that hot authenticity “involves a high degree of commitment and self-investment on part of the participants.” (Cohen and Cohen, 2012, p. 1300). In addition, Bird, Westcott and Thiesen (2009) argue that familiarity results in stronger emotional experience.

While talking about Chernobyl, it is evident that some people associate it with abandonment, others see it as a symbol of triumph of the nature. It relates to phoenix tourism which is described as “a process of destination regeneration, rehabilitation, re-imaging and revitalization” (Miller, Gonzalez and Hutter, 2017, p. 200). As the key points of this kind of tourism are rebirth, it fits perfectly with the example of Chernobyl. Similarly, the respondents identified the pictures as triumph of the nature saying that “I’m fascinated by how nature has taken over what man left behind” and “have a slight calming effect on me with the nature growing around the buildings. It seems like a new beginning to me.”. Using these quotes it can be said that rather than seeing only the abandoned buildings, some identify revival as well.

“Radioactive” Chernobyl ice cream was met with quite hostile opinions. As can be seen from the figure below, themes with rather negative associations have emerged. One of the

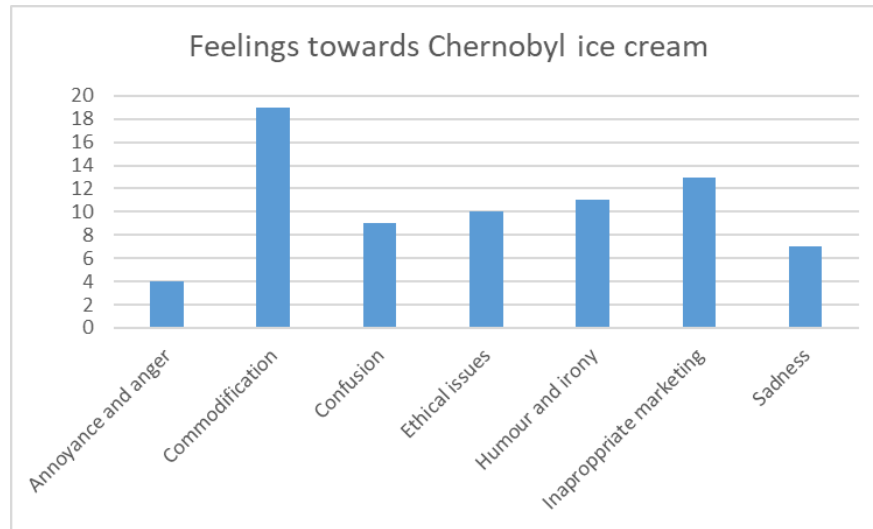


Figure 13: Reactions to Chernobyl "radioactive" ice cream. Made from data gathered on the survey.

respondents wrote that “it is unethical to make show or business from disasters like that. Food should not be a part of commodification and profit. To advertise this thing is nonsense”. Another person said that ice cream makes it look like “what happened in the

past is not big.”. Yet another respondent expressed his feelings saying that “I’m not opposed to snacks/drinks being sold by the entrance (I had a drink there when I went to the zone) but I hate how it’s all advertised with the radioactive sign etc. I also hated that they had all kinds of Chernobyl merchandise at these stands. Making money of the suffering of many”. The first two quoted commentators emphasize on bad marketing decisions while the third tourist engages in self-reflexivity (Mkono, 2016). This way, through criticising himself the tourist acknowledges the complexity of his tourist experiences. Only a small amount of people identified Chernobyl ice cream as humorous and ironic. One respondent said that “this is an irony I think. Trying to attract people so that maybe they could research about this”. This thought resonates with Potts’s (2012) understanding. The author argues that kitsch souvenirs attract people’s attention and it can be argued that individuals are informed of the disaster by them (Potts, 2012). In case of Chernobyl ice cream it can be said that it is really controversial, thus, sparks reactions and might also serve as a motivation to research more regarding the disaster. However, according to Potts (2012), it might also be perceived as a transmission from history to “a spectacle of grief”, meaning that it is now seen more as a tourist attraction rather than something that tells the history of Chernobyl.

Similarly like the ice cream, Chernobyl t-shirt was seen as commodification and a

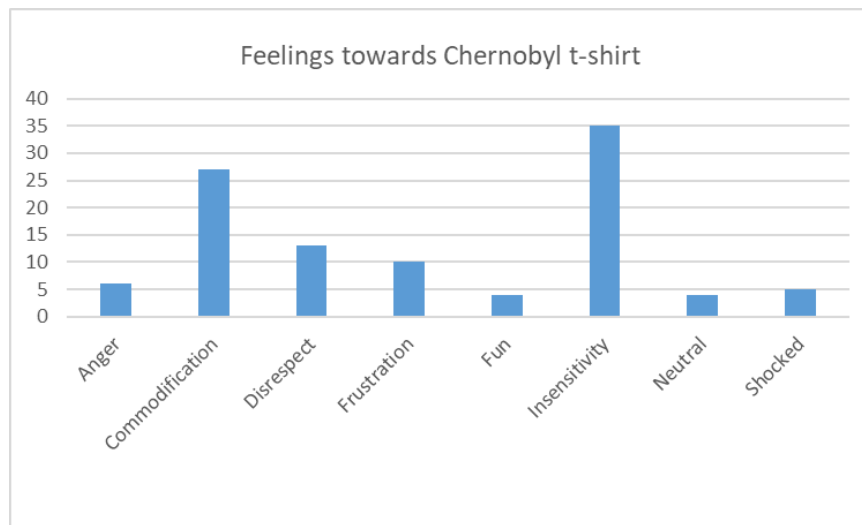


Figure 14: Reactions to Chernobyl "radioactive wolf" t-shirt. Made from data gathered on the survey.

sign of insensitivity. One respondent wondered saying "if they make t-shirts at least they should make it sensitively. I don't know, maybe put a nuclear power plant there and write something like "never forget"?". Others had thoughts that "victims are mocked" and that "no one

who ever read about Chernobyl would wear it.". Engle (2007) argues that "the experience of trauma has become a fashion statement, something anyone can put on" (Engle, 2007, p. 76). That in a way matches with one of the respondent's thoughts: "Probably it has no clear meaning, but nowadays people don't really know what they are wearing and what is written on their tshirt so I don't see anything bad about that.". Another participant of the survey wrote that "This tshirt is like a warning, this should not be worn everyday. This could be worn on special occasions, like in protests against nuclear power plants etc.". This view contradicts with Engle's (2007) and it can be also said that it displays a brand new outlook that looks at souvenirs as a form of social movement. Moving on, another participant mentioned that Chernobyl t-shirt does not invoke any negative feelings "because I can relate that people from the Ukraine need to make their money somehow.". It is clear that even though some people see t-shirt as an entertaining souvenir, others feel that it is insensitive and contributes to further commodification of Chernobyl.

Fridge magnets might be argued to be the most popular form of souvenirs (Swanson and Timothy, 2012). They can be found everywhere, even in such dark destinations as Chernobyl. As the site of the nuclear disaster, Chernobyl is associated with death and the deterioration. Therefore, souvenirs sold there are met with criticism. One respondent has identified Chernobyl fridge magnet as a kitsch. Other commentator wrote that “magnets have been available for many

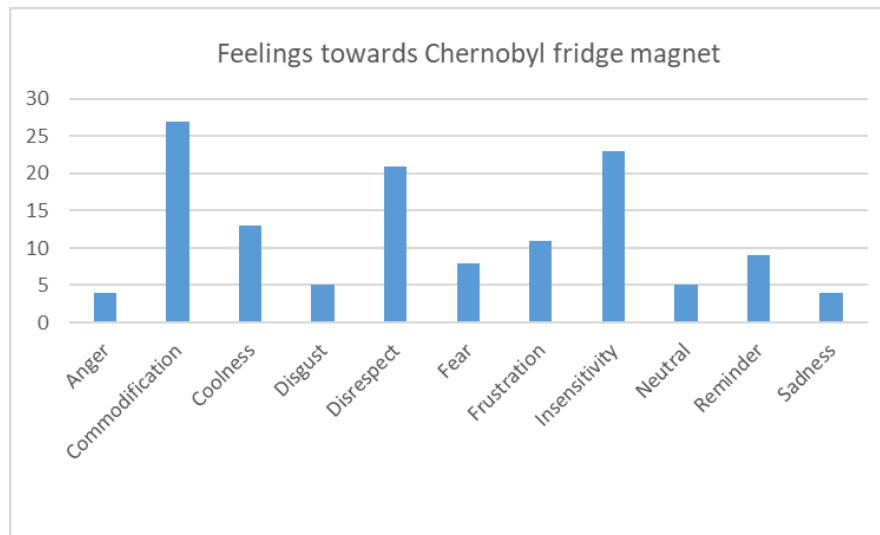


Figure 15: Reactions to Chernobyl fridge magnet. Made from data gathered on the survey.

years, but I think the costumed person makes this a tourist item and disrespectful.”. Some agree by saying that “it is a nice souvenir but a person needs to understand that it is not an attraction but a warning. But I actually disagree because a person might have many magnets on a

fridge next to Eiffel tower etc. so it kind of diminishes the meaning” and “I don’t think it’s inappropriate to sell some merchandise things for people to remember their trip by, but I think taking out the person in full gear and only having a photo of CNPP would be more appropriate.”. Drawing on the theory, Cave and Buda (2016) claim that souvenirs sold and purchased at dark sites have much higher emotional value. It is because of the atrocities that have happened at the site. According to Cave and Buda (2016), souvenirs related to dark sites remind not only of a past trip but also about the disaster. As can be seen from the previous quotes, people are not particularly against the fridge magnet. What sparks their anger and frustration is the person in a hazard suit. That, however, can be argued to be a wish to provoke people (Tilden, 1977). Going back to Cave and Buda (2016), it should be said that one of the respondents recognized the potential of a souvenir as a reminder of the nuclear disaster: “Not something I would want to look at every day as I open the fridge. However, to some people it could be a reminder.”. In short, it can be seen that the fridge magnet is seen as a disrespectful and insensitive souvenir by the largest part and it

contradicts the views of interviewees (Gary I., Nikolai Fomin, Jay M., Asa D. and Simone B.) due to the fact that the latter did not identify souvenirs as a negative thing.

Food is inseparable from our every day lives so it is often used as a marketing tool. Moreover, lots of people engage in food tourism. Meler and Cerovic (2003) note that “for a tourist consumer, the satisfaction of nutritional needs is not any more a mere act but increasingly a culinary-gastronomic “experience,” more or less adjusted to the system of values established by the nutritional culture of an individual consumer.” (Meler and Cerovic, 2003, p. 6). In 2019 Chernobyl vodka was introduced. Its name is Atomic and it was made from grains that were grown

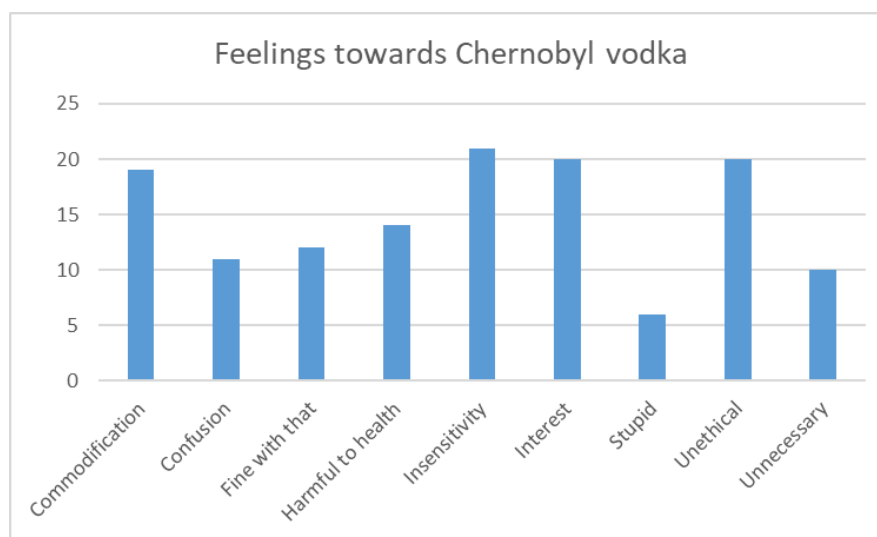


Figure 16: Reactions to Chernobyl vodka. Made from data gathered on the survey.

near Chernobyl (Willsher, 2019). The scientists have claimed it is safe to drink and is free of radioactive elements (Willsher, 2019). Moreover, it serves as a tool of social support since at least 75% of profit will be used to support local communities and also wildlife of the

contaminated areas. Ukrainian government, in particular Oleg Nasvit who is the first deputy head of the State Agency of Ukraine for Exclusion Zone Management supports the idea of Chernobyl vodka saying that “We welcome this initiative to use abandoned lands to help local communities. It is important that we do everything we can support the restoration of normal life in these areas whilst always putting safety first.” (Willsher, 2019). Some people in the conducted online survey share similar opinions by stating that they are fine with Chernobyl vodka as long as the profit does not go to private companies but to local community: “it’s good to support local products of an area whose economy has been significantly harmed due to this event.”, “if profit goes to local people I’m fine with that”, “I would buy this. They’re using resources from the area & putting money back into conservation of the area”. However, opinions like that are met with criticism, for example, in the same online survey some of the respondents said that Chernobyl vodka is “utterly stupid”, “wildly disrespectful to the victims”, “money grabbing exercise”. Among those

respondents was someone who was “disappointed in humankind’s desire to capitalize on a tragedy.”. Another person underlined a contrasting correlation, in his opinion stating that “it is like bullying from nuclear disasters because alcohol is related to parties and holidays. It diminishes the outlook towards the disasters”. Of course, Chernobyl vodka sounds appealing, yet, it is a further commodification of Chernobyl disaster and it is clear that the reaction to it strongly relies on a personal perception.

4.8.3. Rating questions

The last section consisted of rating questions – a total of 7 statements. The answers were rated from 1 to 5, 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree”. The main goal of these questions was to examine people’s perception of Chernobyl. The statements and the rating can be seen in a figure below.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My interest in Chernobyl has grown after HBO TV series "Chernobyl"	28	6	29	23	23
Visiting Chernobyl is not ethical	39	22	24	14	10
My main concern is that visiting Chernobyl is not safe	30	16	12	18	33
There is a lack of information regarding Chernobyl as a tourist destination	11	13	28	28	29
Chernobyl should be promoted more as a tourist destination	43	24	31	3	8
I would like to visit Chernobyl	16	10	17	22	43
I believe it is important to visit such places as Chernobyl	13	11	33	19	33

Figure 17: Results of rating questions. Made from data gathered on the survey.

HBO TV Series “Chernobyl” was a huge hit. Not only it had 8 million viewers (Patten, 2019) but also inspired a great amount of people to visit Chernobyl. In summer 2019 the total number of bookings to the Exclusion Zone increased by 40% (D’alessandro, 2019). Having in mind that approximately 124 000 people have visited Chernobyl last year the direct influence of HBO series can be felt. 46 people stated that their interest in Chernobyl has increased significantly after the show. It is evident that the media has a direct impact on our behaviour. It can even influence the

choices made for the destinations that are chosen to be visited. To many Chernobyl is a mystical place and people seek to visit it in order to see the abandoned city for themselves. Here, the previous observations of Tango are crucial to remember: he claimed that there was an increased attention and interest in Chernobyl after the show resulting in doubled amount of questions regarding visits to Chernobyl. 34 of the respondents have disagreed with the statement. This can be argued to be because of the fact that some people who took the survey were already interested in Chernobyl and some have even been there before the HBO series presented so it did not influence them.

Second rating question sought to examine if, according to people, visiting Chernobyl is ethical or unethical. Again, since people who are fascinated with the area and have visited it took the survey, the majority (56%) of the respondents disagree with the statement that visiting Chernobyl is unethical. 22% were between ethical-unethical scale, it might be partly because they are not yet quite familiarized with tourism there or because of the fact that they simply nor agree nor disagree. 22% of respondents agreed. It was discussed earlier that the participants did not identify visiting dark sites such as Chernobyl as ethical or unethical. Rather, there are ethical and unethical ways do it and it depends on respect factor. There is no consensus of whether it is ethical or unethical to visit dark sites like Chernobyl among the researchers as well: Lisle (2007) thinks that it attracts only certain people who get satisfaction by looking at sites torn by conflicts and that most of the tourists would not find that enjoyable. Others like Lennon and Foley (2010), Cohen (2011) argue that it is important to visit dark tourism sites for educational and commemorative reasons.

51 people agree that their main concerns related to Chernobyl tourism are health and safety risks. Firstly, due to the areas that are still contaminated and radioactive, there is a fear regarding possible radiation poisoning: “Radiation can still be present, it’s a risky destination”, “I think it is too dangerous, small dusty wind can rise active particles and you can get some to the lungs.”, “Danger to visitors health. Radiation is invisible”. There were also the respondents who claimed that even though some areas are pronounced safe, it cannot be known for sure: “They can say that radiation background is normal but it’s not true. Particles are still around and they are still a hazard to the health”. Drawing on the interviews, Simone B. says that there are “a lot of prejudice” about Chernobyl. Similarly, Jay M. argues that:

So many people are still paranoid about the radiation levels and unaware that it's actually relatively safe to visit, so I feel like there's some, there's maybe lack of information about the radiation levels. So it worries a lot of people. It worries a lot of tourists, so it's never going to be a very popular destination unless they change this perception of radiation levels.

As can be seen, radiation and the risks of it concerns people. However, as written in the Chernobyl forum 2003-2005: “Since 1986, radiation levels in the affected environments have declined several hundred fold because of natural processes and countermeasures. Therefore, the majority of the ‘contaminated’ territories are now safe for settlement and economic activity. However, in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone and in certain limited areas some restrictions on land-use will need to be retained for decades to come.”. 46 people disagree with the statement regarding their main concerns being those of health and safety. This can be explained by the fact that people who visit Chernobyl are aware of other dangers (such as wobbly buildings) and those who are interested in the area do their research so the statement is incorrect for them.

In a similar manner, 24 respondents have found the 4th statement false. It can be explained in the same way – people who are interested in Chernobyl try and gather information about it so for them a statement saying that there is not enough information regarding Chernobyl as a tourist destination is incorrect. 57 participants agreed with this statement. Stone (2012) and Korstanje and George (2017) admit that dark tourism “as a discipline remains in its infancy” due to lack of researches done (Korstanje and George, 2017, p. 211). This might partly explain the fact why some of the respondents felt there is not enough information about Chernobyl as a travel destination. Also, since the majority (51 people) of the respondents agree that they are concerned about health and safety in Chernobyl, it can be said that according to their opinions, there is not only the lack of Chernobyl as a destination itself, but also there is not enough information whether it is safe to visit at all.

67 people contradict the fact that Chernobyl should be promoted more as a tourist destination and only a small amount of respondents (11 in total) agree with the statement. As Chernobyl is a dark tourism site where the nuclear disaster took place it is understandable that the majority of people do not support the idea of it being promoted as a tourist destination. The fact that the majority of people do not disagree that Chernobyl should be more promoted can be

explained by a few reasons. First, the most obvious one, is that Chernobyl is a dark site that happened as a nuclear disaster and is not made specially for tourists. Second, the site is already known by the majority of world's population. Third reason is that promotion means more media coverage and more interest and that leads to more people wanting to visit Chernobyl and actually doing it. That, in turn, corrupts the feeling of authenticity as the place becomes more and more known and touristified. Bird, Westcott and Thiesen (2009) argue that "the marketing of dark tourism sites is a morbid and disrespectful means that aims to commodify, and profit from, the pain and anguish of the past." (Bird, Westcott and Thiesen, 2009, p. 660) and that sums up perfectly the complex relationship between dark tourism and the promotion of it.

A wish to visit Chernobyl was expressed by 65 of the participants. This can be a direct consequence of the media that ignites curiosity and a wish to visit Chernobyl (Yankovska and Hannam, 2014, Krupskyi and Temchur, 2018). This is especially seen after last year's HBO show which resulted in a boom of tourist numbers. 26 and 17 people respectively said that they do not possess a want to visit Chernobyl and that they were not sure. They can be said to have not enough interest or might be having doubts regarding radiation, as well discussed before. 52 people felt that it is important to visit dark tourism sites such as Chernobyl while 24 disagreed. 33 people were unsure. This can be explained by the difficulty of dark tourism as a phenomenon and the dissonant heritage that is shown there.

For the last question, people were asked to identify any problems related to Chernobyl tourism. In the table below it can be seen how many times the same problems have occurred. The issues that were identified by the participants of the survey were ranked from the ones that were mentioned the most to the ones that were less mentioned. The graph is provided below. Safety and health concerns ranked in the first place, however, due to the fact that they were introduced before, they will not be further analyzed. Ethics was also among the problems identified by the respondents. People were wondering how ethical it is to visit such places as Chernobyl and someone called it "tourism build on pain" while others compared it to Disneyland. Concerns were raised regarding profit, commodification of the place and the overall wonder whether the place should be visited, which, by some of the respondents, is said not to be visited at all or visited by

Identified issues	Supporting statements
Safety	"Existing radiation", "not safe", "safety regarding buildings and roads"
Health	"Health hazard", "danger to visitors health"
Ethics	"Tourism build on pain", "capitalizing on a tragedy"
Lack of respect	"People not taking it seriously", "not giving proper respect"
The threat of overtourism	"Too many people", "overcrowding"
Commodification	"Vendors", "sale of unnecessary items", "souvenirs"
Need of preservation	"[...] should remain untouched", "it should become a protected memorial parc"
Irresponsible behaviour	"[...] touch things", "people doing parkour in Chernobyl", "[...] run away from their tour guides"
Lack of information	"Lack of info", "false information and fear-mongering"
Vandalism	"[...] stealing things from the buildings", "trying to sneak stuff"
Forgetting real meaning	"Putting historical events out of perspective"
Authenticity	"People are moving things to manipulate photos and not representing the reality"
Illegal trips	"Illegal trips", "stalkers"
Lack of state control	"Not enough governmental/environmental controls"
Corruption	"Corruption"

Figure 18: Chernobyl tourism issues identified by the respondents. Made from data gathered on the survey.

educational or research purposes only. Below there are some quotes illustrating ethical issues identified by the respondents:

It is important to learn about it and from it, but not go there if you're not an expert who knows how to handle situations like that. To go there just for the thrill is inappropriate and dumb – you're exposing yourself to radiation, and also being inconsiderate towards the people who would have done anything to be able to leave on time to escape radiation, and now you go there on your own free will when you know how many people suffered and are still suffering because of it. And also, what

can you see there and why would you want that? It's literally one of the biggest failures of human kind.

Other participants wrote that “it’s shameful that people make profit from a tragedy – the “importance” of learning from the event can be given in form of documentaries, virtual tours and museums”, “Making money out of disaster. If they made it purely educational that would be beneficial but now it’s just for instagram pictures.”, “Do not feel it is something to be visited. Rather learn from information”. Finally, someone questioned “is it ethical to sell souvenirs and make profit from the disaster like this?”.

As for lack of respect, the respondents have mentioned situations where people take selfies in Chernobyl and found that to be insensitive and disrespectful. “I was kind of furious when I saw pictures of that influencer girl in Chernobyl. That wasn’t ethical and it was unscrupulous. Like those people taking pictures for Insta on a Jewish cemetery in Berlin. That’s just .. awful.”, wrote one of the respondents. Below there are some quotes provided that display the views of other people:

People visiting and not giving it the proper respect that it deserves so I suppose visiting for the wrong reasons. It should be visited with compassion and respect and treated as a mass grave. No photos should be allowed. I was horrified when I visited Auschwitz and people were taking photos of the gas chamber. Why would you want a photo of a place where so many people lost their lives?

We live in an age where people live for their next social media post. This has made people take selfies in front of sites people died and I find that troublesome. Also, all the vendors taking over the zone is concerning. The entrance has changed so much in the past few years. We need to be cautious that the zone doesn’t turn into just a cool tourist trap. It is a piece of history people should see, but that must be done with respect to the history that happened there.

All of these examples show that people condemn the phenomenon of Chernobyl selfies and identify it as highly insensitive. However, Hodalska (2015) argues that people use their phones to take pictures in order to overcome their fear of the disaster (Hodalska, 2015). As she

says in her own words, mobile phones and cameras are the devices that „enable spectators to take the selfies, have become convenient tools for emotional detachment, which makes it possible for the spectators to cope with fear that lurks in the background.“ (Hodalska, 2015, p. 4). Similarly, Mazeikiene and Gerulaitiene (2018) claim that by taking and sharing pictures on social media more people are given an educational impact (Mazeikiene and Gerulaitiene, 2018). Likewise Lorenz (2019) claims that there is nothing wrong with taking pictures in Chernobyl, as she notes it is „simply the way we are documenting our lives now“ (Lorenz, 2019). None of the participants of the survey expressed a similar opinion. To sum up, there should be an utter respect for Chernobyl and just because social media is especially widespread nowadays, it does not have to define the behaviour, meaning that just because one visits Chernobyl he should not feel obliged to take a picture as to mark that one „has been there“.

Overtourism was also a reoccurring theme as well: “Have been there before HBO an after. Now overcrowded.”, “I am afraid of it being overcrowded. If too many people go there it is not going to be authentic.”. Commodification and the fear of the place being commercialized were also expressed with an emphasized attention for souvenirs. The need of preserving the area and letting it be a scientific research area was underlined: “The Exclusion Zone should remain untouched. Only press, specialists or educated tourists should be allowed to enter in the ChNPP Exclusion Zone.”. That resonates with a respondent who wrote that:

I have a family that suffered medically for years after the disaster. It is good to study the disaster objectively and have a debate about what happened. But it should not become a touristic place. The fact that “time stopped there” in the late soviet union makes it very attractive, and I personally know people who have visited or who work in companies that organise tourism there. But the place is one of suffering, and an example of what human carelessness and melagomany can lead to. It should become a protected memorial parc. But no one should be able to make profit of Chernobyl tourism.

It can be seen that while some argue that as long as one acts with respect in Chernobyl, there are no problems with visiting, others feel it is not right or ethical even if one does it with respect. The quote provided above relates to dissonant heritage on a personal level.

Irresponsible behaviour will be explained together with other emergent topics such as vandalism and illegal trips. Adams (2001) calls people seeking adventure in unlikely places “danger-zone tourists”. Even though it is not all tourists who engage in rather dangerous activities that are accused of being irresponsible, to some of them wild behaviour is inseparable part of “feeling it all” and immersing themselves completely in the destination. One participant mentioned that “people can be irresponsible with all the victims of the accident.”. This relates to Stone’s (2009) ideas in a way: “We see death, but we do not “touch” it.” (Stone, 2009, p. 33). This means that people are aware of the deaths that happened as a consequence of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, however, some of the tourists seem to neglect that in a forgetful way and in just like that they neutralize death while endangering themselves, as, for example, while “doing parkour in Chernobyl and other dumb stuff.”. This in turn results in a threat of “forgetting the real meaning of the place because of mass tourism.”.

In addition to irresponsible behaviour, vandalism and illegal trips were emergent themes throughout the survey. One of the participants wrote that “many tourists are stealing things from the buildings”. That could be argued to be partly like a souvenir and drawing on Cave and Buda (2016) it might serve not only as a reminder of a trip but also as of a disaster. However, other participant wrote that: “In 20 years after these uncontrolled visits, there could be nothing to see, because everything would be destroyed by vandals.”.

5. Conclusions

The main goal of this thesis was to analyze to what the processes of commodification and kitschification influence tourist experience. However, in order to understand the way that commodification and kitschification influence the perception of Chernobyl and the tourist experiences there, it is important to comprehend the subjective reality – the way different people look at it. To achieve that, 5 interviews were conducted and an online survey was created and shared. In addition, a follow up questions were sent to one of the interviewees as well as questions sent to yet another tourist. The survey was filled in by 109 people and the majority think that souvenirs such as fridge magnets, t-shirts, “radioactive” Chernobyl ice cream contribute to commodification and were viewed negatively. The findings from interviews contradict that because with the exception of one interviewee who identified souvenirs as a sign of

commodification, others perceived souvenirs as a nice reminder of a trip or a source of profit for local people.

One of the main notions throughout the thesis was dark tourism. Even though the term is relatively new, dark tourism itself has emerged centuries ago. According to Stone (2006), Colosseum is the oldest dark tourism site in the world. This proves that people have been always fascinated with death and various disasters. However, it is important to mention that not all tourists who visit dark sites are interested in death, their motivations can vary from educational reasons to remembrance and more. Despite the fact that researchers do not agree in regards of dark tourism definition, there is an opinion that it relates to sites associated with disasters, deaths and atrocities. It is important to mention that dark sites vary in terms of emergence (for example, some sites are the actual sites of disasters, like Chernobyl while others are made for entertainment and profit like the Body Worlds) and the 'darkness'. What is interesting is that by interpreting Chernobyl different people get different experiences. Here, it is important to remember the quote of Fomin where he said that he does not identify Chernobyl tourism as dark tourism, rather educational and adventurous one. As this thesis was a constructive one, people's opinions from survey, interviewees' thoughts and the theory were compared constantly. This was done in order to get to the subjective reality of people and see how they react to the commodification of Chernobyl.

In order to analyze this better, it is important to gather as much data as possible so the recommendations would be to do more interviews. If there are people with the similar experiences (for example, if they stayed in Chernobyl overnight) it would be beneficial to have a focus group interview. In that way, that would be easier to compare the experiences of tourists and it can be argued to be more time efficient as well. To get opinions from former inhabitants of Pripyat in regards of commodification and the touristification of the Zone could be beneficial as well, however, due to sensitive topic and the dissonant heritage that might be impossible. Opinions from people who live there nowadays could be also of a great help in understanding the process of commodification.

All in all, Chernobyl is a very complicated destination. What makes it even more complicated is the process of touristification and commodification, selling kitsch souvenirs. Respondents of the survey identified souvenirs mostly as a bad thing, the interviewed tourists did not mention that souvenirs, hotels and other signs of commodification have corrupted their

experiences. Rather, they were satisfied with the facilities but recognized the threat of Chernobyl becoming too touristified and commodified.

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Appendix 1 - Interview with Charlie Tango

Interview conducted on 9th April, 2020

Interviewee: Charlie Tango

Director of tour organizer Contamination Zone

Has been working with Chernobyl tourism for 6 years

C.T.: Hi, how are you?

B.L.: Hi, I am good and you?

C.T.: Oh, I am bored because of Coronavirus.

B.L.: It's all over the news, it's everywhere.

C.T.: Yeah, I've just been inside my house for three weeks.

B.L.: Oh, wow. I think it's the same case for me. I don't really remember the last time I was... I mean ok, last week I was in a park but I don't really go out now, just only to do some shopping.

C.T.: Yeah, yeah. So, what's your project, how's it going?

B.L.: It's going good so far. So, as you know I am writing about Chernobyl. I decided to write about Chernobyl because I am interested in dark tourism and Chernobyl has been, I would say kind of a mystical place because when I was a kid, when I was growing up I heard so many things about it and I didn't realise that there are actually people going there for tours. And when I found out it was really interesting so my interest has just grown more and more. That's why I want to write about it. And thank you very much for helping me out. I have just one question if it's ok before we start. I wanted to ask if that would be ok if I record that because I, when I will need...

C.T.: Yeah.

B.L.: Ok, ok. Thank you very much.

C.T.: Of course, of course. It's normal I think because this isn't the first time I've helped someone with a project.

B.L.: Oh. That's nice.

C.T.: Yeah, so. Yeah.

B.L.: That's nice. So thank you very much again. Thank you very much again. And I have some questions for you.

C.T.: Sure.

B.L.: So the first one is I'm not sure if I understand correctly but you work in an organization which is called Contamination Zone, is that correct?

C.T.: It's my little project, my little company, yes.

B.L.: And how did it start?

C.T.: About six years ago. I started organizing trips to Chernobyl. Mainly for photographers and film crews. And Chernobyl is a place that I love. And Contamination Zone, it's helping teach people about Chernobyl. We help some of the dogs in Chernobyl like with feeding them.

B.L.: Oh, that's nice.

C.T.: And yes, so people can contact my company and we will take you to Chernobyl.

B.L.: So it focuses more on kind of educational trips, right?

C.T.: Educational trips and specialized trips for scientists or producers or photographers.

B.L.: And you said you have been working as a guide for six years, right?

C.T.: Yeah.

B.L.: And what sparked your interest in dark tourism and in Chernobyl?

C.T.: Are you familiar with the urban, urban exploration of abandoned buildings and cities?

B.L.: Yes, yes, I am.

C.T.: So I have been doing this since I was maybe sixteen years old. So loving abandoned places, Chernobyl was like somewhere I had to visit. So yeah, for the first time I went just for my benefit and when it kind of started becoming more frequent and people would request to visit the Zone with me. Am, and now here we are, six years later.

B.L.: That's nice. Also what do you think influences people to want to go to Chernobyl? Do you think it's social media or just mere interest in dark tourism?

C.T.: There are many different types of people who visit Chernobyl. Some people are already... Some people are interested in the abandoned buildings and exploring and being on the rooftop in an empty city. Some people are interested in nuclear power and will want to get the special permission to go inside of the reactor buildings and inside the power plant. But there are also people who... They just want to take a selfie for Facebook. They just want some Instagram pictures. These are the people who... You could go to Kiev and you can pay 89 euros and you could go and spend a day in a Zone. On a big bus with maybe 30 other people. Generally, I only deal with people who have more interest. Because to come to the Zone with me, it's much more than 89 euros per day, because there's a much smaller group. Am, the maximum I would take to the Zone is 6 people. And normally we will be there on like photography or science for between 3 and 7 days.

B.L.: Between 3 and 7 days. And so the groups are small, the groups that come with you are small and you spend quite a lot of time there. Where do you take those people to? Do you have a route for them or every group is different and you just go to different places?

C.T.: The tourists buses have a fixed route. They see all the same places, they drive the same roads but for me it depends on who is with me in the group. Because like photographers like certain places, scientists like certain places. So normally, it's a 2 hour drive from Kiev to Chernobyl. So there is time to discuss with the people in the group what they want to see and make like the plan, am, of where we're going to go. So it really is, it's very flexible, very spontaneous sometimes.

B.L.: That's very nice. Also, have you noticed maybe if there has been a rise in tourist, in number of tourist after last year's HBO's "Chernobyl"? Do you think it had impact?

C.T.: There has been... I think I get double the amount of people emailing me or messaging me wanting to go on a trip now. However, I haven't seen more of an increase in actual visitors than

would be normal. Every year for the last 6 years there's been more people visiting. I think HBO... It's... It made people think about visiting but from my experience this hasn't resulted in more actual bookings. Does it make sense?

B.L.: Yes. If I understand correctly, what you're saying is that the interest after the show has grown, but only the interest, not the actual number of people, of bookings of people.

C.T.: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

B.L.: Ok. So it just kind of, how to say... Shone a light ... regarding Chernobyl.

C.T.: Yes, yes. And then people... People will message me going on "I want to visit Chernobyl". And then they realise where Ukraine is and well, that's quite a long journey. Just to visit one place.

B.L.: Yes. Yes. I agree.

C.T.: Yeah. But then there's lot of people who do come to Ukraine just to visit Chernobyl but these people will come for like 5 days in Chernobyl.

B.L.: And then do they stay in Kiev then?

C.T.: No, there is a hotel for official visitors inside the Exclusion Zone.

B.L.: Is it hotel Desyatka?

C.T.: This is one of 3.

B.L.: Oh, so there are 3. Ok.

C.T.: Desyatka is my favourite.

B.L.: Why?

C.T.: Because it has hot water and heating.

B.L.: Yes, that's important.

C.T.: Well, in Exclusion Zone, you know, it's a not so easy to have hot water and heating. So this hotel is my favourite. I always try to stay in this hotel. One other hotel has only hot water and no heating. And one other has a... Only heating and no hot water.

B.L.: Oh.

C.T.: Yes.

B.L.: So hotel Desyatka is like a jackpot because it has both.

C.T.: And it has a bar and a restaurant.

B.L.: Oh. So it should be quite an authentic experience for people that come to Chernobyl to stay inside the Exclusion Zone.

C.T.: Yeah, yeah. It's something that people really love. I mean even Desyatka though, it's not a 5 star hotel.

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: You don't come to Chernobyl to go in a hot tub and a spa and have a massage in a hotel, you know.

B.L.: Yes, I agree.

C.T.: It's very basic but it's comfortable. It has good food and it has amazing alcohol.

Interviewer: Moving on I have a question. Regarding ethics. A, because some people think that visiting such places as Chernobyl is not very ethical because, it's first of all it's a site of the disaster. What do you think about that?

C.T.: I think... The... It again relates to the different types of people who visit Chernobyl. I think some of the people who come on 89 euro one day trip in a big bus, some of those people are very disrespectful. They just want to tell their friends on Facebook they visited Chernobyl. I think people who come on a more serious trip... I don't know, act more respectful and generally I think it's a good thing that you're able to visit because even the disrespectful people will learn something during the stay. Because every group has a tour guide who is always giving information. Even if they disrespect the place I hope when they're back in Kiev they have learnt something of the history and the affect this cause many people. You know, if we don't learn from our mistakes as humans we will just repeat this mistake in future.

B.L.: Yes, I agree with you.

C.T.: So I think it's very important to show people and teach people how it wasn't just one person who caused Chernobyl. It was the culture. It was the... So many things. Just the way people were. And people were scared to stand up for what they believe in and it caused this.

B.L.: Yes. Yes, that's true.

C.T.: You know, even in the construction, you know people were obsessed with pretending everything is ok. Which is why in the investigation they found that they didn't use the correct materials and they didn't do the construction properly because they needed this reactor open because in Soviet times they would receive a bonus for meeting the target. And sometimes you need to make sure that safety is more important than any target or money.

B.L.: Yes, that's true, that's true.

C.T.: Yeah.

B.L.: Also, I can draw on my personal experience. I was born when my country wasn't in Soviet Union anymore but my parents were born in Soviet Union.

C.T.: Yeah.

B.L.: In times of Soviet Union, so those times were really hard and you could not really openly say your opinion, you just kind of had to agree with what the government says and I think that Chernobyl really shows that.

C.T.: Yeah.

B.L.: Yes, I believe so because it's... I think that's it's not just the nuclear disaster, it's also kind of a reflection of Soviet Union and its flaws if it makes sense.

C.T.: Yes, I totally agree. Because people who were saying that it's not safe were scared because even their apartments was provided by the Soviet Union. So if they make people angry they lose their apartments in Pripyat and they can be moved to somewhere else, to another nuclear power plant. And Pripyat was a very young city. And it was very nice. I mean for a city of 50 000 people to have so many gymnasiums, so many swimming pools, supermarkets...

B.L.: Even the amusement park.

C.T.: Yeah. The supermarkets in Pripyat, am, was only one of the 2 places in Soviet Union you could buy Western products like shampoo. Vo5 shampoo you could buy it in Pripyat and Moscow.

B.L.: I didn't know that.

C.T.: Yeah. It's... It was a very nice city and you're right, the amusement park as well. You know, for such a small city to have its own amusement park and its own swimming pools and good supermarkets, so many things you could buy.

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: It's a... People really wanted to live in Pripyat.

B.L.: Yes, I can understand why.

C.T.: Yeah.

B.L.: It's... It was a nice city. I wanted to ask you if you have heard about the president's Volodymyr Zelensky's plan? He signed the decree last year and he said that he wants Ukraine to kind of shake off the negative image of Chernobyl. What do you think about that?

C.T.: I have my own opinions of this man as a president. Lots of people in Chernobyl found it quite funny.

B.L.: Funny? Why?

C.T.: That he said that he wants to open Chernobyl as a tourist attraction because Chernobyl has been open as a tourist attraction for many years already. It's almost like he didn't know this. After this decree it became easier to do certain things, to visit certain places inside the Chernobyl power plant. There is less corruption in the Zone now. Before to visit certain places... You're from former Soviet country so you understand how you can pay an extra special charge...

B.L.: Oh yes.

C.T.: And you can do some things.

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: Yes. With this decree lots of things became official. So there was... There is much less corruption in Chernobyl now. We used to say that Chernobyl is the most corrupt place in all of

Ukraine. But now it's much better. They're always working on new possibilities for visitors. So... They're always working on new possibilities for visitors. For example, now it's possible to visit the control room of Unit number 4 officially whereas previously it would always have been like some bribery or some corruption to visit this place.

B.L.: And now it's open for tourists? I mean officially?

C.T.: It's... It's kind of open.

B.L.: Kind of?

C.T.: It's only a few people they let visit this place. And the cost of the permit is 200 euros for each person. But, you know, I think it's better to pay 200 euros to the power plant than to pay 100 euros and it goes in someone's own personal bank account, you know. It wasn't... It was... It was corruption, it was bribery, you know. There was a guy who had the keys and had permission, you give him 100 euros, he lets you in. Now it's more expensive but you know that this money is going to the proper place. Because to maintain the Exclusion Zone and to decommission the power plant is very expensive and they could use the money better. They need the money.

B.L.: Yes. I agree. Also, what do you think about the threats of Chernobyl tourism if you can identify any threats?

C.T.: Threats... You mean like risks?

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: So, when I take people to Chernobyl, I always tell them that the biggest risk to their safety is not the radiation, it's a building collapsing on top of them in Pripjat. Do you mean this type of threat?

B.L.: Yes. Yes, I mean this and also threats like commodification, then maybe possible over tourism also.

C.T.: Ok. Yes, yes. I remember answering your questions now in the website. The threats of tourism... Some people do not understand... The safety aspect of visiting this place. They think it's like a theme park or rollercoaster. In rollercoaster you feel like it's dangerous but the truth is, rollercoasters are very safe. In Pripjat, in Chernobyl it's real danger and people don't understand

this. Every day I see tourists doing stupid things. And we already had one person die. He was in the Zone illegally; he was not a tourist. But he was climbing Duga. And he was drunk and it was winter and he fell because he slipped on the ice. And tourists are doing stupid things and eventually I think that the government will say this is too much. And they will close the Zone. Or they will make things very very different to the freedom we have today. You have Chernobyl tour with the 89 euro tickets and they have one guide for a bus with maybe 30 or 40 people. And it's impossible to look after these people's safety. You're trusting them not to walk off and do something stupid. And the problem here is in Pripyat there is very dangerous buildings, there is lots of holes in the ground or places to get lost or to fool. Somebody is going to become injured and the problem is that this company does not explain the danger so well because they make it like a tourist attraction. You've seen the Chernobyl ice cream.

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: The... You know... They sell condoms that glow in the dark. It's... It's a company who... The people who they are marketing their trips to, if they got told how dangerous it really is, would never visit. So they don't want to tell people it's dangerous.

B.L.: So they try to attract them in other ways. With...

C.T.: Yeah, yeah. They make it tacky, like Disneyland. If you come to the Zone you will see they have gift shops where you can buy t-shirts and it's... It's not good.

B.L.: Yes, I agree.

C.T.: This is over-commercialization. Not because visiting is a bad thing but because they don't care about teaching or... They don't care if people learn something. They just care about the 89 euros. Every company in Chernobyl that runs trips, takes people, everybody is in good relations, except for this Chernobyl Tour. They don't have a relation, a good relation with anybody else. Is this the answer you look for or...?

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: Did I?

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: Ok.

B.L.: I think so. Also, do you think that some measures can be taken or should be taken in order to stop this commodification? Like, I don't know, selling magnets or t-shirts? Do you think something can be done about this?

C.T.: It's difficult to say. I think not with the current financial situation in Ukraine. The government are just happy because the government take a cut of these 89 euros. So the more people who visit Chernobyl, the more money the government gets.

B.L.: So they are kind of...

C.T.: And...

B.L.: Trying to attract more people so they would get more profit.

C.T.: Yeah. The, the Ukrainian government is very talented at ignoring a problem if they're making some money. And this is exactly what happens in Chernobyl. There's so many things happening that should not be happening. But the government ignores it because they're making money.

B.L.: Also, do you think that Chernobyl should be promoted as a tourist destination? Do you think they should have a marketing strategy or you think that it's not useful?

C.T.: Each individual company has its own marketing strategy that is promoting tourism, not just to Chernobyl but also to Ukraine. I think it would be nice for the government, the tourism agency to have a more focused approach in bringing new tourists to Ukraine. But I think they need to promote the country not just Chernobyl. Because there are so many things to do and see in Ukraine that people don't know about.

B.L.: Yes, I agree because many people when they think or hear about Ukraine I think the first thing that comes to their mind is Chernobyl.

C.T.: Chernobyl, yes.

B.L.: Yes. Not necessarily that it's bad but... I don't know...

C.T.: Now, Kiev is a very nice city. But also you have the Carpathian mountains... With amazing skiing and snowboarding... And also you have Black Sea.

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: You know, why aren't they promoting... The Black Sea, like Odessa? It's beautiful. There are beautiful beaches and a beer cost you one dollar. You know, if they promoted this properly, they could get so much tourism, not just about Chernobyl.

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: But... It's easy at the moment because everybody thinks of Chernobyl when they think of Ukraine. So they're getting enough tourists. But what's going to happen to the country when Chernobyl is not an option? And I think this will happen in 5 or 10 years where tourists will not be allowed to Chernobyl anymore because the buildings are too dangerous. They have no back up plan. They need to promote all of Ukraine. Not just Chernobyl.

B.L.: Yes, I agree. And also, do you think that maybe it contradicts with president's plan because he says that Chernobyl shouldn't be like a dark tourism magnet in Ukraine anymore but companies are focusing on marketing of Chernobyl and not Ukraine. So what do you think about that?

C.T.: I'm not sure what I think about this. Every compa... Again, it goes back to there's no centralized strategy for marketing and tourism to Ukraine. Every company is individual. And every company is riding the Chernobyl wagon because it's easy to make money from Chernobyl. They don't want to make effort to take people somewhere else because they have an easy option: "I will take people to Chernobyl". There are so many new companies in the last 2 years for Chernobyl. It's crazy. Every time, every 6 months I see new companies but there must be I think one new company every 3 months making new trips to Chernobyl. It's an easy way for these people to make money. Because they adopt the 89 euros strategy.

B.L.: And what do you think, what are your thoughts if a... Anything should be changed in Chernobyl and the management of Chernobyl?

C.T.: Anything should be changed... There are changes that would benefit me and my type of trips. But at the same time a... The... State Agency of Chernobyl have a duty to protect people's safety. Maybe you already know that entering buildings has been illegal since 2012.

B.L.: Yes.

C.T.: If you've looked at my website or my Instagram or the group on Facebook you will see everybody goes inside buildings. But this is only possible in the small trips like I do, not in the big group trips. Because it's just like a few people, you can hide and sneak. And you're always trying to avoid the police and the military when they do their patrols. It would be nice for some buildings to be permitted for you to go inside. But it will never happen because it's not safe. Apart from this some of the bureaucracy. It would be nice if we didn't have so much bureaucracy. It's getting better since the president's decree. We can now apply for the permits, now up to 2 days before. Previously it was 12 days. To apply for the permissions is now online. You have a log in to the website.

B.L.: Oh, that should be easier if it wasn't online before.

C.T.: And... Yeah, before it was all done by email. Or fax. So things are getting easier but it would be nice to have even less bureaucracy. For example instead of... So now if you want to come to Chernobyl, I would need a copy of your passport. And then I'll receive a permit that has your name, your age, your passport number, your nationality. It's an official permit to let you inside this place. It would be nice if it wasn't so complicated, if they authorized the company to take people. Then we can just turn up with whoever and we don't need individual permits for everybody but say just the guide has a permit. Less paperwork, it would be better. But you know, generally... I don't think they will change much because it's Ukraine.

B.L.: Yes. And what do you think about the future of tourism in Chernobyl?

C.T.: I think... Like it is now... 5 or 10 years maximum. I think... One day a... Too many buildings will be too dangerous. And right now Pripyat is an amazing place to see. But one day it will just be destroyed buildings on the ground because they've collapsed. And... Who is going to want to go all the way to Ukraine to see some empty buildings that collapsed to the ground?

B.L.: Probably no one.

C.T.: Yeah, exactly. It's definitely limited time remaining to see this place. Yeah... I think 5 years probably things will be very different.

B.L.: I see.

C.T.: Already now there are some places in Pripyat where I will not go inside, I will not let people with me go inside because some of the buildings are already too dangerous.

B.L.: Yeah, that makes sense. I think that I got all the answers that I needed.

C.T.: Excellent.

B.L.: And thank you very much again for helping me.

C.T.: Oh, no problem.

B.L.: Thank you very much. Thank you.

C.T.: If you need anything else just always message me or call me or something. I'm happy to help you. I think I have a graph of a chart of the people visiting Chernobyl each year. Is that useful for you?

B.L.: Yes, that would be.

C.T.: Ok, I will try to find it and send it to you.

B.L.: Thank you, thank you very much.

C.T.: No problem, no problem. Talk to you soon, yeah.

B.L.: Talk to you. Bye.

C.T.: And will you be able to send me a copy of your project when it's finished?

B.L.: Yes, of course.

C.T.: Ok.

B.L.: The due date is 2nd of June so I will send you after I submit it if that's ok.

C.T.: Yeah, that's great.

B.L.: Ok.

C.T.: You still have lots of time to finish it.

B.L.: Ok, yes. Thank you very much then.

C.T.: No problem. I'll talk to you soon.

B.L.: Talk to you soon. Bye.

C.T.: Ok, bye.

Appendix 2 - Interview with tourist Gary I.

Interview was conducted on 14th May, 2020

Interviewee: Gary I.

Tourist from UK

Did not stay overnight

B.L.: Hi.

G.I.: Hello.

B.L.: How are you?

G.I.: I'm alright. Just climbing on the walls with this Coronavirus around.

B.L.: Oh yes, it's everywhere. It's on the news everywhere, it's on the news everyday, we can't get, we can't escape it. Unfortunately. But let's hope that it will finish soon or soonish. Well, I wanted to thank you very much for, for agreeing to have this interview, I really appreciate that.

G.I.: No problem at all.

B.L.: Ok, so my first question is when did you go to Chernobyl? And was it one time or a few times?

G.I.: I've just been there once, last year, November last year for the first time.

B.L.: And why did you decide to go there because it is quite an unusual destination.

G.I.: No, cause for it was basically I'm into history and all that and I was 12 years old when this disaster had happened. And I've done a poll and we decided do Chernobyl. We stayed in a hostel in Kyiv and then from there we done the Chernobyl detour on a full day.

B.L.: So it was just a 1 day trip, right?

G.I.: Yeah, was just a 1 day trip we did.

B.L.: And are you interested in dark tourism? Like, destinations like Chernobyl?

G.I.: What was that, sorry?

B.L.: It was a question regarding your interest in dark tourism. It's, I'm not sure if you are familiar with this notion but dark tourism is when people go to places that are initially associated with disasters like Chernobyl, for example or...

G.I.: Yeah.

B.L.: I don't know, death, battlefields, battles, wars. Are you interested in that kind of tourism?

G.I. : Yes. That's the reason I've done Chernobyl for because I remember when a disaster had happened when I was 12 year old. It happened on Sunday the 26th of April 1986. And I'm just, we thought we would just get there ... When I've done Chernobyl it was like interesting and emotional at the same time. And obviously when we went through there we got the liggetts (?) and we received the same common uniforms there, make sure that we're all clear for us to go in through and all that and. It was interesting in what we had to see about it which I had a rough idea of what was all about anyway. But like we went round Pripyat and all that, it was basically a ghost town, basically. But obviously we weren't allowed to through like any, dangerous spots, you know what I mean. For example, the hospital or anything because there's still radioactive in certain places like Red Forest. Because you got the (?) like from the day it happened. But it was really interesting and emotional and what had happened. And all these people that were living in Pripyat can't go out. They were told they will, like allow to be back like days after but never happened, you know what I mean. And then basically you still got a family, who, like you still got people who still love, live in Pripyat and basically decide to come back, you know what I mean.

B.L.: So, as I can see from what you're telling me your experience in, in Chernobyl was quite an emotional one, right?

G.I.: It was. It was interesting in what you have to see. It's like emotional as well because what had happened, you know what I mean, like a lot of lives got, went. That was... Wasn't nice.

B.L.: Yes and of course when other people visit Chernobyl they visit, they might visit for different reasons but do you think that people are usually influenced by social media? So that they decide to visit Chernobyl?

G.I.: Why, I wouldn't, I wouldn't really, I wouldn't, like people who still visit Chernobyl it's basically people who should be gone. Just, like, to see what had actually happened, you know what I mean. Not just, not just go there. Not just go there for the sake of it. You've gotta be like well, you know what I mean. That's the reason why we did seek focus on what was interesting for us to do, you know what I mean.

B.L.: Also, did you prepare for your trip, did you do anything in particular? I don't know, read maybe books or gather other information or anything else?

G.I.: Well, I basically, I watched a few documentaries about Chernobyl before I went over there which I knew what was all about anyway and what had happened. And like I've read a lot of research upon us, a few documentaries and a few book. And I really when I went over there, there the tourism person who we went with, it was just basically explaining everything what had happened, you know what I mean.

B.L.: Yes, so that person was a guide, right?

G.I.: Yes.

B.L.: And did you learn something new while you were visiting, something that maybe you didn't know before?

G.I.: Basically, about, he was just explaining about like, obviously... Wait, I knew roughly all about it anyway but it was just like... I don't know if you're aware of it, can you remember the HBO series of "Chernobyl"?

B.L.: Yes, yes.

G.I.: Right, I mentioned that to the tourism person who we went wrong with, who like took us wrong to. Basically he says when they filmed it was identical the way it happened but apart from like a couple of scenes like obviously the bridge bit...

B.L.: Sorry?

G.I.: You know the bridge?

B.L.: Yes, yes.

G.I.: Yes, he says that that was a nonsense, you know what I mean. That death bridge and all that. But he says like apart from that, he says like the way they did it was like basically identical the way it was. The way that happened, and I wasn't I wasn't aware, you know, the merry-go-round and then the dungeons and that. I didn't realize obviously them just caught up, like a couple of years just before the disaster had happened. And then never got used. I don't know if that's true or not. But...

B.L.: Yes, maybe. And as we speak about HBO TV series, I have researched that it was really it contributed a lot to huge numbers of tourists, because numbers have increased since last year.

G.I.: Right.

B.L.: So yeah, probably people are actually influenced by social media. Also, people have some certain concerns before visiting Chernobyl. I think these are mostly regarding health and safety. Did you have any concerns?

G.I.: Well, basically like basically when I was staying here because we stayed on a hostel basically in Kiev before we done the day tour and then obviously when we got there we all got sent consent forms and all that and then we've got the the radioactive maintenance, you know what I mean?

B.L.: Yes.

G.I.: Like for radioaction, radioactive thing but like your main concern was like obviously one of donors wanna be okay at the combat through your all main cause when we finish there when we finish the tourism we all go through this x-ray thing to like to see if you're like radioactive, if you caught it or anything. And we were told by the tourism guy that we weren't allowed like to like sit on the floor or put your coat on the floor or anything, you know what I mean? And just like listen to what he had to say and like obviously take wasn't like not like wander off you know what I mean? Like all stick together.

B.L.: Yes.

G.I.: Cause we're, we were, there was four of us who went but we like we're all in a group at the time. Like before the people...

B.L.: So was it a private tour?

G.I.: It was a private, yeah. No, it wasn't a private tour. I just said the lad who we went through with he popped it off. And it was like obviously, we've got on the mini bus like that. I don't know if you've seen the photographs on my Facebook wall. We went by your proper tour guide and they were advertising Chernobyl on the vans and all that and we've spent the full day there and then obviously we want the coffee. We are the pipe rage (?) in Chernobyl. But I wasn't now keen on the food. But what, never mind. But it was, it was really interesting. I would love to go back. You know what I mean?

B.L.: Yes.

G.I.: Because obviously there's a lot more out there to see, you know what I mean.

B.L.: Sorry did you say that you were eating lunch at the cafeteria in Chernobyl?

G.I.: Yeah, we went in the cafeteria.

B.L.: That was quite an authentic experience.

G.I.: Yeah, we had like a bite array from the cafeteria and then spent about an hour and then we went back out, you know what I mean. We were basically there all day and like obviously we've got like on there like nighttime. We were there for a few hours.

B.L.: Also, when you were in Chernobyl did you happen to see the souvenirs that are sold there? I don't know like fridge magnets, t-shirts?

G.I.: Yes, I did. Yeah. Basically, when okay, well, I came up Chernobyl I bought like obviously like some fridge magnets. Before we left there I bought two fridge magnets, I bought like obviously like a gas mask and basically I've got a timer (?) in the bathroom. And obviously you like I bought like the St. Gallen (?) the bathroom doll like caution. And basically I bought a hat as well. I bought the Chernobyl hat like with a logo one and like, obviously I bought a bag as well. So I did buy a few souvenir things from there.

B.L.: And what do you think about those souvenirs? Do you think it's, because Chernobyl is like a place of disaster do you think that buying souvenirs, selling maybe souvenirs, a, tell the story of Chernobyl?

G.I.: Say that again, sorry?

B.L.: Sorry, I don't know if I made myself clear. My question was regarding souvenirs. Do you think that they tell the story of Chernobyl?

G.I.: Yes, yeah. But yeah we'll see in the dough (?) because the the jobman who we went with, the tour guide he explained everything, you know what I mean? Like obviously we were all in the group and then basically like every destination where we stared like will stop and Matthew was like talking about each area and like there's some of it, like obviously then obviously I brought the question about the HBO series, he remembers, when they came out and film didn't and you know, just basically everything what he was explaining and like I knew about roughly but like, obviously. Just like, apart from a couple of things. You know what I mean. But was really interesting, but every part where we stared at like, where we stopped enough. They would say they're stopping him. Sure. And easier for the light photographs on and explaining and everything here.

B.L.: So that's very informative. Also, do you think that visiting Chernobyl is ethical? Because still it is a place of disaster and there are some concerns by other people and they think that Chernobyl shouldn't be visited or maybe should be visited only for educational reasons. What do you think about that?

G.I.: Chernobyl should be open for like, what just like just gone for the sake of it. It's like, if you're really interested in it and obviously you should be allowed to go through and visit.

B.L.: So you think it's ethical, right?

G.I.: I would say so. It's history on that, it's like when you go to Poland, like when you go to Auschwitz and all that. It's basically the, it's just like tourism here, you know what I mean. But obviously you just don't go there just for the sake of it. You go there for the history.

B.L.: So you are going for the history and educational reasons.

G.I.: Yeah, definitely.

B.L.: So, my other question was do you think that people should be allowed to visit? You answered yes.

G.I.: Yes, definitely.

B.L.: Yes. Also, do you happen to know anything or heard anything about the president's plan? Because he was planning with his last year's decree to kind of shake off a negative image of Chernobyl. And he wanted to make it, I don't know, maybe more positive. Do you know something about that?

G.I.: No, not that I'm aware of, no.

B.L.: So it's just basically that the president doesn't want Chernobyl to be associated with disaster, and he wants to make as a tourist destination.

G.I.: Right.

B.L.: Yes. So, do you have any thoughts about that?

G.I.: No, not really. No, not at all. Basically, it's just like I said, it's like you should be allowed to go on anywhere, you know what I mean, like pharmacy, where like, they visit and get more about it. You know, I mean. That's the whole idea.

B.L.: Yes. What do you think about the future of Chernobyl tourism? What do you think will happen? Will the people be still willing to visit or will it grow or do you think the numbers eventually will decrease?

G.I.: I would say there's many years over the life of a table of visitors. You know what I mean. But it's like, it's like an emotional, like an emotional place to go and all that. For what had happened. But I think it should be like, I think it should you should be allowed to go, you know what I mean. And visit, like in years to come and like as from now, you know what I mean?

B.L.: Yes. Yes.

G.I.: But I know like, obviously I've noticed a couple of month ago that was, I don't know, that was a couple of month ago. That was like a, like a fire forest.

B.L.: Yes.

G.I.: Was there a fire?

B.L.: Yes. Also, you said that you didn't stay overnight in Chernobyl, but some people do. Do you have any thoughts about that maybe?

G.I.: No, no thoughts at all. As long as we know that we're going to be safe, from like, obviously where we stay enough. You'll be fine. No problem at all.

B.L.: Yes. And also did you know that some people go to Chernobyl illegally? Like I think they are called the stalkers. So they just come illegally. Oh, what do you think about that? Should the government take some...

G.I.: Yeah, the company.

B.L.: Some action?

G.I.: Yeah, they should take more action about it because for people who sneak into Chernobyl. They're causing the damage, they're causing the damage to themselves, you know what I mean. Because basically they can go in certain areas, like for the Red Forest space, which is totally radioactive. That's the way to go through, you know what I mean. And they're causing things themselves. So that should be stopped. You should only be allowed to go in by someone who, like a professional, basically, like a professional person.

B.L.: Yes. So, to sum up, my, my impression was that your trip was emotional one. Because you were familiar with Chernobyl and you were interested in that so it's emotional one.

G.I.: I would say yeah, it was like interesting like about the history of us and then actually gone there, you know what I mean? And same for myself. And basically like, when he was talking about like, like the time that it happened, like, all the people there was like living in Pripjat... Are getting scattered all over in Kiev and all that. Basically, some companies won't allow them to go in, you know what I mean. This is horrible.

B.L.: Also, did you visit other places in Ukraine or did you go mainly for Chernobyl?

G.I.: We just basically went for Chernobyl but like when we were staying in Kiev, basically, obviously, the memorial, there was a museum. There was a museum placed in the Ukraine, where we, it was only about a five minute walk for where we were staying at the hostel. And basically, we went through when we like, got the normal things like when we went to the museum and all that, and basically, there was a school, there was a lot of school kids there at the time when we went and it was like, basically, yeah, we watched a few videos like they were showing on their screen, and they're basically all of the people who like live there, you know what I mean? Like all

the pictures, I mean, I recorded some, you'll see all the video of like, I don't know if you've seen it yet. This video on Facebook. Like if you go on the wall on Facebook. And then all of it's there. I've got videos when I was in the museum as well.

B.L.: Ok, and I have another question. Because you mainly went to Ukraine for Chernobyl. Do you think that Ukraine should to continue promoting Chernobyl or do you think it should have some other plans to promote whole country or I don't know, other cities? Because mostly now when people think about Ukraine, they immediately think Chernobyl.

G.I.: Yeah, I think we should advertise it quite a lot.

B.L.: So you think Ukraine is advertised a lot or just Chernobyl?

G.I.: Just like, I would say like, obviously like, obviously, you've got the museum in Kiev, you know what I mean? So like, obviously, you've got advertisement there, you know what I mean. And I know like from Kiev to Chernobyl I think it was like a two hour. I think it was a two hour drive. But these are few places in in Kiev that's advertising about Chernobyl. But to me it's mainly just the museum but basically it should be advertised all over in the Ukraine I think.

B.L.: Yes and overall, were you happy with your trip?

G.I.: What, sorry, say that again.

B.L.: Overall, were you happy with your trip to Chernobyl?

G.I.: Yes, very. I would love to go and visit there again.

Interviewer: And this time you would go with the same tour or would you choose another?

G.I.: I'll probably go by the same, I will probably pay folks to do it again. I'll probably go with the same tour and do the overnight.

B.L.: Do it overnight. That's interesting. And the tour that you went on, does it have a fixed route for all the tours or I don't know, does it change accordingly?

G.I.: I think it changes, I'm not really sure. You know what I mean, cause I only just did that once so but basically if I was to go back to the Ukraine I would still go with the tour guides and probably just do the overnight. Cause basically you get to do more, you know what I mean.

B.L.: Yes. And you can if you stay overnight you can get more experience. More memories, more impressions.

G.I.: Definitely, yeah.

B.L.: So, like we have said before your experience was emotional and you think that people should be visiting Chernobyl for educational reasons.

G.I.: Educational, yes.

B.L.: Historical aspects. Ok, I understand. I'm not sure if I have other questions but thank you very much.

G.I.: You're welcome. Any time.

B.L.: I really appreciate that you're taking your time to answer these questions.

G.I.: No problem.

B.L.: And once again, thank you very much. This was really helpful.

G.I.: You're welcome. Any time.

B.L.: Thank you.

G.I.: Ok then.

B.L.: Thank you, bye bye.

G.I.: Right, bye. Stay safe, bye.

B.L.: Thank you, bye, bye.

G.I.: Bye.

Appendix 3 - Interview with Nikolai Fomin

Interview conducted on 15th May, 2020

Interviewee: Nikolai Fomin

Co-founder of tour organizer Gamma Travel and the guide

Has been working with Chernobyl tourism for 10 years

B.L.: Hi.

N.F.: Hello.

B.L.: How are you?

N.F.: I'm good, thank you. Yourself?

B.L.: I'm good as well. So thank you very much for your time and for agreeing to have this interview with me. As you know I'm writing my master thesis about Chernobyl and I have prepared some questions for you. So the first question – I just want to make sure, you are the co-founder of Gamma Travel agency, right?

N.F.: Yes, that's me. And also I'm the guide.

B.L.: And how long have you been a guide?

N.F.: So I started this in 2010. Nearly 10 years ago. I started as a state worker so I was actually escorting groups. At that time tourism didn't exist as a thing. So I was escorting officials like students, media guys, different delegations and scientists, media, all that. So after couple of years I started to work as a freelancer, as a guide to just tours and since 2017 we established a company called Gamma Travel so we run tours to the Chernobyl Zone and many other destinations. But most of our energy we spend on Chernobyl. So far I have over 2000 trips to Chernobyl Zone.

B.L.: That's a lot.

N.F.: And I've been doing it on a day to day basis.

B.L.: And why did you decide, sorry you said that before doing your own company you were escorting people, you were working like a guide, right?

N.F.: Yes. Yes.

B.L.: And why did you decide to work as a guide in Chernobyl area?

N.F.: At all? Well, that's part of my education. So I studied tourism, international tourism. So I was expecting to become a guide somewhere but I never expected to end up in Chernobyl. So to be honest, I didn't know much about it when I started. And when I started doing it, it was a need. I was a student right after the university so I found the job. And at that time, I didn't know much about Chernobyl but I decided to give it a go and then very soon after I figured out that it's actually very interesting job.

B.L.: And quite unique.

N.F.: Yes, it is actually really unique.

B.L. Also, I have another question. Of course there are many people Chernobyl and they visit for different reasons. But what do you think is the, I don't know, the biggest reason why people visit Chernobyl?

N.F.: Well, I think it's just a curiosity. So, there are many different people. You know, we've got good friends from all over the world. And they are all different age, different, like a social position, you know, mainly it is a common, like the majority of our guests. They are about 30-40 years old. And they're mostly men. So there are a couple of things they're interested in, for example, the history. Because the place has a very unique, unfortunately sad but very if you like famous story, so it attracts people. Also, it's a quite amazing nature reserve itself, I mean the area. So it attracts people who like to observe nature, wildlife and so on. There are many people who come with the purpose of photography. So, I mean, starting with the hobby photographers, people, just for fun and ending with a high end class photographers that actually make international exhibitions and print photo books, et cetera, et cetera. Many people from the industry you know, the nuclear industry is rather big. And the community is actually opposite. It's very small so everybody knows each other.

B.L.: That's nice.

N.F.: And people who work at the nuclear power plants and even students, they also come to the Chernobyl Zone. So it's a huge variety of very different people and we can talk about each types for hours, you know. But yeah, mainly, mainly it's history. It's just a common interest. And also, many people take great pictures so they expect to be, to to finish the trip with many, many pictures. Which we normally succeed.

B.L.: And do you think that people are also influenced by a social media? Like, for example, when they see pictures of Chernobyl and then they think “Oh, I would like to go there”.

N.F.: There are people like that, too. So, you know, a part of other categories of I described earlier. There is also a people that are just visiting Ukraine. They don't know much about the place. They just want to spend time some and they just go to the Chernobyl Zone and then take some pictures, put it on the social media. There are many bloggers as well that come to make some video reports and just take beautiful footage. So it's rather popular too.

B.L.: And also, have you noticed that there are many, many more tourists coming after HBO's last year's “Chernobyl” TV series?

N.F.: So, look, now we don't have any people coming at all. Because of the pandemic.

B.L.: Yes. That's understandable.

N.F.: So in 19, in 2019, we received a bit over 120,000 people. So the number of people it was growing organically by itself for many years continuously. It was a climb. Very slow but steady. Right. And we expect to see the effects of a mini series on our industry in 2020, right. So the number of people it rose slightly, well, not dramatically much but slightly, we did see an increase but the Coronavirus, you know, it shut down our plane before it took off.

B.L.: That's sad. Also, when you take your groups do you have a maximum number of how many people can be in a group?

Interviewee: Yes, it depends on the type of the tour of course. So we do a day trips, we do multiple day trips. We do group tours which are limited up to 20 people, so we never take more than 20 people per one guide and the vehicle so we tried to keep this personal approach, you know, and keep groups as compact as possible. They're also private tours where people can book it just for themselves, you know. So, for example, couple of friends or family members and that is normally two to five people. So which is, in my opinion, way better because it's much more personal and you can ask your personal questions. Go with your own pace and see places you like, so. However, there is a thing that some other companies they packed big buses. Like 40 people, 45, so we don't do that. We try to limit groups up to 20 and private tour. They're initially small so.

B.L.: So they get maybe better experience if the groups are smaller.

N.F.: Of course.

B.L.: Do you take people to same places, do you have the same, I don't know, the same paths for every group or does it change a little bit?

N.F.: Well, it really depends on the on the guide and it really depends on the group itself. So as we discussed earlier, the people are different. So, of course, the tours are never exactly the same. Right? So we always try to make it personal and two things, but there is a general line of course, so there are a couple of places that we visit on each tour and that for sure, because they're famous, they're iconic, popular and people want to see them. People expect to see those places. Like the town of Chernobyl, like to go Raider, the power plant itself, the new Safe Confinement, Pripyat sign and then the town of Pripyat itself. So at the same time, there are different tours as I told you earlier, like three to five day tours. Expeditions when you stay overnight in the Zone and when you have way more time to explore. The day trips, they are rather typical. There is a number of places that people want to see. But private tours like those multiple day trips, they can be very flexible. The Zone has a lot to offer, you see, there are hundreds of locations, and you need weeks to see them all. People that come every year, sometimes multiple times a year in such expeditions and we explore the Zone much deeper. But that takes time and that is an option that you can get only on the multiple day trips.

B.L.: I understand. And do you think that, for example, do you think that one day trips are more popular than other trips or no?

N.F.: Clearly, day trips, they are much more popular. Because the audience is a little bit different. Right. So, most of people they don't know too much about the Chernobyl. And they want to see, for them it's quite enough to see all the main iconic places. And some people can afford it. Some people don't have much time. They have some other places to see. But the day trips, it's a big number of people.

B.L.: And is there any preparation required before visiting Chernobyl? Like do people prepare? I don't know, by reading books or articles or doing something like that?

N.F.: Sure, yes. There are many people who read about it before they come. And people who want to visit the area for many years and then they finally book a tour. So, of course, there are many people who take it as a hobby. So it's much deeper research and they know a lot more about the

Zone than any average person in the world, you know. But again, the day trips they are, the people are less knowledgeable, let's say. In general, of course, there are people who know it deeper but most of it, they all know only facts.

B.L.: Also, because Chernobyl is a place of disaster, do you think it's, because some people think that it's not very ethical to visit it. What do you think about that?

N.F.: Magical? Yeah. Yeah, I heard these opinions that some people call it dark tourism. Whatever. I probably disagree on this. Because it really depends on the guide. Because when you get to see for the first time, you see it through your guide, you know, so it really depends how do you present history and the value of all this. So, I would say it's rather educational tourism. You see when people go there to learn from our mistakes and we learn them, we will not repeat them. Hopefully. So I try to educate people as much as I can and I try to pay a lot of respect to the place itself. Because, yeah, it's a sad, very sad event that unfortunately took place 34 years ago but at the same time, we need to learn from it. And I always tell people to treat the place with respect. And don't, you know, make fun of it. And then so far it works. I mean, normally, if you try to tell people, the historical facts and all other details, it really works and people get engaged and people take it as a history lesson. And plus very great experience because you can see how rapidly nature is taking over the place. Which is another great fact that people normally notice very, very quickly. Because Chernobyl Zone it's a restricted militarized area but at the same time, it's a huge nature reserve with a great nature and a huge wildlife which has been excellent in the area without people.

B.L.: Yes. And also since people are visiting Chernobyl do you think that Chernobyl should be promoted like a tourist destination? Or what do you think that?

N.F.: Yes. Definitely. There are a few reasons for that. First, it's not going to last forever, right. So the place decaying and the place is slowly dying. So we will lose many locations within 10-15 years. So, people need to use this chance and come and see the place. Before it disappears or before it completely turns into the forest. And the second reason is that, again, you need to learn from your mistakes. So, we need to visit these places, for example, Auschwitz and Chernobyl and Hiroshima and Nagasaki. So that is important, I think. Again, it should not be promoted as a classic tourism. Because it's not actually classic tourism. There are many restrictions you need to follow. There are many rules and you need to comply with them because that's your safety. So I would not call it classic tourism, but again, it's more like adventure tourism and education.

B.L.: I agree. And also, what do you think about president Zelensky's plan? Because last year he signed the decree and he, I read some speeches. And he said that he wants Ukraine to kind of shake off a negative image of Chernobyl. Do you have opinions about that?

N.F.: Of course I know about Mr. president's plan but so far as a part of this industry, we don't feel any big changes. So yeah, there is a position of the authorities that we should develop this destination and promote it. But so far, nothing is happening, maybe when the pandemic is over. We will see a difference but so far we don't feel anything.

B.L.: And do you agree with his thoughts that Chernobyl should be, I don't know, that Chernobyl should be looked as not a bad thing or dark destination, but more like open to tourists, something like that?

N.F.: I think I agree with that because that will bring more people. And that will help to develop the region and actually big, big part of price, it actually goes to the government. So it really helps to support the road and all the other infrastructure. So yeah, we should definitely make it more popular.

B.L.: Yes, I see. And also there are, I saw on your website that you sell souvenirs and I know that also in Chernobyl area there is a souvenir shop. So do you think that those souvenirs tell the story of Chernobyl? Like that they are important?

N.F.: Souvenirs? You mean souvenirs?

B.L.: Yes.

N.F.: Well, you know, for some people, it's just a nice piece of memory they can take with them. So I think there is nothing bad in that. And if people like to send postcards from Chernobyl or or buy a little memory I think that's a great thing. I do the same when I go somewhere, I always buy some fridge magnets.

B.L.: Yes, I see but some people argue that maybe it's not, again, very ethical. Because, like, if you buy a fridge magnet from Chernobyl, some people argue that it's not very right. I don't know.

N.F.: Well, I mean, it's a personal thing. So of course there would be, there will be people who, who dislike some things. That's fine. I'm fine with that. So if they don't want to purchase anything, well, they don't have to.

B.L.: I agree. Also, do you think that there are some problems related to Chernobyl tourism? You mentioned that, that buildings are falling and that Chernobyl tourism might be over. Do you have another issues that you can identify?

N.F.: Well, you know, we, the first thing we do on our tours, we want to make sure that everyone is safe. So that's a first, a priority thing. So people get to know the rules in the beginning of the tour so they have to acknowledge them. And rules are very strict and the safety radiation safety rules, and just the common sense is really important because it's wild. You see, there are stones, there are holes. There is the old crumbling city. But again, if you follow the safety precautions and follow all the rules, you will be just fine. So, so far we didn't have any serious issues. I will knock on wood, you know. But yeah, it's fine. I mean, if you comply with the rules of behavior, you'll be fine. If you're looking for trouble, well, you will probably find it there as in the other places in the world, you know. No, but the routes we visit, for example, the places we take people, they all have been measured for radiation. They all have been restricted. So we actually cannot go inside. And radiation wise, if you follow the route, you'll be fine. And of course people to, you know, to watch their step and be careful. So normally we don't have any problems with.

B.L.: So let's hope that you will not have any problems at all in future as well.

N.F.: Let's do so.

B.L.: Also, I have a question regarding your opinion about future of tourism in Chernobyl. What do you think? How long do you think it will last? And do you think that numbers will be growing after a pandemic or what is your opinion on that?

N.F.: Well, I still try to be optimistic, you know, and hope for best but also as a realistic person, I need to prepare for worse. And then I think the tourism industry has been badly affected in the entire world.

B.L.: Yes, unfortunately.

N.F.: So Chernobyl is the small correction. So there is not much predictions we can do. We don't know what to expect, actually. And we can see that and then come to some conclusions only after we open the country again and start working. So for now, I don't think it's possible to do any, you

know, suggestions or conclusions. Very hard. Very hard. We definitely expect the decrease, big decrease in the number of visitors. But we'll see. We'll see.

B.L.: Yes, because people probably will not be travelling even when the pandemic is over. But let's see. But also, like you said many times that the buildings are falling. So probably one day in Chernobyl tourism kind of will finish maybe because if all buildings fall down, I don't know.

N.F.: That will take quite some time for all of them to fall down, you know. There are thousands of structures in the Chernobyl zone, it is a huge area. And so far we've got only three buildings that partly damaged. And they just fell in the natural way because of the weather conditions and trees growing on the roof and just a normal decay. So, we've got only very few places that are actually damaged and you know, there are many buildings that will last 10s of years. For instance, apartment blocks in Pripyat. They are very well built, you know, they are made of concrete slaps that are incredibly strong. And those ones will last for quite some time. But eventually we will lose it all. But I think that's part of the game, you know. So it's a decay that we escort when we do. I'm a photographer myself so I try to document all the places that I visit different times of the year, different weather, different places, so I try to keep it documented, as much as possible. So...

B.L.: That's nice.

N.F.: We are not talking about a, like serious devastation soon. That will probably take another 20-30 years.

B.L.: So, to sum up, your company is doing private tours like for photographers and for groups, like one day and two day tours where people stay overnight. That's nice.

N.F.: That's right. We do both. We started, you know, when we, when we started, we were focused more on the private tours. But at least all the time before the pandemic, last few years, we have been doing both. We are running tours on a daily basis.

B.L.: That's nice. Actually I don't think if I have other questions right now, I'm not sure. So I would like to thank you for your time and for your attention and I really appreciate your help. You really helped me so thank you very much.

N.F.: You're more than welcome.

B.L.: Thank you.

N.F.: Hope to see you one day in Ukraine. So when you finish with your work...

B.L.: Hope so. I haven't actually been to Ukraine so, but I would like to go.

N.F.: You should. Especially...

B.L.: I will some day.

N.F.: Yeah, one day. You know, it's a pretty interesting country and people normally expect a lot less than they get in this country. So you definitely should. One day.

B.L.: I will.

N.F.: No problem. If you have any other questions, feel free to contact.

B.L.: Okay. I will.

N.F.: And when you're done, it would be great if you could send me a link or something where I can see your work, would be great. For my personal...

B.L.: Yes, of course. I will. Thank you very much. Actually the deadline is on 2nd of June, so I can send you after that. Okay, thank you very much. Thank you.

N.F.: All the best. Bye bye.

B.L.: Thank you. Bye.

Appendix 4 - Interview with Jay M.

Interview conducted on 16th May, 2020

The interviewee: Jay M.

Tourist from USA

Spent one night in Chernobyl

B.L.: Hi.

J.M.: Hello.

B.L.: First of all I wanted to thank you for your time and for agreeing to. And for agreeing for this interview with me. I really appreciate that.

J.M.: Of course. It's all good.

B.L.: Thank you again. So I wanted to... As you know, I'm writing my master thesis about Chernobyl and as you decided to have an interview with me I suppose you are interested in dark tourism. Is that true?

J.M.: Yes. It's of many hobbies that I have and I find it very intriguing and I read about it whenever I have a spare minute.

B.L.: That's nice. So have you visited other places than Chernobyl?

J.M.: Not really, to be honest. I just, I only went to Chernobyl last spring but that's about it.

B.L.: Last spring. And did you go alone or with some friends?

J.M.: No, I actually went there with some of my friends from college and I'm glad we did it because travelling in Europe nowadays is really restricted for obvious reasons so...

B.L.: May I ask you what sparked your interest in Chernobyl?

J.M.: To be honest I always knew it existed but, I mean from history books, but what really caught my interest is the HBO series based on real events. And after watching the show I got really interested.

B.L.: So HBO series influenced your decision to go to Chernobyl, right?

J.M.: Yes.

B.L.: That's nice. Also, how long were you in Chernobyl? Did you stay overnight or was just a one day trip?

J.M.: We actually spent one night in Desyatka hotel. So technically two full days in Chernobyl area.

B.L.: Wow, that must be an authentic experience to stay in this hotel in Chernobyl area.

J.M.: Well, to be honest I read some reviews of the hotel on Trip Advisor before booking the room and it met my expectations. Obviously, it's no 5 star hotel but I'm not very picky person in general so it was okay.

B.L.: Well, yes, of course and to have a 5 star hotel in Chernobyl area, that's not really imaginable. So, my other question is regarding social media but you, I think you already answered it. So the question is do you think that people are influenced by social media to visit Chernobyl?

J.M.: Well, I'm not really sure because I have not seen any posts about it on social media but I do believe that it plays a huge role in today's travelling. Like if I see a cool location on social media like Instagram I always screenshot it and save it on my phone and add it to my bucket list so I think it positively impacts tourism and helps discover less advertised places maybe.

B.L.: I see your point. Also, could you maybe describe your experience in in Chernobyl a little bit? Like, for example, was your group big, was it a private tour or no?

J.M.: You mean my experience about the hotel that I stayed in?

B.L.: And overall your expectations that you had before going and what you got in Chernobyl?

Interviewee: Well, speaking of the hotel as I said it wasn't too bad but obviously, the conditions were basically satisfying. It was nothing more than I expected. But Chernobyl itself, it definitely felt like a ghost town. There, there's so many abandoned houses and coffee shops and even kindergarden and you could easily enter any building that you wanted to. And. There is even an abandoned ferris wheel and a small adventure park so. I have to admit that it was pretty haunting.

B.L.: Did you prepare for your trip before leaving? Did you read some articles or books or watch some documentaries or you just went there without no particular preparation?

J.M.: Well, obviously I saw the HBO show so it kind of helped to learn more about Chernobyl. But apart from that, well, there is nothing in particular that we had to bring apart from our cameras and comfortable shoes. We just made sure, like I was reading some articles and people were saying that you need to have like a Geiger counter to measure radiation levels in the atmosphere. So I made sure that I bought that.

B.L.: I see. Did you learn something new while you were visiting? But you said that you researched, like you watched HBO series and while visiting did you learn something new that maybe you didn't know before?

J.M.: Perhaps nothing in particular about the history of Chernobyl. Cause I already knew it. But I learnt that you can't really even drink water during the tour. So it's basically best to stay hydrated

before the tour starts cause during the trip you cannot drink water at all. And we were lucky cause we went there in March so it wasn't that hot. But if you go there in July, I imagine, it must be quite hard, like not being able to have any food or drink. That's basically too dangerous to do that or something like that.

B.L.: Did you have any concerns before visiting? Because, for example, the majority of people obviously think that it's dangerous to visit because of the radiation. Did you have some concerns like that?

J.M.: I was definitely worried about the levels of radiation that is still present in the atmosphere. But actually, after doing some research, I realized that short term exposure will not lead to any serious condition and it's basically the same thing as taking a long haul flight or getting an x-ray scan. So unless you're in a special risk group or something like that radiation level is nothing to worry about.

B.L.: And if we move on to ethics, from your personal point of view, do you think that it's ethical to visit Chernobyl? Because it is a site of a disaster? What do you think about that?

J.M.: It's a very hard question, but I believe there is no right or wrong. I obviously believe that Chernobyl commemorates human suffer. But in my opinion, the thing that matters the most is the purpose of visiting. If you are 100 percent sure that you know the reason why you're visiting for example, you want to learn about history and your teacher at school and you believe it will expand your knowledge. So, why not? Right.

B.L.: So you think that it can be ethical or unethical based on your reasons why you are visiting, right?

J.M.: Exactly.

B.L.: And, so in that case do you think that people should be allowed to visit?

J.M.: I believe that if tourists are voluntarily, voluntarily willing to visit and are asking to go to the Exclusion area, then I would let them do it in like private, small tours. But I wouldn't advertise it too much like in Ukraine, if that makes sense.

B.L.: It does, because it's a very sensitive topic and a very sensitive site. So I definitely agree with you. Also, I have a question regarding souvenirs. Did you see souvenirs that were being sold in Chernobyl? Maybe you bought something?

J.M.: I remember the gift shop. I remember they had like a small gift shop. But, I saw like everything you mentioned. I saw some souvenirs. But it personally did not make, make me feel uncomfortable. But I understand why for some people it would. Obviously there are so many people who have negative associations with his place and might experience PTSD maybe or things like that, but I'm personally not against the souvenirs. You can literally find souvenirs being sold at 9/11 Memorial in New York City or in places in Berlin. So I think it's okay to sell souvenirs.

B.L.: And do you think that those souvenirs tell the story of Chernobyl and in I don't know, maybe educational way or something like that?

J.M.: No, I actually believe is just a gift shop trying to make some money.

B.L.: Oh, so just the profit.

J.M.: Yeah.

B.L.: Moving on, I remember you said that Chernobyl should not be promoted as a tourist destination in Ukraine. But do you think that it should be promoted elsewhere, like outside of Ukraine? Or is your opinion the same about that, that it's not ethical, and this shouldn't be done?

J.M.: I believe that it shouldn't be commercialized too much. I believe that there's always gonna be tourists who are aware of it and are willingly asking to visit the Exclusion area. But, so basically, I believe that the government should not prohibit visiting that place, if you are asking to do so. But I believe it should not be commercialized in other countries too much. And also it would take away all the mysteries surrounding it, if you know what I'm saying.

B.L.: I think I do, yes. And I think also that marketing, the promotion of this destination is very difficult. I'm not even sure if I, if I can think of a right way to promote that. I'm not sure if you are familiar, but last year the president Volodymyr Zelensky, he signed a decree and with that decree he said that he wants to make Chernobyl like a tourist destination that is, that has a positive outlook rather than negative one. Because like you know now Chernobyl is associated with dark tourism. So, do you have opinions about that maybe?

J.M.: So is he trying to commercialize the Exclusion area and like advertise it more?

B.L.: Yes, kind of. Because his plan was to kind of touristify the Exclusion zone, he wanted to make new routes like I don't know, new waterways for tourists and just make it a site as which is not related with dark tourism.

J.M.: No, I believe it should still be associated with dark tourism to be honest. But I see where he's coming from obviously, it would bring so much money for local companies. But I believe personally that commercializing it means the country is trying to benefit from such a tragic historical place and I think they should not like do too much.

B.L.: I agree. Um, so I have another question as well. It's regarding your opinion about the future of Chernobyl tourism. What do you think about that? What do you think is going to happen in Chernobyl in or to Chernobyl tourism, um, in a few years? Do you think people will be willing to go? Or do you think it will decrease eventually?

J.M.: Well, first of all, I'm not even sure when is the nearest time that we will be able to travel around Europe. You know what I mean? But I think that there will always be tourists who are going to visit that place. But it will never be an extremely popular destination because so many people are still paranoid about the radiation levels and unaware that it's actually relatively safe to visit, so I feel like there's some, there's maybe lack of information about the radiation levels. So it worries a lot of people. It worries a lot of tourists, so it's never going to be a very popular destination unless they change this perception of radiation levels.

B.L.: I see your point. And also, actually the buildings are falling. So some people think that the Chernobyl tourism is not going to last too long for this reason.

J.M.: I didn't know about that. That's tragic.

B.L.: Yes, so to conclude, I can see that your experience was like associated with education to some extent, right?

J.M.: Well, I knew where I was going to. I just wanted to learn more about the Soviet history. And yeah, basically after seeing this TV show, like it really caught my interest and I'm really curious about history, European history and Eastern European history and things like that so and my friends are similar, so it was basically the reason why we went there.

B.L.: I see. Also, did you go to Ukraine only for Chernobyl or did you visit some other places and cities in Ukraine?

J.M.: Well, actually, we had a flight from Brussels to Kiyv. And, well, obviously there's no like airport at Pripyat or anywhere close to Chernobyl. Closest airport is in Kiyv, which is two hours away, so we did spend several days in Kiev before going Chernobyl and it was such a great experience.

B.L.: I see. And would you consider going to Chernobyl again, of course, when it's the time when it's possible to travel?

J.M.: No, I believe it is not a place that you would visit for several times. I believe that we saw everything that we wanted to and yeah, I would never plan to do something like that again.

B.L.: I see. So I think that's all. I would like to once again thank you very much for your time and for attention and for your time.

J.M.: I hope it was helpful in in some way.

B.L.: Yes, it really was. So thank you very much.

J.M.: No worries at all.

B.L.: Thank you. Bye bye.

J.M.: Bye. I'll talk to you later.

B.L.: Bye.

Appendix 5 - Interview with Asa D.

Interview conducted on 28th May, 2020

Interviewee: Asa D.

Tourist from Sweden

Spent 2 nights in Chernobyl

B.L.: Hi.

A.D.: Hi.

B.L.: Sorry, at first I had some problems with my computer, I don't know, I think I accidentally ended the call.

A.D.: It is no problem.

B.L.: So how are you?

A.D.: I'm fine, thanks and you?

B.L.: I'm good too, thank you. And I wanted to very much for agreeing to have this interview with me. It really means a lot to me.

A.D.: Good.

B.L.: So I wanted to ask you when did you visit Chernobyl?

A.D. Yes?

B.L.: When was that?

A.D.: Excuse me?

B.L.: When did you visit Chernobyl? Was it last year?

A.D.: Yes, last year in October.

B.L.: So it was after the HBO "Chernobyl" TV series. What was your motivation that you decided to visit Chernobyl?

A.D.: My motivation have been since the accident have been. When I heard that in the news, then I wanted to go directly but that you cannot do. So I have always wanted to go and I wanted to go before the accident too, but I have not go.

B.L.: And do you think that some people are influenced by social media, maybe like “Chernobyl” TV series?

A.D.: Maybe someone is, of course of this area but I think they are curious anyway.

B.L.: Like you, right? Because you were interested before by accident you said. Also, was it a one day trip or did you stay overnight?

A.D.: I stayed three days in Chernobyl.

B.L.: Three days... Wow, that’s a lot. Do you remember in which hotel you were staying?

A.D.: I know there are three hotels and in in this hotel we eat food.

B.L.: Was it hotel Desyatka maybe?

A.D.: Excuse?

B.L.: Was it hotel Desyatka maybe?

A.D.: Maybe.

B.L.: So you stayed for free days. So how did you feel? I mean, because this is such an unusual destination and to stay over for free days should be different.

A.D.: Of course I... But this trip was so exciting for me so I don't think so much for leaving and I only want to go. So it was only curious everything.

B.L.: Yes, I can imagine. And do you think that staying at a hotel in Chernobyl was a different experience, like authentic or something like that?

A.D.: For the hotel you mean?

B.L.: Yes.

A.D.: The hotel was very... Well, what can I say? It was not expensive hotel. So it was very simple. So there you have beds and you have, but the only thing I that time I was telling that it was cold in

the night. I knew that it was going to be cold, but I didn't think it would be so cold. They have not put a warm up, huh. And we had only warm water.

B.L.: But you know, staying in Chernobyl I think you can't really expect too much I guess. I don't know.

A.D.: No, you cannot.

B.L.: But how did you feel because you were staying in Chernobyl hotel. Did you have a thought that wow, this is really different from any other experience?

A.D.: Of course it is different because this is a special place. But for other ways, it is like your go to a two star hotel.

B.L.: And was your group big?

A.D.: My group was only me.

B.L.: So it was a private tour, right?

A.D.: Yes.

B.L.: That's interesting. So you went there alone on a private tour.

A.D.: Yes.

B.L.: Ok, that's very interesting. And what else you could say about your experience in Chernobyl? I mean if you can add something else?

A.D.: For me, everything was very special to see all around but I wanted to stay longer but the price stopped me from that. It is much money to go. Have we been more people it have been more cheaper, but now it was only me. But I have got very much. I have once we stopped we go to Chernobyl town and go around and look and he showed me the buildings that they have meetings before. And after the accident. And it was very quiet about this because no one wants to say which one they gonna blame for the accident. But we go around and after that we go to a village and I meet the people.

B.L.: So you met the local people?

A.D.: Yes. So there are two families and we seek to speak very much. And I get information, not very much but little amount. After that we go to Pripyat in the dark because they gonna show films on the wall. So, we went there and stay till it was finished and we go back to the hotel. Then the next day we go to Pripyat.

B.L.: And you said that you met local people. I don't think that all tours of do that. So I think it's kind of special that you had a chance to talk with them.

A.D.: Yes, they take, how can I say, my guide says like this: I only take people who are very interested. They want to know everything about Chernobyl. They want to ask very much to the people, that people I take to the village. He said so to me. Everyone, when I say big groups it is difficult because they are not young people who live in the village. They are really old.

B.L.: And I think then there are big groups, some people come just for pictures maybe. Maybe they are not even interested too much in Chernobyl.

A.D.: Yes. Many people, he said to me, it is many people who come and I stopped to speak with them about what have happened and everything around and they don't want to listen. They don't want to listen, they only asked me to go so they can do photo. That I think it is sad. Because I am very interested in the history of Chernobyl and Ukraine. Anyway, so it is everything.

B.L.: I see your point. And would you consider going back again to Chernobyl?

A.D.: Yes, of course, I want to go back again, but I don't know when I go.

B.L.: These days, these times it's difficult.

A.D.: Very difficult. I think you have the same problem.

B.L.: I think everyone in the world now has this problem. Also, did you prepare for your trip? Did you do some things in particular?

A.D.: No, not more than planning my trip. That was the only thing I do.

B.L.: Because you said that you were interested for a long time, so probably you knew what you can expect and things about the disaster. Also, while you were visiting, did you learn something new that maybe you didn't know before?

A.D.: What can that be?

B.L.: Maybe local people told you something that you didn't know?

A.D.: Yes, that I think about what they said. I don't remember now what they said to me because we spoke so much. So now the only thing - that we ate food of the family and we ate the food from the ground.

B.L.: What do you mean from the ground?

A.D.: That they have their own. You know salad and everything like these potato.

B.L.: Wait, so when you say on the ground you mean that they grow potatoes and salad in the Chernobyl area and they gave you that food, right?

A.D.: Yes. Because here where they live they have no radiation.

B.L.: So that must have been a very authentic and different experience.

A.D.: Yes it was, because I have seen another video from Youtube, it was three boys or four boys from school who have went. They had to do like you do now, with me. But they have gone to Chernobyl to look and video their trip. For the school. And the guide has said to these boys that don't eat something, even if they give you. But it depends where, which one you go for, because there is different where they live and where the radiation has gone. But here there I was there was no radiation.

B.L.: And before you left for your trip did you know that you will meet with local people?

A.D.: No. I didn't know.

B.L.: So that was a nice surprise.

A.D.: Yeah, it was a surprise.

B.L.: Also, did you have some concerns before visiting?

A.D.: Some what?

B.L.: Some concerns, like were you worried about something, like because, for example, some people are worried about radiation?

A.D.: No, I was not, no. I was not worried for that.

B.L.: And were you worried for other things?

A.D.: No, I was not worried for this trip Chernobyl at all.

B.L.: Also, we have talked a little bit about big groups, so what do you think about that? Do you think that people should be allowed to visit Chernobyl? Do you think it should be maybe controlled in some way?

A.D.: Now I know it's gonna be more controls for Chernobyl and that I think is very good. Today, there are too many stalkers inside, it is not good. They destroy so much inside. That I don't like.

B.L.: Did you see, while you were visiting, did you see some souvenirs that were sold there?

A.D.: Yes.

B.L.: Like fridge magnets, t-shirts. What do you think about that? How does it make you feel?

A.D.: What I think about that it is one Chernobyl Tour. You know this. That it was only this one who sold things at the border when we go inside. They own both, both sides of the road they stay with yellow van. You know van?

B.L.: Yes.

A.D.: Yes, they stayed in this one and sold things.

B.L.: And what do you think about that? Do you think it's good or bad or what is your opinion on that?

A.D.: It is okay.

B.L.: So you don't think that that is unethical or something like that?

A.D.: No, I think every tour that you go with can sell something to your people. You understand what I mean? And not go to another guide to buy something. That I don't like. But now I don't buy anything.

B.L.: Sorry, can you repeat that again, the thing that you don't like?

A.D.: I say, for this way to buy things, souvenirs, it is better to go to your own guide and buy something from them and not to another guide.

B.L.: I understand now.

A.D.: If I say like this, you know, I see you know this one. Nikolai.

B.L.: Sorry?

A.D.: Nikolai Fomin. You know him. Because he has Gamma Travel and Chernobyl Tour is another guide. It was Chernobyl Tour who sold the souvenirs. For this I think it is was better if Gamma Travel have their own so we can buy from them and not from Chernobyl Tour.

B.L.: I understand. But you are not against the souvenirs, right?

A.D.: I am not against, no.

B.L.: Also, I have another question. When I was looking, reading information about Chernobyl, I found one, I don't even know how to describe it. But that was a mutated Chernobyl matryoshka. What do you think about that?

A.D.: Look, now I don't understand what you mean.

B.L.: I can explain. So I have seen a mutated matryoshka. I don't know if you know but matryoshka is a small doll made from wood and inside that there are many other smaller dolls. Does it make any sense?

A. D.: You mean the dogs running around?

B.L.: No, I am sorry, not the dogs, doll.

A.D.: Doll?

B.L.: Yes. Doll, like a toy.

A.D.: A toy?

B.L.: Yes.

A.D.: You mean a doll for small children?

B.L.: Yes, but it can be also like a souvenir. So there is a doll but inside this doll, inside that toy there are other smaller versions of that toy.

A.D.: I think I know what you mean now.

B.L.: So that doll that I saw on the internet it had three, four or five heads and the name of it was mutated Chernobyl doll. Do you think it's okay to do things like that or no?

A.D.: Like that, no. That what is already from before that is okay, but not this one.

B.L.: I see. And also, what do you think about the future of Chernobyl tourism?

A.D.: What?

B.L.: What do you think about the future of tourism in Chernobyl?

A.D.: I hope it's gonna be good, that we can go again. Of course, because I want to go again but I know that it's gonna be very much controlled and for now when it opens again it's gonna be that we must have, what is the name for this?

B.L.: Permission?

A.D.: What?

B.L.: Permission. I don't know if that's what you mean

A.D.: This one you put over nose and mouth.

B.L.: Mask.

A.D.: Mask, yes. That you must have now when you go inside when they open.

B.L.: It might be true. And what do you think about the fact that now many people, I mean maybe before virus, many people were going to Chernobyl. What would you think about that? Because now there are so many, there were so many tourists going it's kind of like overcrowded. What do you think about that?

A.D.: It is too much of this now. And I hope they can do something. So maybe when you only go, of course you're almost outside.

B.L.: Sorry, what do you mean?

A.D.: For this way, the tourists who go to Chernobyl we are of course outside. So, we are not, everyone is not inside in the same place. So for that it is no problem. But the problem is when you

go going for to stay and listen to your guide. If you are a big group then it can be a problem. For the ... I think.

B.L.: And also, I was very impressed when I heard that you spent two nights in the Chernobyl area. So if you would go back again, would you stay...

A.D.: Longer.

B.L.: Overnight again?

A.D.: Yes, I'm gonna stay longer.

B.L.: How much longer?

A.D.: I don't know. I have not decided that yet.

B.L.: But longer than three days that you were, right?

A.D.: Yes, of course. I think you maybe one week or a little more, I don't know yet. Because I want to see much more and not so fast. Because if you have, the area is still big. You understand? And to see everything now it's much that have gone away because it had burned down. And that is very sad. But still it is much to see. So to see so much you must stay a very long time. For me, who is so much interested in this, I can say, I easily can say I want to stay one month, but that I cannot.

B.L.: So as I can see, your experience is really interesting because you talked with local people and you also ate food that they made and you stayed in the Zone for free days and two nights, you stayed at the hotel. So that is very interesting.

A.D.: You have not been there?

B.L.: No, I haven't.

A.D.: Why?

B.L.: I don't know.

A.D.: You are afraid?

B.L.: No, I wouldn't say that I'm afraid but I just didn't really have a chance I would say. But maybe one day I will go, we will see after the virus, we will see.

A.D.: I hope you will go because it is very interesting. You're not gonna be disappointed I promise.

B.L.: I can imagine. And one more question. You said that you were very interested before the HBO show. And can you please say one more time why were you so interested in Chernobyl?

A.D.: Yeah, why I am suddenly interested? My interest to go, to know the history for each country.

B.L.: So it's education, kind of?

A.D.: Yes, but Chernobyl has been more and more interesting also because they had very good sportsmen. From before. And here in Sweden, it's not far from me. They started to, how to say, for the poor people in Ukraine.

B.L.: Help?

A.D.: Yes, they do a lot of organisations. From here and they drive over and give them things. When I heard about this it was after the Chernobyl accident, much long after, but they, I like what they are doing for them. So, my interest in Ukraine and Chernobyl has been very long time and the accident had triggered it more.

B.L.: I understand.

A.D.: And then after I have read very much about the power plant and everything about that.

B.L.: I see. So actually, I think that you answered all of my questions that I had. Again, I would like to thank you very much for having this interview with me. And again, I would like to thank you very much for having this interview with me. I really appreciate that.

A.D.: You're welcome.

B.L.: Thank you very much.

A.D.: I'm pleased to help.

B.L.: Thank you.

A.D.: I hope it will go good for you.

B.L.: Thank you. I hope the same for you.

A.D.: Thank you very much

B.L.: Have a nice evening.

A.D.: And you too. If the easy anymore You can ask me.

B.L.: I will. I will. Thank you very much.

A.D.: Okay.

B.L.: Thank you. Bye bye.

A.D.: Bye bye.

Appendix 6 - Follow up-questions with Jay M. (26th May, 2020)

1. How can you describe your stay at Desyatka hotel in Chernobyl? How did you feel?

Honestly, it was not as bad as I expected. Considering the location of the hotel, I reckon the conditions were definitely satisfying. We had comfortable beds, decent food and Wi-Fi. The staff members were helpful and hospitable which I appreciate. However, the showers were shared which was not an issue for me personally but it might bother some tourists. All in all, I would say it's no luxury hotel but perfectly suitable for a non-picky tourist who is willing to spend a night or two in Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. Speaking of feeling, I was thinking myself to be in a movie, as if the trip was not happening in real life. Everyone knows Chernobyl and I'm sure there are thousands or millions of visitors but to stay in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone is something out of this world. I actually freaked out a little bit, questioning myself what was I doing. Sleeping in Chernobyl? That was definitely a big deal to me, a once in a lifetime opportunity, honestly. I think you asked me during the interview if I would go back to Chernobyl – no, after a 2 day visit there I honestly don't think that I could gain any more experience than I already did.

2. Do you think that staying at one of the hotels in the Exclusion Zone gives more authenticity to people who are visiting?

Possibly. One of many reasons why most tourists visit Chernobyl is the desire to immerse themselves in a dark historic environment, therefore living in a hotel which has a “creepy vibe” (i.e. poor WiFi, strange food, barely working showers) could possibly add some charm to their experience and make it feel more authentic. When people go to Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, they do not expect to find comfort in the first place. I definitely felt more authenticity. Like I said in the previous comment, sleeping at Chernobyl Exclusion Zone is something hardly describable. I think it definitely adds more to the experience. I feel like people who only go for a 1 day trip are deprived of so much, they rush or do not see enough.

3. *Do you think that your visit and experiences in Chernobyl would have been different if you didn't stay overnight? Why? How?*

Staying overnight allowed us to fully explore Chernobyl Exclusion Zone without having to rush and visit all the landmarks in one day. I suppose it would have been different if we didn't stay at a hotel because the abandoned area is actually quite huge and tour guide had a lot of stories to tell. There is a lot of history (and mystery) behind this place, therefore spending several days is recommended. Like I said before, the fact that you can actually stay overnight is a game changer, gives you a much darker experience, at least this was my case. If I have to elaborate on that more I can say that it had a huge impact on my trip, I mean made me feel like I was having a stronger experience. Like going to Chernobyl is already a big deal but staying there overnight is even a bigger deal you know.

4. *Did you buy some souvenirs from Chernobyl?*

I did buy several souvenirs, despite them being a bit overpriced. I've seen some before and some of them seemed quite odd and even insensitive (e.g. mutated Matryoshka dolls), but I believe there is nothing wrong with the fridge magnets or postcards that are being sold there. I mean literally every place sells them. So I guess it's a normal practice but everything has its limits. When I found out about that Matryoshka, I was like what, are you kidding? This is the reality we're talking about, the real event I mean. Some people got really sick and there are photos of babies and kids affected by radiation everywhere online. I can accept a lot, like souvenirs such as fridge magnets, lighters, pencils etc. – they do no harm. But this Matryoshka was really highly insensitive and wrong in so many ways. And

even worse than that I believe there are people out there who would go and buy it you know. We are degrading is all I can say. To make profit from these kind of things enrages me.

5. *Do you think the place would be different if there were no souvenirs being sold?*

Absolutely not! The guided tour is so intriguing that it kind of overshadows the need to buy any souvenirs. I also took plenty of unique (yet rather disturbing photos) which could also be considered a souvenir. In summary, I believe souvenir shops are not necessary at all and they did not contribute to the experience that I got in Chernobyl. Souvenirs are everywhere so I suppose it does not make any difference if they are sold or not. And to conclude I think that souvenirs are fun, they remind you of where you've been (except if you purchase that damn Matryoshka doll!).

6. *What is your opinion on hotels and souvenirs in Chernobyl? Would you call it a commodification? Why?*

Commodification is a bold statement! There is clearly a demand from many tourists to visit Chernobyl, therefore it is natural that the locals are going to open hotels or Airbnb apartments so that tourists don't go camping. In terms of souvenirs, I believe it is not necessary at all, and perhaps is a light form of commodification of a tragedy. What I think about commodification is this, if they opened a hotel in Chernobyl, called it i.e. Atomic or Nuclear, staff wore hazard suits or masks, reception phones were shaped and coloured yellow to resemble Geiger counters, that would be what we call commodification. But now there are just nice, quiet hotels. They are simple and the only difference from other hotels outside of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone is that they are located in that Zone.

Appendix 7 - Written correspondence with Simone B. (28th May, 2020)

Interviewee: Simone B.

Tourist from Italy

1. *Are you interested in dark tourism?*

Oh yes, I love dark tourism, for me and a couple of friends of mine it's almost a religion. We often visit abandoned places, such as churches, factories and asylums. Chernobyl is probably the world top destination for dark tourism lovers. I also like to explore contented territories, all over the world, especially in Eastern Europe, such as Kosovo, Crimea or Abcasia, but this is more a political issue. One day I'd like to be able to visit Fukushima or Rwandan genocide museum. I never visited Gulag or Nazi Lager, but they're on also on my "to do list".

2. *Why do you think people visit Chernobyl? Do you think they are influenced by the social media?*

I think people visit Chernobyl because that kind of places are very fascinating and attracting. It's the irresistible instinct of something Unknown, mysterious and dangerous. If something it's partly prohibited, I absolutely want that. In the latest years, especially after the HBO series, I'm sure 1000% that a lot of people started to know more about Chernobyl disaster, and tourism received a turbo boost thanks to that. So, yes, a lot of recent tourism has been definitely influenced by social media.

3. *When did you go to Chernobyl? What sparked your interest in Chernobyl? What was the reason you went there?*

I've been to Chernobyl exactly 4 years ago, on 3rd June 2016, it was almost 1 year that I was planning that trip (I'm a born trip planner), but it was years and years that I was dreaming to go there, even tough, parents and whole family disagreed with that. I didn't care. It was a too strong recall to me. I think my interest sparked after I saw some documentaries about it many years ago, when I was still a child. I think I always had some love for Chernobyl story. The reason that led me there? I went there to watch my eyes what it's Chernobyl exclusion zone, and what it means an entire abandoned city (Припять). If

you don't go there, you can't understand what it means. It's been the best touristic experience of my whole life. That's sure.

4. *How long were you in Chernobyl? If you stayed overnight how was the experience of sleeping in the Exclusion Zone of Chernobyl? Was it authentic? Can you elaborate on that?*

Unfortunately, I have been there just 1 day, from 10am to 6pm. I only had lunch in a small Chernobyl restaurant (it was part of our organised private tour), and also the lunch was a unreal experience. If I ever should be back down there (maybe in 2026) I would certainly spend 1 night to see how does it feel.

5. *What do you think of authenticity in Chernobyl?*

When I have been there, in 2016, Chernobyl was surely authentic, but I use to see that tourism was slowly spreading in there... I'm pretty sure that if I should come back this summer, I would be deluded, because I'm sure I would find most expensive prices, more people and maybe also more "fake things", such as reconstructed or restructured houses, just to show them to the people. Like a kind of "Las Vegas of abandoned cities". It should be preserved more, but as it is, just "natural", for the next generation, to never forget the heavy lesson.

6. *Could you please describe your experience in Chernobyl?*

My experience in Chernobyl has been unique. We were two guys, and we had private tour with a minibus with a private guide, with transfer from our Kiev Hotel and back. Lunch included. Full experience was 109€ each, and I have to say that it was the best money expense ever. We visited the 3 different check points, Chernobyl town, the Chernobyl museum in town, the memorial, then we moved to Radar Duga-2, and then a long stunning walking tour of abandoned town of Припять (sorry but I like the most the original name). We explored schools, apartments, stadium, gyms, supermarkets, and the amusement park. Every corner of that was awesome. I loved it how it was so real. A huge experience. After that we had lunch and then back. In one word: SUPER.

7. *Did you prepare for your trip? Did you do anything in particular?*

As I told you before, I planned this trip for almost 1 year. I spent a lot of time planning every detail (also for our stay in Kiev), I saved on my maps every “must see thing”. We were totally satisfied about my planning. I did nothing particular, except follow the few rules they give you before and during your stay in Chernobyl. I guess it’s a trip adapt to anyone between 18 and 80 yo. There is nothing particularly hard to do, to visit that place. Bringing a Geiger counter is suggested, but they rent it to you for ~20€.

8. *Did you research information regarding Chernobyl before your trip? Did you learn something new while visiting?*

Yes, I studied a lot, on internet research, videos on YouTube, and documentaries on TV. I don’t like to visit a place without documenting myself about it before. And that was the “father” of every place. Yes, I learned some little curious fact from our personal guide, but they were something like tittle-tattle. The main story and main facts are and were well clear in my mind.

9. *What were your main concerns before visiting?*

I never had any kind of concerns before visiting... my family was worried about radiations, but I didn’t care. I documented myself for a long time about it. They can’t hurt you if you stay 8 hours in there.

10. *From your personal point of view, what do you think about Chernobyl tourism? Should people be allowed to visit?*

Chernobyl tourism is a good thing, both for Ukrainian economy, both for people working in the induced sector. It’s good also because the people that visit it, understand what it means when man makes great mistakes, and hopefully they learn not to repeat them again. I think it’s right that it’s allowed to visit it, because the risk is almost zero, and everyone that goes there come back home with an intense experience that follow you until the end of your days. I hope it will be allowed to visit it for many and many years again.

11. *Did you see the souvenirs that are sold in Chernobyl? (Fridge magnets, t-shirts, lighters etc.)? How did it make you feel?*

When I have been there there was only a very little shop, selling basic necessities, and merchandising was almost zero. I remember that me and my friend took a couple of beers for the rest of the trip and he bought a shirt with the name of the city. I don't remember any other merchandising shop.

12. Did you buy some souvenirs?

No, I didn't. In every case, generally I don't like very much souvenirs...

13. Do you think that souvenirs are commodification?

Well, maybe a little bit. But I don't judge them. A lot of people living in Ukraine are not very rich, so if they can make some money in that way, good for them.

14. Do you think it is ethical to visit Chernobyl?

Sure, it is. Always paying respect to the victims and to the people that lost literally everything. People who vandalise and grab objects should be banned for life. And this rule works for every abandoned place in every corner of the world.

15. Do you think Chernobyl should be promoted as a tourist destination?

Absolutely. There is still a lot of prejudice about it. In my opinion it is totally right to promote it.

16. What is the future of Chernobyl tourism, in your opinion?

I think that it will be visitable for years again, but not too long... maybe 20 years, no more. Because a lot of buildings are very weak and old, and without any kind of maintenance they'll start to collapse. Maybe before the 100th anniversary of the catastrophe, they'll decide to raise it to zero (except the sarcophagus) and bury all. Maybe it would be the right move to symbolise the tragedy, build a memorial and keep it simply like that. But sometimes I think also that humankind one day will invent something that eliminate radiations, and the zone will be clean and livable again.

Appendix 8 - Questions on an online survey

How old are you? *

Short answer text

What is your gender? *

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Rather not say

Could you please state your nationality? *

Short answer text

Have you ever heard about dark tourism? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I am not sure

After section 1 Continue to next section

Section 2 of 4

Dark Tourism

Description (optional)

Please provide examples of dark tourism sites (if you know any)

Long answer text

Have you ever been in a dark tourism site?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I am not sure

What was your primary motivation to visit a dark tourism site?

- ☐ Interest in horror and death
- ☐ Interest in history and heritage
- ☐ Fun and entertainment
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Interest in abandoned places
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I have never visited a dark tourism site

Do you think it is ethical to visit dark tourism sites?

Long answer text

After section 2 Continue to next section

Section 3 of 4

Chernobyl

Description (optional)

Do you know Chernobyl? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Have you heard about tourism to Chernobyl? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Have you visited Chernobyl? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Now you are going to see some pictures from Chernobyl and Pripjat. Please describe what do you feel :





Question *

Long answer text

Image title



Question *

Long answer text



Question *

Long answer text

Here you can see "Atomik" Vodka that is made from the grains grown in the Chernobyl area. Please elaborate on your feelings about this :



My interest in Chernobyl has grown after HBO TV series "Chernobyl" *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

...

Visiting Chernobyl is not ethical *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

My main concern is that visiting Chernobyl is not safe *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

There is a lack of information regarding Chernobyl as a tourist destination *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Chernobyl should be promoted more as a tourist destination *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

I would like to visit Chernobyl

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

I would like to visit Chernobyl

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

I believe it is important to visit such places as Chernobyl

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

Last question : can you identify any problems related to Chernobyl tourism? If yes, what are they?

Long answer text