



Walking the Streets of a Nuclear Ghost Town— Dark Tourism in Pripyat (Chernobyl)

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Abstract

Dark tourism is defined as traveling to places, which are associated with tragedy and death. Even though the concept has already been defined in the early 90s, dark tourism has only received more attention during the past few years from the media and the public. The topic is ethically controversial and tourists' reasons to be involved in it differ greatly. This dissertation aims to unveil the various reasons that tourists have and to understand what motivates them to visit a dark site. So far, past theories assume that tourists are interested in death and/or history, heritage plays a role, the site is seen as a famous attraction or tourists are simply curious. The focus is on one specific form of dark sites: ghost towns. The case of Chernobyl and the abandoned town Pripjat is analysed in this context. Based on a qualitative analysis with MAXQDA, the findings show that "Education/ Historical Interest", "Curiosity" and "Seeing it to believe it" are the most stated factors. In addition, especially younger tourists are influenced by what they see on social media. These findings are important for various stakeholders. They can help operators of dark sites to make the topic less ethically controversial by showing that most tourists have good intentions.

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Keywords: dark tourism, ghost towns, Chernobyl, tourists' motivations, interviews, content analysis

Resumo

O turismo negro é definido como a visita a lugares associados à tragédia e à morte. Embora o conceito tenha origem nos anos 90 do século passado, só recentemente é que o turismo negro tem recebido atenção por parte da comunicação social e do público. O assunto é eticamente controverso e as razões dos turistas para visitarem lugares associados à tragédia são diversas. Esta dissertação tem como objetivo identificar os motivos que levam os turistas a visitar um local obscuro. As teorias anteriores indicam que os turistas estão interessados na morte e / ou na história, o património histórico desempenha um papel importante e o local é visto como uma atracção ou uma curiosidade. Esta Dissertação tem como objetivo estudar o caso de Chernobyl e da cidade abandonada de Pripjat. A análise qualitativa com o *software* MAXQDA, evidencia que a "Educação / Interesse Histórico", a "Curiosidade" e "Ver para acreditar" são os principais fatores que motivam os turistas a visitar a cidade fantasma. Os turistas mais jovens que visitem a cidade são influenciados pelo que veem nas redes sociais. A identificação dos diferentes motivos que levam os turistas a visitar locais eticamente controversos ajudam os operadores turísticos a evidenciar que a maioria dos visitantes tem boas intenções.

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Palavras-chave: turismo negro, cidades fantasmas, Chernobyl, motivações dos turistas, entrevistas, análise de conteúdo

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1 Introduction

Morbid curiosity – “a fascination with grisly or gruesome matters” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Whether it is a car crash, a natural disaster or seeing a terror attack on the news. Have you ever noticed that it is hard to look away from these things, even though they are terrible? Humans seem to be paradoxically drawn to tragedy and disasters. Footage of the 9/11 crash got millions of views on YouTube (TSA, 2018), Titanic is one of the most popular movies of all times (Ebiri, 2020) and more than 2.3 million people visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in 2019 alone (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2020). Visiting places that are connected to death and tragedy, such as the 9/11 Memorial or Auschwitz, is called dark tourism. The concept itself has been known for years, as far back as Ancient Rome, where people travelled to the Colosseum to watch the deadly gladiator games (dell’Agnese, 2015). Since then, the concept and its definition have greatly developed.

Dark tourism can positively influence the local economy (Wang & Luo, 2017). On one side local communities directly benefit from the money that tourists spend by offering visitors services such as renting their homes in the area to them or selling goods like souvenirs (Cornell et al., 2019). On the other side, the country’s economy is indirectly supported by a larger amount of taxes that these local businesses must pay, which the government can use to improve the local infrastructure (Curwen, 2020). In 2013, when Alcatraz Island was closed shortly due to a governmental shutdown, the ferry company that usually brings tourists to the island lost \$3 million in cancelled or rescheduled tickets (San Francisco Examiner, 2013). Dark sites are also important in terms of education and historical knowledge, especially since a rise of ‘historical ignorance’ can be observed (Stepman, 2018). History majors in bachelor’s degrees for example have been declining for years (Schmidt, 2018). According to a study from Israfilova and Khoo-Lattimore (2018), dark sites can stimulate the educational interest by combining history, emotions, and experiences.

Dark tourism can occur in many different forms including Holocaust tourism (Heřmanová, 2015), war tourism (Juan et al., 2020), prison tourism (Aslan, 2015) and others. But why are we so fascinated by places where terrible things once happened? There have been numerous theories that try to answer that question, including the theory that negative events trigger more questions than positive ones and we want to close that information gap or the desire to feel

empathy towards the victims (Koopman, 2013; Loewenstein, 1994). Up to now, research is mostly based on conceptual frameworks with few empirical data and seldom from the perspective of tourists (Wight, 2005; Zhang et al., 2016). According to Light (2017), the focus in the past was largely on sites related to the Holocaust, war and/or slavery. Ghost towns have not been a major topic in previous research. The literature so far includes a chapter written by Ironside (2018) about ghost tourism. However, the cited study strongly thematizes ghost hunts, which cannot necessarily be connected to dark sites such as Chernobyl. Another research article by Millán et al. (2019) also specialises on ghost towns, though the focus of the study is the demand of tourists and how the tourist product can be improved. This dissertation is not the first approach of understanding motivations of tourists who travel to Chernobyl specifically either. A recent research paper from Urbonavicius (2021) analyses the internal motivations of tourists. In contrast to this dissertation, the author of the research paper focuses on young travellers only and on the differences between genders, not age.

Understanding the motivations of people to participate in dark tourism is significant for many parties involved. Firstly, it is important for the whole tourism industry. Despite no official statistics that show how big the dark tourism industry is nowadays, it cannot be denied that it is strongly on the rise (Ledsom, 2020). Due to Covid-19, which led to a decrease of 80% in international arrivals from January until July 2021 compared to the same period in 2019 (World Tourism Organisation, 2021), the earnings in the tourism industry have sharply declined. An in-depth understanding of what tourists are looking for, will help governments and operators of dark sites to slowly attract more tourists again. In this context, the research in this dissertation will also help to define if and how the motivations of different age groups vary. From a social perspective, a deeper understanding can help various stakeholders to avoid ethical misconduct. This is especially important since the topic is highly controversial (Wight, 2005). Furthermore, dark tourism can increase knowledge about historical events or disasters, which can help to prevent or limit any disasters in the future (Robinson, 2016).

The present dissertation will mainly focus on ghost towns and analyse the case of Chernobyl as an example of a dark tourism site. The site was first opened in 2011 for tourists and has seen a rapid growth of tourists during the past years. This dissertation has two main objectives:

RO1: Understanding the different motivations that tourists, who travel to ghost towns like Pripyat, have.

RO2: Comparing the motivation of two age groups (Group 1: people born before/when the accident happened in 1986; Group 2: people born after 1986) to further investigate if there is a relation between age and motivation.

To achieve the stated objectives, the following research question has been developed:

RQ1: What are tourists' main motivations to visit ghost towns?

Semi structured interviews with tourists who have visited Chernobyl were chosen as the research method. This qualitative data collection method is useful to gain detailed information with open-ended questions that might require further explanations by the interviewee (Adams, 2015). The results of the research suggest that "Education/ Historical Interest", "Curiosity" and "Seeing it to believe it" are the motivations that are stated most. At the same time, tourists that were born before the accident seem to be less influenced by the media, than people who were born after the accident. The latter group often stated social media or a series about Chernobyl, which came out in 2019, as an influential factor or even the driving force of the visit.

The dissertation is structured in the following way: In the first part, the concept of dark tourism is defined and the development during the past few years is analysed. After a clear overview, the thesis narrows the focus down to ghost towns and explains the case of Chernobyl before existing theories of motivations are presented. The methodology, including research method, data collection and data analysis approach, can be found in the proceeding chapter. This is followed by the results and discussion. The dissertation is concluded in chapter six with a brief summary of the main findings, theoretical/ practical contribution as well as limitations and suggestions for further research.

2 Literature Review

The following chapter will define dark tourism and the theories that are known so far as well as provide more background knowledge about Chernobyl.

2.1 Dark Tourism Spectrum

The curiosity and fascination with the death of people is not a new phenomenon (Isaac & Ashworth, 2011). Think of public executions that were common up to the 19th century in many countries or gladiator games in Ancient Rome. Back then people would already gather to watch other people suffering. In 1996, the act of traveling to sites that are associated with suffering and death received a name: dark tourism. First coined by Foley und Lennon (1996), they referred the term to the presentation and consumption of disaster sites. Other terms that were introduced to describe the concept are ‘thanatourism’ which Seaton (1996) defined as ‘travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death’ (p. 240) or ‘morbid tourism’ (Blom, 2000). Like Stone (2005) stated, dark tourism can be called an old concept in a new world. It can be found all around the world and has similar elements across different societies and countries (Lennon, 2017). There are various forms of dark tourism, including Holocaust tourism, grave tourism, nuclear tourism, or battlefield tourism. Stone (2006) argues that certain dark tourism products share similar features and can be categorised and translated into ‘shades of darkness’. His scale reaches from the darkest form of sites where people have suffered or died to sites which are ‘only’ associated with suffering and death and can be seen in the following figure:

Figure 1

Dark tourism spectrum according to Stone



Note. Reprinted from “A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions.,” by P.R. Stone, 2006, *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal*, 54(2), p. 151. 2006 by "Philipp R. Stone".

To classify a site along this scale, different factors must be measured including the education vs. entertainment orientation (What is the main purpose of the site?) and the location authenticity (Did people directly die/suffer at this location or is the site only associated with tragic events?). For example, while the London Dungeon treats historical events, the fun factor is still in the foreground (Merlin Entertainments, 2021). Memorials, on the other hand, have the purpose to educate visitors and make them think about the victims (Uhrmacher & Tinkler, 2008). Despite the education mission, the Holocaust memorial in Berlin for example is not located at the exact place where the history happened while the concentration site in Auschwitz has a very high location authenticity. Based on this classification, Stone (2006) concluded that there are seven dark suppliers from the lightest form, namely dark fun factories such as ghost trains at fun fairs, to the darkest form which he called dark camps of genocide. An example for this form is the killing fields in Cambodia where more than 1.5 million Cambodians were killed during the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1998). Three years later, Sharpley (2009) introduced another way to structure dark sites. His model is based on supply and demand. He argues that while some sites have not become tourist attractions on purpose, others are purposely exploited as such, with the goal to make a profit from them. On the demand side, he takes the fascination and interest in death as a measurement and concludes that there are four clusters: 1. Pale tourism – tourists who are not motivated by the topic of death and visit a site that is not a tourist attraction on purpose. 2. Grey tourism demand- tourists that are interested in death, but the site is an unintentional tourist attraction. 3. Dark tourism supply – dark sites that want to attract tourists, but the tourists are not mainly motivated by the topic of death and another motive is in the foreground. 4. Black tourism – visitors are fascinated by the death and the dark site intentionally meets this need (Sharpley, 2009).

Nowadays, dark tourism is more present than ever, largely due to the high exposure on social media (Marton et al., 2020). After the start of the Netflix series ‘Dark Tourist’ in July 2018, Google searches for the keyword ‘dark tourism’ exploded (Google Trends, 2018). At the same time, tourists are steadily getting more demanding. They are looking for an emotional stimulus (Minic, 2012), which dark sites can provide due to their historical nature and tragic atmosphere. According to Proos and Hattingh (2020), dark tourism has now ‘‘become a niche

tourism sector with great potential for future tourism growth” (p. 1). With more people interested however, dark tourism is also more and more commercialised which can lead to ethical questions. Although there are not many studies on moral issues yet (and very few that take the viewpoint of residents living near the place of tragedy or the victims’ families into consideration), commercialisation remains the key driver for moral doubts (Chen & Xu, 2020). Is it ethically justifiable to promote a place where many people lost their lives? People sitting on the Holocaust memorial in Berlin or selfies of people in front of Auschwitz are all over the internet; a new trend that is highly controversial. However, this paper will not go into detail about the ethical aspect but rather focus on the tourist side.

2.2 Ghost Towns as one Form of Dark Tourism

Dark tourism can occur in different forms. One of them can be classified as ghost towns which are defined as “deserted towns with few or no remaining inhabitants” (Lexico, n.d.). The term should not be treated as an equivalent for ghost tourism, despite the fact that ghost tourism can occur in the context of dark tourism (Holloway, 2010). Even though both forms take place in abandoned places, the motivations for visiting such a place can differ greatly. People who take part in ghost tourism normally expect to experience paranormal activities and are often entertained by legend telling and/or performances that underline the narratives of the stories (Krisjanous & Carruthers, 2018), which puts it at the lighter scale of Stone’s (2006) classification. According to Ivanova and Light (2017), this does not exclude people being interested in historical and educational aspects. However other factors, such as the belief of people in ghosts and afterlife and the desire to experience a supernatural occurrence or simply the thrill, are usually more predominant. While ghost tourism can occur as a form of dark tourism, many abandoned towns are not related to any paranormal activity.

There are various reasons why towns get abandoned in the first place. According to McFadden (2019), one of the following two cases is most common: 1) Economical collapse, when people are forced to relocate due to a breakdown of the infrastructure and financial bottlenecks due to the lack of jobs. 2) Natural disasters, which include a variety of different forms such as a volcano eruption, flood, or a hurricane. Nuclear accidents are also put into the second category, despite the reason for the accident not being related to natural forces necessarily. They are often a result of technical failure combined with human mistakes (Högberg, 2013). In places where nuclear accidents happened which resulted in the place

becoming abandoned, another relatively new form of tourism can often be found: nuclear tourism or atomic tourism. Nuclear tourism can be defined as the travel to places connected with nuclear research and technology, places with atomic explosions in the past, or places related to the use of nuclear energy (Otgaar, 2012). According to Gusterson (2004), people are fascinated by the destructive power, attracted to the forbidden and eager to learn about the history.

2.3 The Exclusion Zone of Chernobyl

In April 1986, a nuclear accident happened at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the former Soviet Union and today's Ukraine at the border to Belarus. It was labelled as the worst nuclear accident in history (Black, 2011). As a result of technical failure combined with human mistakes (Salge & Milling, 2006), one of the reactors exploded during a safety test. This led to a nuclear chain reaction with several explosions. Consequently, large amounts of radioactive material were set free into the atmosphere. Directly after the accident, attempts were made to get the fire under control and impede the contamination by dropping sand on the flames with an airplane (Wellerstein, 2016). However, despite the radioactive material and immediate death of two plant workers, nobody was evacuated until 36 hours after the accident happened (Blakemore, 2019). After an initial try by the Soviet Union to cover the horrific accident up for political reasons, the Soviet Union was forced to officially confirm the accident after the radiation level set off the alarm at a nuclear plant in Sweden, more than 1000km away from Chernobyl (North, 2011). Soon after the accident, the Armed forces of the Soviet Union, established an exclusion zone around the reactor. The zone, which covers 30km, is still there today. It is in the north of Ukraine at the border of Belarus. approximately 100km away from Kiev and covers the following geographical area:

Figure 2

Exclusion Zone Chernobyl



Note. Reprinted from “Tschernobyl besuchen: Lost Place ohne Zombies (Visit Chernobyl: Lost Place without Zombies),” by G. Rahn, 2021, *Im Osten was Neues. 2021* by “Gregor Rahn”.

The catastrophe cost 30 people their life as a direct result of the explosion, over 100 fell sick due to the exposure to the radiation. The government had to subsequently evacuate over 350.000 people (World Nuclear Association, n.d.). According to research by the UNSCEAR (2018), 6000 cases of thyroid cancer related to the radiation were found in former residents of the contaminated area up to 2005. All of them were still a child or an adolescent when the accident happened. Apart from the health impacts, the financial damages are estimated over \$240 billion scaled to 30 years for Ukraine alone plus roughly the same value for Belarus and Russia (Samet & Seo, 2016) and turned the area surrounding the reactor and the neighbouring city into an uninhabitable ghost town.

Since 2011, when authorities marked the area as safe, Chernobyl is open to the public (Behner, 2011) and can be visited with several different tour operators. The offers mostly range from one day tours to two-day tours which include a night in a nearby hotel. Since a few years ” a process of gradual turistification” (Banaszkiewicz et al., 2017, p. 164) can be observed. According to Statista (2021), the number of tourists who travelled to Chernobyl peaked in 2019 with almost 125.000 visitors. Compared to 2018, the number went up by over 70%. The main reason for the sudden rise in interest was the HBO miniseries about the Chernobyl disaster which was launched in May 2019 (Hunder, 2019). The upwards trend was

interrupted when Covid-19 hit in 2020 and travel restrictions were put into place. Despite Covid-19, the "Full-Day Tour of Chernobyl and Pripjat from Kyiv" has become and remains the most popular tour in Ukraine on TripAdvisor with more positive reviews than any other tour (TripAdvisor, n.d.). In the future, Ukraine is even hoping to receive UNESCO world heritage status to attract funding and even more tourists (Reuters, 2021).

Besides being part of a popular tour in Ukraine, Chernobyl is also one of the best-known dark tourism sites worldwide (Madden, 2019). Some people might find it highly unethical to visit Chernobyl while others see it as a source of historical education. There are various reasons to visit a ghost town like Chernobyl. Stone (2013) states that "Chernobyl is viewed as a heterotopia – a ritual space that exists outside of time – in which time is not only arrested but also notions of Otherness are consumed in a post-apocalyptic place" (p. 79). The following section will go more into detail about the motivation theories in dark tourism that are known so far.

2.4 Present Theories of Tourists' Motivations

The reasons why a person decides to travel can greatly vary. According to early research by Dann (1977) there are two general factors that guide a tourist's decision: push factors and pull factors. Push factors relate to the intrinsic motivation, such as the need to escape from the daily routine for a while. Pull factors, on the other hand, refer to the extrinsic motivation. A tourist might choose a specific hotel because of its proximity to the beach or ocean. Dann (1977) also stated that more attention has been paid to pull factors in the past when trying to explain why people travel. This finding is supported by Crompton (1979) who says that the tourism industry assumes that peoples' motivation to go travelling is largely based on pull factors. Consequently, both authors focused their studies more strongly on the push factors to find out if they really play a minor role. Dann (1977) concluded in his study that anomie, referring to the drive of people to find a meaning in their life, and ego-enhancement are important push factors for tourists, that should not be overlooked. Crompton (1979) argued that curiosity is an important push factor.

Dark tourism is driven by demand and supply. A study by Farmaki (2013) concludes that "Production and consumption of dark tourism is continuous and interrelated as demand appears to be supply-driven and attraction-based" (p. 281). But why would anyone want to

visit a place that is related to suffering and death? For different types of dark tourism, motivations can differ greatly (Chang, 2014). Furthermore, tourists' experiences and reasons are highly subjective. There have been several approaches to get a grasp on the potential motivations, however there is still a gap in research in this area (Sharpley, 2009). While early studies are more theoretical, more recent studies are focusing more and more on supporting their theories with empirical research (Iliev, 2020). The following table shows an overview of some of the past theories in dark tourism:

Table 1

Overview of previous motivation theories in dark tourism

Author & Year	Theories of motivations to engage in dark tourism
Blom (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adventure: seeking something new & frightening ● Mental purification: experiencing the unknown from a distance
Seaton and Lennon (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schadenfreude: getting pleasure from someone's misfortune ● Contemplation of death
Tarlow (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A pretext to understand our own age ● Romanticism: visitor has a personal connection ● Barbarism: feeling superior over the victims ● Part of national identity: form of patriarchy ● A sign of decadence: wanting to understand what happened ● A mystical experience: experiencing something mystical ● A spiritual experience: feeling connected to the victims & surroundings
Dunkley (2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spiritual purpose ● Thrill & risk seeking ● Validation of events: see it to confirm that it really happened ● Authenticity: confirming that the persons/place is real ● Intrinsic motivation to learn more ● Seeing places that immortalized key events/ landmarks: e.g Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin ● Convenience: visiting the site because it was 'on the way' ● Morbid curiosity: the interest in unpleasant things ● Religious motivations: e.g visiting ground zero ● Empathy seeking: feeling with the victims

Biran et al. (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See it to believe it: confirm that it really happened • Learning and understanding • Heritage experience: own or family connection to the site • Famous attraction: wanting to visit because the site is well-known
Isaac and Çakmak (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remembrance: the act of remembering the victims • Must visit attraction • Learning • Paying respect: acknowledging the victims' death
Weaver et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand knowledge • Sightseeing • Curiosity: wanting to see something new
Urbonavicius (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ego-enhancement: e.g being able to 'brag' that you have been to a dangerous place (due to radiation, etc.) • Novelty-seeking: experiencing something new & exciting • Prestige: impress others/ increase of the social status • Escape: forgetting about the daily routine

According to Blom (2000) and Dunkley (2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011) one of the reasons is the urge to run away from our everyday life; to escape the routine that we are normally trapped in. The thrill of something unknown and frightening. Furthermore, he said that dark tourism can be an "expression of an inner purification" (Blom, 2000, p. 34). By opening up to tragic events that can be 'observed' from a distance, since they are not related to them, people can experience some kind of mental cleaning. Meanwhile Tarlow (2005) suggests several forms: The first form is related to learning something about the past to understand the present and take away learnings for the future. Besides, he mentions romanticism where the visitor has a connection to the historical event or can imagine himself/herself in this situation. An example would be a survivor of the war visiting a battlefield. In contrast, barbarism occurs for negative reasons. Visitors can be tempted by the feeling that they are in a superior position to the victims instead of sympathising. Dark tourism can also take place as a form of patriarchy while other visitors have the urge to understand why and how others were mistreated. Places of tragedy often have something mystical about them, for example a ghost town. Lastly, Tarlow (2005) describes his seventh theory: a spiritual experience which is similar to the mystical experience. However, the spiritual experience is more intense. The theory of spirituality is in line with one suggestion by Dunkley (2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011). In addition, he suggests that some people are simply motivated by convenience. They might not plan to visit a dark site but only discover it by accident. In research by Biran et al. (2011) related to the purpose of tourists' visit of

Auschwitz, most participants stated that their main motivation was the educational aspect. This finding is supported by an empirical study by Weaver et al. (2017) that identified the acquisition of new knowledge as the main factor that people chose in the questionnaire, followed by sightseeing. The survey is based on a pre-questionnaire with open-ended question; hence the most stated factors were included in their study.

In addition, many are looking for an emotional experience. In contrast to Seaton and Lennon (2004), who state the fascination with death as a main motivational factor, interest in death was not an important aspect for the surveyed Auschwitz visitors (Biran et al., 2011).

In general, there is a shift from the old theories, that point out the fascination with death (Seaton & Lennon, 2004) and morbid curiosity (Dunkley, 2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011). In a study by Isaac & Çakmak, the authors summarised that “Western tourists (...) do not have any dark motivations.” (2016, p. 243). Instead, the main motivations were education and following recommendations so see a popular tourist attraction as seen in other empirical studies (Biran et al., 2011; Isaac & Çakmak, 2016; Weaver et al., 2017). Urbonavicius (2021) confirms this finding but also points out that factors of ego-enhancement as mentioned by Dann (1977) and novelty seeking which was pointed out by Crompton (1979) many years ago, are still important push factors. According to Urbonavicius (2021), the media plays a large role as well nowadays in driving tourists’ motivation. This is supported by findings from Marton et al. (2020) stating that dark sites are commonly shown on social media or tv and consumers are highly influenced by these platforms.

Furthermore, motivations also vary between lighter and darker sites. While tourists visiting lighter sites are mostly attracted to the entertainment factor (Ivanova & Light, 2017), it can be assumed that darker sites have a different focus.

There has not been much research, which is specially targeting ghost towns. Ghost towns are still mostly connected to paranormal activities. In this context, the motivation can be to come closer to mortality in a spiritual way. In a study by Millán et al. 75% of the respondents stated that they want to “find out about paranormal stories” (2019, p. 172) when visiting a ghost town. People nowadays are also less confronted with death due to various reasons, including the decrease in active participation in religion (Dancausa et al., 2020). Other reasons mentioned in the study are thrill seeking and wanting to learn about history as proposed by Dunkley (2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011). The following section will focus on collecting primary data to add to the current literature.

3 Methodology

In the following chapter, the research method is described before summarizing the data collection procedure and the data analysis approach.

3.1 Research Method

“Qualitative research is not concerned with numerical representativity, but with the deepening of understanding a given problem (...) Qualitative research is therefore concerned with aspects of reality that cannot be quantified, focusing on the understanding and explanation of the dynamics of social relations” (Queirós et al., 2007, p. 270).

Having the main objectives (finding out what factors motivate tourists to visit ghost towns and if there are any differences related to people born before & after the accident) of this dissertation in mind, a qualitative research approach was chosen. To explore the various reasons why tourists decide to visit the ghost town Pripyat, in-depth interviews are conducted. This form of research has several advantages. Besides being more flexible in arranging the interview, the interviewer can focus on one person only which allows him/her to understand that person better without the social pressure to conform to any group opinions (Malhotra et al., 2017). In this context, semi structured interviews give the responders the opportunity to give an answer that is ‘intuitive’ and ‘imaginative’ (Malhotra et al., 2017, p. 64). Semi structured interviews generally follow a set of questions that cover the broad topic while still allowing the interviewer to ask follow-up questions, change the order of the questions and talk about related subtopics in the process of the conversation (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). Therefore, the interview guide (presented in Appendix 1) is based on previous literature that is presented in chapter 2 of this dissertation and accordingly reframed. To get a full picture, the questions are divided into the following three blocks: 1. Decision making process to find out more about different aspects that led to the final decision to visit. 2. Experiences during the tour and post- behaviour. 3. Demographical questions. This separation helps to establish a rough guideline for orientation. After the conduction of the interviews, the data is collected and analysed with the help of MAXQDA 2020.4.1.

3.2 Data Collection

Before starting the collection of data, the following target group was defined: People who have been to Chernobyl since the site opened in 2011. To fulfil the second objective, the comparison of two age groups, the author tried to achieve a relatively equal distribution of people in two age groups. The first group contains individuals who are over 35 years currently

(born before/in 1986). Depending on their birth year, they could have memories from the news of the accident. Furthermore, they are more likely to spend less time on social media. The second age group is defined as people currently under 35 years (born after 1986). This group is social media affine which might have an impact on their motivations. Furthermore, they were not born yet when the nuclear accident happened in 1986. Hence, they do not have any personal experiences with Chernobyl. As previously mentioned, the data are collected in semi-structured interviews and include open-ended questions which leave space for follow up questions in cases where further elaboration is helpful (Adams, 2015). The participants were found through the author's own social network as well as on social media platforms and referrals during the interviews. Before the interview, each participant received a consent form (presented in Appendix 2). All interviews were conducted in either English or German. In the case of German interviews, the transcript is translated to English. All participants remain anonymous and are only identifiable by an assigned number. The following table gives an overview of the respondents:

Table 2

Overview of the interviewees

<i>Group 1 (born before 1986)</i>			
Respondent ID	Gender	Age	Nationality
Tourist 1	female	38	German
Tourist 2	male	37	Austrian
Tourist 5	female	43	Dutch/ Australian
Tourist 7	male	57	German
Tourist 8	female	36	Ukrainian
Tourist 11	male	52	Polish
Tourist 12	male	44	British
Tourist 19	female	44	Brazilian
Tourist 20	female	47	Polish
Tourist 21	female	42	French
Tourist 23	male	62	German
Tourist 25	male	40	German
<i>Group 2 (born after 1986)</i>			
Tourist 3	male	27	Dutch
Tourist 4	male	28	Irish
Tourist 6	male	23	Swiss
Tourist 9	female	32	Italian
Tourist 10	male	32	Ukrainian
Tourist 13	female	23	Israeli
Tourist 14	male	22	Japanese
Tourist 15	male	26	British
Tourist 16	male	29	American/ Russian

Tourist 17	male	28	Spanish
Tourist 18	female	27	Brazilian
Tourist 22	female	33	Hungarian
Tourist 24	female	23	Ukrainian
Tourist 26	female	30	Norwegian

3.3 Data Analysis Approach

MAXQDA 2020 is a computer-assisted data analysis software program, that is able to analyse qualitative data (Elaldi & Yerliyurt, 2016). In the first step, all interview transcripts are imported. With regards to RO2 (Comparing the motivation of two age groups), the interviews are split into two groups according to the birth year of the respondents. After reading all interviews thoroughly, categories are developed based on the interview guide. The next step, coding, turns raw data into valuable information. In preparation for the analysis, coding reduces the amount of data, while increasing the data quality (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). A hybrid approach of deductive and inductive coding is used, which is especially helpful for semi-structured interviews, as they usually have a guideline for the questions but still allow the exploration of other topics (Campbell et al., 2013). The deductive stage is a top-down approach which involves creating basic codes that are derived from the interview questions and applied to all interview transcripts. In a second, inductive, coding process the basic codes are then put into more detailed sub-categories with regards to the themes that emerged within the basic codes by using ‘fine coding’ (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2020). In addition, MAXQDA offers a system for memo writing, which helps to organise the answers of participants (Oswald, 2017). This feature is used to highlight the key statements.

For the purpose of the dissertation, the results are displayed in two visual maps that are derived from the codes. The first map presents the most important insights in general to fulfill RO1 (Understanding the different motivations that tourists, who travel to ghost towns like Pripyat, have). To achieve RO2 (Comparing the motivation of two age groups), a second concept map is created with MAXQDA’s two cases model, which allows the comparison of two data sets (Paulus & Lester, 2021). It visualises the codes that appear in one group only as well as the most relevant codes with their respective frequency that appear in both groups. Based on both maps combined, the RQ (What are tourists’ main motivations to visit ghost towns?) can be answered.

In general, the data organisation in codes gives a more in depth meaning to the spoken words of the participants. This enables the author to not only explore the motivations that the participants directly state but also understand what influenced their motivations subconsciously, since unconscious motives often play a role in decision making (Lumer, 2019).

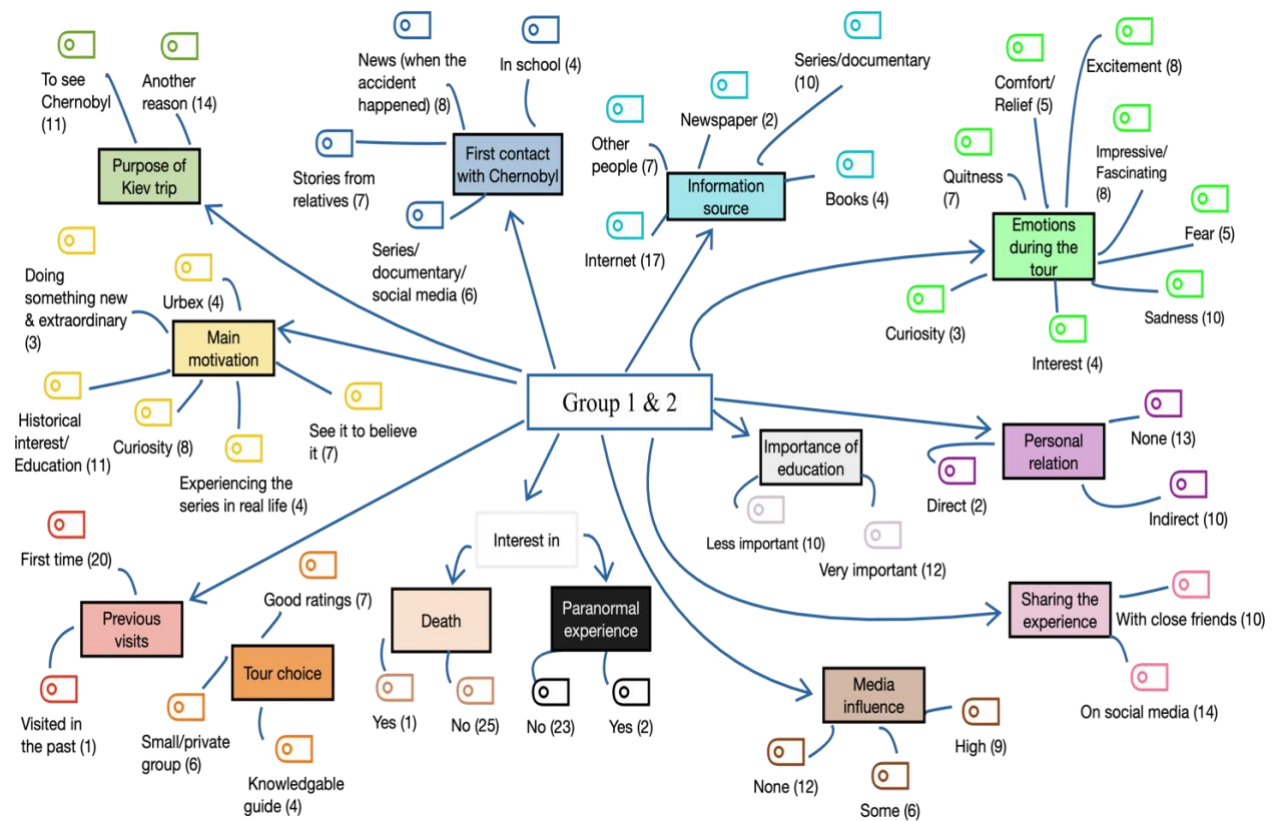
4 Results

The result of the analysis shows 13 topics that occurred during the interviews (see Figure 3). Each of the topics is displayed in a different colour and has several subtopics that summarise how the interviewees responded to the topic. In addition, the code frequency is shown for every subcode. The yellow topic ‘‘Main motivation’’ refers to the factors that were directly stated during the interviews and is therefore the central topic. It consists of the following subcodes from most often mentioned to least often mentioned: ‘‘Histological Interest/ Education’’ (11), ‘‘Curiosity’’ (8), ‘‘See it to believe it’’ (7), ‘‘Experiencing the series in real life (4), ‘‘Urbex’’ (4), ‘‘Doing something new & extraordinary’’ (3). From the total count, it can be seen that some respondents stated more than one main motivation.

The surrounding topics cover any subconscious factors that might have influenced respondents in their decision to visit Chernobyl such as the brown topic which refers to their perceived influence of the media and has the subcodes: ‘‘None’’ (12), ‘‘Some’’ (6) and ‘‘High’’ (9)’. Apart from that, the additional topics have the purpose to test theories that have been pointed out before by other authors (see Table 1) such as the black topic regarding the respondents’ interest in paranormal experiences which has the subcodes ‘‘No’’ (23) and ‘‘Yes’’ (2), indicating that the majority of respondents was not motivated by an interest in paranormal activities.

Figure 3

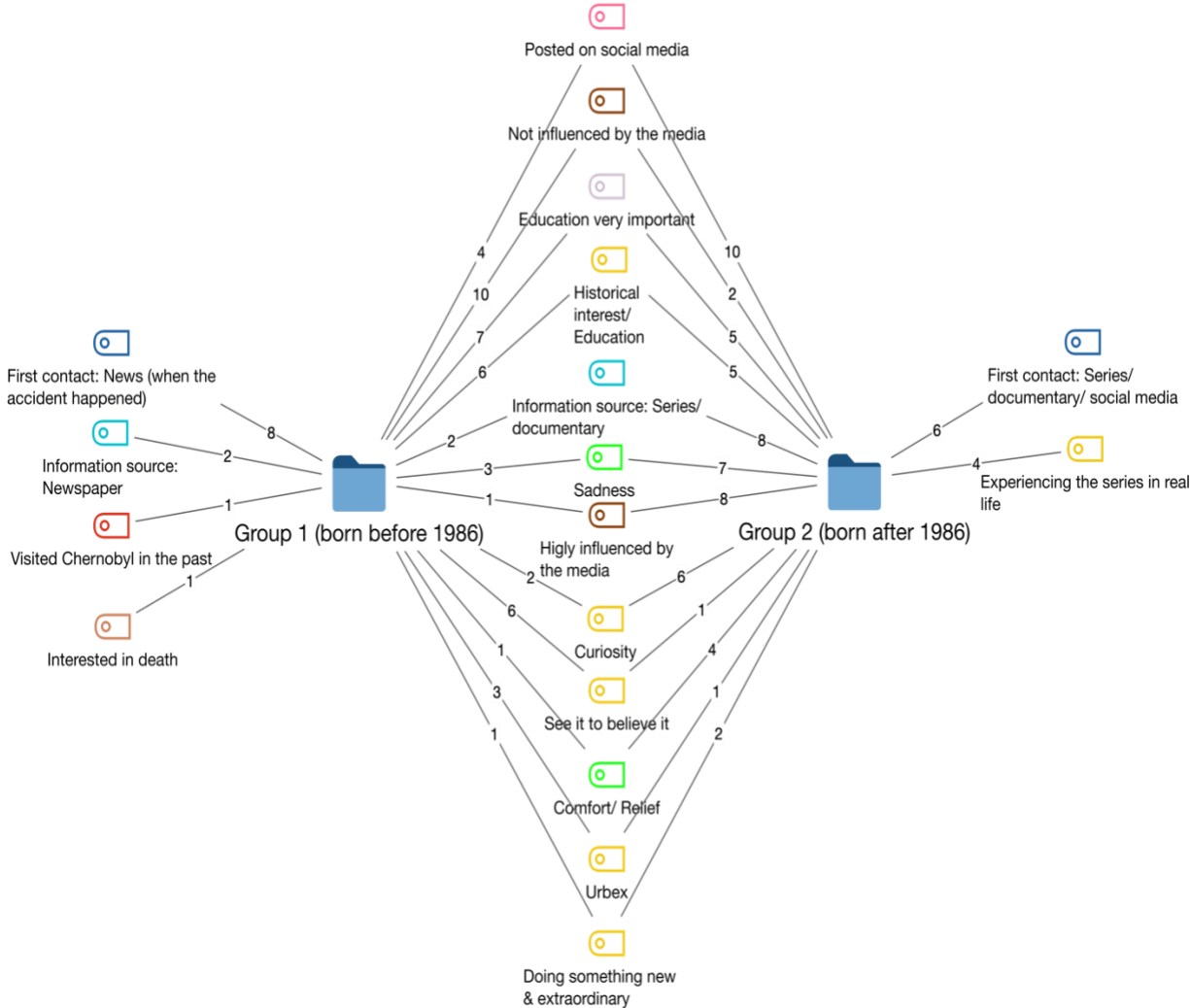
Main responses by all participants



As shown in Figure 4, not all subcodes occur in group 1 (tourists born before the accident) and group 2 (tourists born after the accident) or they appear in both groups but there are significant differences in their frequency. The yellow subtopic ‘‘Experiencing the series in real life’’ (4) comes up in interviews with group 2 only, while the same group reports to have had their first contact with Chernobyl through a ‘‘Series/ documentary/ social media’’ (6). In contrast, subcodes that are found in group 1 only are ‘‘News (when the accident happened)’’ (8) regarding the first contact, ‘‘Newspaper’’ (2) as information source, ‘‘Visited Chernobyl in the past’’ (1) and ‘‘Interested in death’’ (1).

Figure 4

Differences and similarities between Group 1 (people born before 1986) and Group 2 (people born after 1986) of the most relevant subcodes



5 Discussion

As pointed out in the last chapter, two maps were created. While Figure 3, is the base to understand the different motivation that tourists have consciously and unconsciously (RO1), Figure 4 is needed to analyse possible differences between age groups (RO2). Both ultimately lead to the main motivations that tourists have to visit Chernobyl (RQ). The analysis is divided into two parts: Firstly, the motivations that respondents directly mentioned are analysed and compared to previous literature. Secondly, any other main motivational factors

that occurred in previous literature are taken into account. While analysing all themes, any differences between age groups are directly pointed out.

5.1 Main Motivations

”Historical Interest/ Education” (11)

Starting with the main motivations that the respondents themselves mentioned, education is the most stated factor (see Figure 3) with no notable difference between the two age groups (see Figure 4). This factor is in line with one of the theories by Dunkley (2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011) who argues that tourist generally have an intrinsic motivation to learn more. More recent theories include the factor of education as well with Biran et al. (2011) describing it as ‘Learning and understanding’ and Weaver et al. (2017) referring to ‘Extending knowledge’. Within the field of education, it can be differentiated between a primary interest in history and a primary interest in culture. While culture is defined as “a set of values and beliefs, or a cluster of learned behaviours that we share with others” (Lebrón, 2013, p. 126), history can be described as the study of the past. Though, both terms are highly interconnected. Culture is often shaped by history; hence history can be viewed as a basis for cultural values (Coomes, 2004). Tourist wishing to acquire more knowledge about the nuclear accident do not all share the same reasons for wanting to do so. While the background of some tourist is “to understand the whole event culturally (...) to understand why the people in Ukraine behave how they behave” (Tourist #3), others see the educational factor as a means to understand what “human carelessness lead[s] to” (Tourist #10) or have simply “always been interested in historical events” (Tourist #21). In contrast, some respondents underlined the importance of the experience as opposed to the educational factor.

“Curiosity” (8)

Apart from the educational interest, curiosity is found to be another main motivation (see Figure 3). This finding supports one of the theories by Weaver et al. (2017). The statements of the respondents prove that in their case curiosity was not related to any enjoyment of unpleasant things. Hence, this finding refutes Dunkley’s theory (2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011) who assumed that ‘morbid curiosity’, meaning the interest in death and violence, is one motivational factor. Generally, curiosity typically arises from the drive to fill a perceived gap in knowledge (Loewenstein, 1994). It is often seen as an intrinsic motivation

and can therefore be classified as a push factor as previously defined. However, curiosity can also become a pull factor, for example through the influence of the media (Rittichainuwat, 2007) just like in the case of Tourist #13 who became ‘‘curious after seeing the series’’ and then ‘‘ wanted to see what it is like in reality.’’ This finding is especially relevant with regards to negative news which are naturally connected to the history of dark sites. Psychologically, the human brain is more activated by negative news as opposed to positive news, a phenomenon that is called negativity bias (Soroka et al., 2019). This was already observed by Foley and Lennon (1996) in the nineties when they first coined the term dark tourism. What is notable is that more respondents from group 2 mentioned curiosity as their main motivation (see Figure 4). Since this group could not ‘actively experience’ the time of the nuclear accident, it might be the case that their curiosity is triggered more since their information gap is bigger compared to group 1.

’’See it to believe it’’ (7)

Another motivation that is often mentioned by the respondents is seeing it to believe it (see Figure 3); a theory that is known from Biran et al. (2011) already. Within this frame of reference, it is important to understand that the term ‘believing’ does not relate to questioning whether the accident happened or not. It is a synonym for wanting to see where it happened to grasp the full extent of the disaster and ‘‘see it (...) to really acknowledge what had happened’’ (Tourist #5). At the same time, the purpose of seeing Chernobyl and the ghost town Pripyat in real life can also be ‘‘to feel all emotions in person and not just behind a screen’’ (Tourist #18). In contrast to curiosity, more respondents from group 1 were motivated by the urge to see it with their own eyes as opposed to tourist from group 2 (see Figure 4). This can be explained by the fact, that most tourist from group 1 have memories of the accident like Tourist #11 who states:

‘‘ I remember that we had to drink Lugol's liquid, which was supposed to help us somehow before the contamination. Because of course, the radioactive cloud was raging over Poland. Whether that helped, I don't know..’’

Hence this motivation can be interpreted as the wish to see something, that the respondents heard on the news many years ago, in real life as a form of validation.

”Experiencing the series in real life (4)

A new theory which has not been explored yet by other authors is the wish to experience the series in real life as pointed out up by some participants in group 2 (see Figure 4) such as Tourist #16 who states:

‘Here's the most fascinating part. If you go to World War two Memorials or World War 1, for example the Vietnam Memorial, you see the memorial, but you can't like go and see the battle. Right. But in Chernobyl, you saw the TV show and you can go and actually experience it. You can walk on a building and see that clothing that was shown on HBO, the gear that was shown.’

Generation Z (born 1997-2012) and Millennials (born 1981-1996) were not born yet or too young to remember when the accident happened in 1986. As a result, they only heard about Chernobyl at a later stage of their life. As reported by some respondents in group 2, some of them had their first experience with the nuclear accident through a series or documentary. Based on that, many used this as their primary information source. Of particular note is the five-episodes miniseries ‘Chernobyl’, which aired in June 2019 on HBO. With an audience of more than 8 million people within the first days only, the series is one of HBO’s biggest hits (Clark, 2019). The strong effect of the series is underlined by a statement from Tourist #6:

‘(...) I know that my friend who I was there with came to it mainly because of the series. And I also know from a tour guide that since the series came out, so many people have gone there that they even put up a sign. It says ‘thank you HBO’. Because the series helped so much to get bookings.’

When watching a series, viewers get involved in the story, build an emotional connection to the characters, and truly care about the outcome (Page, 2018). Visiting the place that is shown, can give a whole new opportunity to relate even more to the series. As pointed out by Tourist #1 ‘If you have seen the series or a documentary, you still have these pictures in your head [and] then you try to compare it a bit.’

”Urbex ” (4)

Urbex stands for Urban Exploration and describes the activity of going to urban places which are forgotten and abandoned and often not legally accessible to the public (Kindynis, 2016). Stated during the interviews by participants as their main motivation to visit Chernobyl and especially the abandoned town of Pripyat (see Figure 3), this theory has barely been explored yet in previous dark tourism studies. One of the few studies by Cetin (2020) who compared dark tourism to Urbex, concludes that both concepts share similar motivations such as the

wish to experience something unusual. However, they differ in a way that people who are involved in Urbex often have political/ideological backgrounds as well as the willingness to take high physical and legal risks. Despite little research yet, the phenomenon is not new in Chernobyl. There are various blog posts and videos on YouTube of people filming themselves while doing an illegal tour. With over five million views, one of the most popular videos by Shiey (2019), proves that the public interest is high. The ghost town Pripyat which is called the ‘‘worst ghost town in the world’’ by Tourist #7, is seen as ‘‘the Urbex capital’’ by Tourist #12. The aspect of freedom and testing out the laws and own physical and mental limits are motives that are often referred to by people involved in the Urbex scene (Williams, 2017). In this context, the term ‘Stalker’ emerged as well during one of the interviews. As explained by Tourist #12 ‘‘stalkers explore the zone on (...) [their] own (...) [and] mostly enter at night-time due to the high risk of being caught.’’ The tours are not led by an official guide and participants can face high fines for trespassing the zone. Despite these hurdles, Urbex has become more popular and visible over the past years and can be the motivation to visit abandoned towns. Even though the target audience is younger people normally (Moss, 2016), group 1 stated Urbex as their main motivation as well (see Figure 4).

‘‘Doing something new & extraordinary’’ (3)

Introduced by Blom (2000) who summarised the theory as ‘Adventure’ and Urbonavicius (2021) who called it ‘Novely seeking’, three participants were interested in seeing something new and ‘‘something that not everyone does’’ (Tourist #1) (see Figure 3). A few years ago, it was still assumed that ‘‘novelty was a reward in itself, but, like dopamine, it seems to be more related to motivation’’ (Cooper, 2014, para. 6). As disclosed earlier in this dissertation, humans are more influenced by negative stimuli than they react to positive stimuli. As one region of our brain, the amygdala is mainly responsible for conveying our emotions (Britannica, n.d.). According to research from Weierich et al. (2009), the amygdala reacts even stronger and is longer activated when confronted with novel stimuli compared to being exposed to negative stimuli. Hence, the authors concluded that ‘‘novelty is a critical stimulus dimension for amygdala engagement’’ (Weierich et al., 2009, p. 2871). Chernobyl is often seen as ‘‘one of those special places’’ (Tourist #16) and can therefore be attractive for tourists who are wishing to experience something that they cannot see on a daily basis.

5.2 Other Theories from Previous Literature

Interest in death

The interest in death is called attention to by Seaton and Lennon (2004). According to the research that was conducted for this thesis, this theory cannot be proven. All participants, except for one, claimed to have no interest in death and afterlife (see Figure 3). Despite the statement from Tourist #15 who thinks it is “hard to relate to death when just watching an old documentary”, which implies that this person could relate more to death while physically being in Chernobyl, many respondents did not think about this topic at all. Chernobyl was rather described as “Really sad place” (Tourist #22) and some participants expressed their compassion for the victims as opposed to thinking about their own death. As highlighted by Tourist #13 “it’s sad very much for me for these people”. Despite not being specifically talked about as a main motivation during the interviews, the implied aspect of ‘feeling with the victims’ has similarities to one of the theories of Tarlow (2005), who describes the connection to the victims as a spiritual experience. In addition, it is also in line with the notion of empathy seeking by Dunkley (2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011) and Isaac and Çakmak (2016) who describe it as an act of paying respect to the victims.

Interest in paranormal activities

Equally denied was the theory that the interviewees might have an interest in paranormal activities (see Figure 3) as described by Tarlow (2005) who refers to tourists being motivated by a mystical experience and Lewis et al. (2021), who found in his study that tourists are intrigued by paranormal activities. In this context Tourist #4 argued that the experience of being in the ghost town Pripyat “was more sad than mystical” and that “[Pripyat] it’s more of just kind of a city left behind, it didn’t feel like a Ghost Town like creepy spiritually”. Despite almost all participants saying that they have no interest in mysterious experience, nor believe in ghost, some participants still showed a general understanding like Tourist #6 who remembered a certain situation:

“Um, but I can remember one moment. We were outside of an abandoned hospital and all the other people in my group said later that they had already had an eerie feeling when they were there at the hospital. I don’t know, because so many people were buried there. And somehow that triggered something in certain people. But not with me at all. Maybe I’m not sensitive enough, but some people said that.”

As earlier in this dissertation discussed, this finding underlines the fact that not all ghost towns are connected to actual ghost. In the special case of Chernobyl, it can also be added that

the source of some peoples' unease mainly came from the fear of exposure to the radiation: "the spookiest stuff of all is radiation" (Tourist #19).

Heritage

Heritage, as assumed by Tarlow (2005) and Biran et al. (2011) has not been proved to be a main motivational factor either. With regards to the findings, it is important to make clear that a large variety of nationalities was interviewed during the study. Amongst all respondents three tourists are Ukrainian. Despite them being familiar with the nuclear accident from childhood onwards and having heard stories from their parents, they all stated different reasons as their main motivation such as Tourist #8 who was interested in seeing "the scale of the disaster with my own eyes; a city that is swallowed up by nature." The results might be different if the focus was on Ukrainian tourists only.

Convenience

According to Dunkley (2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011) tourists might visit a dark site simply because it is 'on the way'. To test this assumption, respondents were asked if they came to Kiev for Chernobyl specifically or for another reason. Having discussed the background already in chapter 2, tours only start from Kiev and can (legally) only be booked through an official agency/ guide. Interpreting the results, which are that slightly less than ½ of all respondents named Chernobyl as their primary reason, while the other half would have travelled to Kiev anyway, it can be concluded that convenience can indeed play a role. However, it should be noted that Chernobyl is at least a day trip and attached to financial costs and often considerations regarding health and safety. Therefore, it can be argued that convenience is unlikely to be the primary motivation of the visit.

Famous attraction

As argued especially in more recent theories, some tourists do not only visit a dark site because it is convenient, but also because it is known to be a famous attraction (Biran et al., 2011; Isaac & Çakmak, 2016; Weaver et al., 2017). Due to the increasingly easy access to information, especially through social media, this theory seems to be obvious. Like many respondents Tourist #5 "saw the tour on TripAdvisor" and booked it because "it had good reviews." In this setting, the influence of social media should be discussed as an important factor. In contrast to traditional media, social media channels have some distinctive characteristics such as spreading news quickly and giving people the opportunity to directly

interact with others, leading to a very powerful tool to form public opinions (Dai et al., 2021). As proven earlier, a hype around a series of online posts, led to a considerably higher booking rate of Chernobyl tours. According to a UK study, 18-35 year olds (represented by group 2 in this dissertation) are twice more likely to trust social media personalities over their own network of family and friends when booking a trip (Raturi, 2021). This finding can also be seen in Figure 4, where the overwhelming majority of respondents that claimed to be highly influenced by the media, belongs to group 2. In addition, many tourists from group 2 reported to have posted their Chernobyl trip publicly on at least one of their social media channels, confirming a recent study by Urbonavicius (2021) that implicates that prestige and ego-enhancement can be one main motivation to visit a dark site. Despite not being specifically referred to as main motivation by any of the respondents, this finding is likely to play at least a subconscious role, that cannot be ignored. Citing Tourist #17: ‘I was always curious about this topic but seeing it on social media inspired me to go there.’ On a different note, especially tourists from group 1 noted that the tourist factor which comes with the rise of social media was not favourable for them:

‘‘What bothered me and what you can describe a bit as this experience factor of the tours is that, for example, each visitor gets a measuring device to check the radiation at each point. And (...) the person who measured the highest radiation got a prize at the end. That had the character of a competition. So I found that quite frightening’’ (Tourist #2).

6 Conclusion

The last chapter summarises the findings and aims to answer the RQ as well as the two ROs that were previously defined. In addition, the contribution of knowledge as well as the limitations will be discussed before concluding with suggestions for future research.

6.1 Main Conclusion

Motivation is a complex topic, especially since we are not always aware of every aspect that motivates us, but some part of our motivation often happens unconsciously (Kihlstrom, 2019). With dark tourism on the rise, due to more exposure on various platforms than ever before, and tourists’ desire for experiential travel (Chan et al., 2016), it is important for various stakeholders to understand what draws tourists to dark sites in the first place. The aim of this

dissertation was to analyse the particular form of ghost towns to add knowledge to the few studies that have been conducted in the past. The collected data from 26 interviews with tourists who have visited Chernobyl and the ghost town of Pripjat were summarised in two maps and analysed. The findings show that tourists have a variety of different motivations that led to their decision to travel to Chernobyl and that there is not ‘the one’ motivation that completely prevails. Furthermore, tourists are also influenced by side factors to a certain extent such as the convenience of being physically close to the desired place anyway or having seen Chernobyl on social media previously which added to their interest. Regarding the second RO, it can be summarised that younger people who were not born yet when the accident happened, are more likely to be influenced by pictures from Chernobyl that they have seen on social media platforms or in a series. They also tend to get many educational information from these platforms. Hence, they often expect to see the same things that they have seen in the HBO series in real life, and this can become a main driver to visit Chernobyl.

So what are tourists’ main motivations to visit ghost towns? Even though, there are many motivations, three factors ultimately stood out. The first one is education. Tourists have the desire to educate themselves and learn more about the historical background of the disaster, which ultimately led to Pripjat becoming a ghost town. Secondly, curiosity is an important motivation. Tourists (especially younger ones) are curious to see Chernobyl in real life. Curiosity is normally seen as an intrinsic motivation and therefore a push factor. However, social media and the series are pull factors as well since they increase the interest in Chernobyl and Pripjat. Lastly, tourists are motivated by seeing the place of disaster in real life. Tourists (especially older ones) see the trip to Chernobyl as something that they need to see with their own eyes in order to grasp the whole extend of the accident.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

There have been several studies with regards to dark tourism in the past. However, most of the past literature focused on the supply-side (Zhang et al., 2016), without considering the consumer-oriented perspective. This dissertation explores the topic from the view of tourists and therefore adds to the research by taking a different viewpoint into account. Tourists, compared to providers of dark sites, often do not see the ‘dark’ side of the place that they are visiting. For them other aspects, such as satisfying their curiosity or getting educated, are in the foreground. Furthermore, the category of ghost towns has not been explored much in the

past. Instead, many past studies deal with dark sites that have a connection to the Holocaust or battlefields (Light, 2017). The few studies that explore ghost towns often thematize ghost hunts and how the suppliers of such hunts can improve their tours. However, they do not ask what motivated tourists to visit in the first place. Accordingly, this dissertation proves that paranormal activities are not automatically what tourists are looking for when visiting a ghost town. In addition, studying different age groups fills a gap in the literature, since there has barely been any differentiation in past studies. This dissertation shows that there are indeed important differences, especially the influence of the media, that play a large role for younger groups.

6.3 Practical Contribution

The findings are relevant for different parties. First of all, dark tourism still has this stigma of being ethically controversial attached to it. As proven by this dissertation, none of the tourists were motivated by wanting to see the ‘misfortune’ of others as suspected in earlier theories. Quite the contrary was the case during the interviews and tourists felt with the victims and/ or were simply interested in the historical background. This finding can be used to improve the overall image of dark tourism by showing that this type of tourism does not always have to be negative. Dark sites can be used as an educational source and to raise awareness of the history of a country, which often explains a large part of their culture and present state.

On this note, managers of dark sites can use the findings to improve their offers and adapt it to the needs of tourists. A practical implication for Chernobyl could be to offer two different tours; one with the main focus on historical education and the other one with the main focus on experience. Another important factor concerning proper management is to still preserve the authenticity of Chernobyl and Pripjat while allowing tourists to visit the site. This is especially crucial when having in mind that Chernobyl plays a major role in the Ukrainian culture, that still affects how locals behave nowadays. Therefore, boundaries should be set, and it should be considered to remove certain features such as winning a prize for measuring the highest radiation, as critically pointed out during the interviews. This would not only improve the perceived authenticity of Chernobyl and therefore the tourists’ experience but also weaken the ethical barriers.

6.4 Limitations

Despite contributing to previous research, this dissertation is limited by several factors. The sample size of 26 tourists is rather small. Despite the author's effort to include as many nationalities and age groups as possible, the data does not necessarily represent all tourists who visit Chernobyl. All interviews were coded with MAXQDA. This method is time consuming, and the validity of the data largely depends on the coder, despite all effort to correctly categorize all answers.

In addition, even within the field of ghost towns, there are several forms. Even though the data can be applied to other dark sites, tourists might not have the same motivations to visit other ghost towns. Chernobyl/ Pripyat is a very specific case. Often ghost towns become abandoned due to a natural catastrophe such as a wildfire or hurricane that destroy the whole city. In Pripjat, tourists can see a town which, apart from having aged and the growth of the wildlife, still looks as it used to look in 1986 before the accident happened. Hence, Pripjat might not feel like a 'classical' ghost town to some tourists. Lastly, the strong effect of the HBO series must be taken into account. As proven in this dissertation, the series played a major role in the motivation of, especially younger, tourists to visit Chernobyl. This factor certainly does not apply to many other ghost towns.

6.5 Future Research

This dissertation aims to contribute to a better understanding why tourists visit dark sites and, in this context, especially ghost towns. To further understand their motivations, other ghost towns should be studied as well. Especially sites that have not profited from a recent media hype like Chernobyl did. Additionally, this form of dark tourism should be compared to other forms such as battlefield tourism or Holocaust tourism to find out if the motivations to visit a dark site are overall the same or if they differ depending on the site. To improve the tourists' experience, it is also crucial to not only study their reason to visit. Their experience during the tour plays a large role as well. Hence the author proposes to further analyse what people experienced during their visit.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Guideline for semi-structured interviews

Explored topic	Source in the literature	Reframed question	Purpose of the question
		<i>Decision-making process</i>	
Information sources	Niemelä (2010)	When did you first hear about Chernobyl?	It would be interesting to see the differences between age groups. Knowing about the first encounter with Chernobyl can give indications for the motivation to visit the site.
Information search	Niemelä (2010)	Where did you find further information?	Could indicate hidden motivations, e.g. social media as an informational source might be an indicator for push factors such as ego-enhancement and prestige while reading historical articles can indicate education as a motive
Convenience factor	Dunkley (2005, as cited in Dale & Robinson, 2011)	What was the primary reason for visiting Kiev?	Tours only start in Kiev. This question is asked to find out if Chernobyl was the primary motivational factor to travel to Kiev or just a convenient 'side effect' of the journey.
Why have you come here today?	Ivanova and Light (2017)	What was the main reason for your journey to Chernobyl?	The key question: Intents to find the main motivational factors so they can be compared to the existing literature.
Times of Visits	Tang (2014)	Have you visited Chernobyl before? If yes, how many times?	Previous visits might show a stronger likelihood of certain push & pull factors such as heritage.
Decision-making process	Smallman and Moore (2010)	How did you decide what tour to book?	Pripyat/Chernobyl can only be visited through an agency. Knowing what features attracted people to a certain tour can tell much about the motivation to visit a ghost town.
Have you previously visited any other museum and/or site	Yuill (2003)	Did you previously visit any other dark tourism attractions?	Indicates if the person is driven by a general interest in dark tourism or just interested in a specific site.

directly related to the Holocaust?		If yes: Which ones?	Shows if there is a preference for a certain type of dark site.
Heritage as a motivational factor	Biran et al. (2011)	Do you know anyone personally who has been affected by the nuclear accident?	Could indicate heritage and personal reasons as a strong motivational factor.
Travel influence of the media	Urbonavicius (2021)	Did the media effect your decision to visit Chernobyl?	Proves assumptions of recent studies (e.g. Marton et al., 2020; Urbonavicius, 2021) that the media is a key motivational factor nowadays compared to a few years ago.
Spiritual/ mystical experience	Tarlow (2005)	Are you interested in paranormal activity or/and did you expect to see anything like that in Pripjat?	Indicates if tourists' motivations could be based on their interest in experiencing paranormal activities
Fascination with death	Seaton and Lennon (2004)	Are you interested in knowing more about death & afterlife?	Investigates fascination with death as one motivational factor
Must visit attraction	Isaac and Çakmak (2016)	Did you visit Chernobyl as part of your sightseeing routine?	Investigates sightseeing as one motivational factor
Expanding knowledge motivational factor	Weaver et al., (2017)	How important was the educational aspect in your decision to visit?	Investigates how important education is
<i>Experiences & Post Behaviour</i>			
Do you think it was very authentic or rather commercialized as a tourist attraction?	Deutsch (2014)	Did you have the impression that Chernobyl is still as it used to be after the accident or 'designed' for mass tourism now?	Asks for their opinion about making a tourist attraction of Chernobyl. Positive answers could indicate certain pull factors such as sightseeing while negative answers could indicate push factors such as paying respect and empathy.
How did you feel inside the museum? How was the experience for you?	Deutsch (2014)	What emotions did you feel during the tour?	Emotions can be an indicator for the initial motivation, e.g fun can be related to people motivated by visiting a famous attraction or novelty seeking while sadness can be an indicator for being motivated by empathy and

When I go home, I talk to everybody about my destination	Lewis et al. (2021)	Did you tell many people about Chernobyl after the tour?	wanting to understand the victims' pain Can indicate push factors such as ego-enhancement or prestige
		<i>Demographics</i>	
		How old are you?	Important to meet the second objective and compare two different age groups
		What is your nationality?	Might be related to different motivations

Appendix 2: Consent form for interviews

Walking the Streets of a Nuclear Ghost Town– Dark Tourism in Pripyat (Chernobyl)

Master thesis by Lisa Benden, submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the MSc in Management with Specialization in Strategic Marketing, at Catolica Lisbon SBE

Dear participant,

First of all: Thank you for sharing your valuable time and insights with me. May you receive many Karma points. In the following you can find a short overview of the research purpose as well as some guidelines for your participation.

Research purpose:

In recent years, dark tourism has been a topic that is on the rise. The term defines travelling to places of historical disasters and tragedy. Motivational factors of tourists flocking to these sites can greatly vary. Despite research in the past, it still is not clear why people decide to visit dark sites. This dissertation will specifically focus on form of dark tourism, namely ghost towns. In this context, it will be analyzed what motivates people to visit the ghost town Pripjat/ Chernobyl.

Guidelines:

- I confirm that I am over 18 years old.
- I can withdraw during the interview at any point and do not have to answer all questions.
- The purpose was explained to me.
- I had the opportunity to clarify any doubts or questions.
- I confirm that I am aware and fine with my interview getting recorded.
- I understand that all information are confidential.
- I acknowledge that my real identity will be anonymous and I will be assigned a number that can be referred to.

I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

If you have any further question, you can contact me anytime under the following email:
Lisabenden311@gmail.com

Appendix 3: Interview Transcripts Examples

Interview 1 (German, 38, female)

Respondent: Hello.

Interviewer: Hello, this is Lisa. Thanks for answering and thanks for your time. As you already know, I'm writing about disaster tourism. And in that context, I found ghost towns like Pripyat very interesting and decided to write about Chernobyl. My main goal is to find out why people decide to travel there.

Respondent: I think that's a bit different with me than with other people. Well, I don't know what x said about me, but I am a flight attendant.

Interviewer: Ah, interesting.

Respondent: Yes, with Lufthansa and with us it's often the case that when we fly to the cities, now for example to Kiev, we usually don't have much time, so we spend the night there, eat there and if we're lucky, we still have a few hours to do something, to look at something and then we leave again. Normally, you get to know the city, but never the surrounding area. And

I had caught a flight, where I had a day off and then yes I actually looked on the Internet, what trips you can do, because I always like to do something that not everyone does. I find such a city..., what's it called? City...

Interviewer: City tour?

Respondent: Exactly such a city tour, yes of course. City tours are the standard thing to do. But well, you can probably also do it alone somehow. And as a flight attendant I fly to the cities again and again, you can also explore the city little by little and yes, that's how this idea came up, through the Internet. I was looking at what you can do out there. And then I saw this tour and I found that quite exciting.

Interviewer: Ah yes, interesting. Do you still remember when you first heard about Chernobyl?

Respondent: Well, I was, sorry, I still have a bit of a cold. I was three when it happened. So the memories that I have now are not the same. I know it from stories of my parents, who live near Berlin. I do not know when exactly I heard about it during my childhood. I remember hearing about nuclear and nuclear power plants. It was already discussed everywhere back then but the information I have now with some background knowledge are quite different compared to what I perceived as a child.

Interviewer: Did you read up on it again later, that is, on the accident itself?

Respondent: I actually did, after I decided to do this tour and signed up for it. I watched the series first after that, which was on HBO. When my husband was at work and the little one was in day-care, I watched it in two days and found it totally exciting. Especially because I hadn't really dealt with the subject before. It was more like I don't go there now because I know what happened and find that totally exciting, but it was just rather that I wanted to do something that I normally can't do because there is no opportunity. Something out of the ordinary that not everyone does. So that was more my background, why I said I want to do the tour and then I also asked my crew to join me. And actually only one person came along. The others said no, I don't want to. And the co-pilot, he came along, and he really only decided on the day when we flew to Kiev, because he had probably read about Chernobyl a bit. I think he also had a bit of respect at the beginning, also because of the radiation. I also informed myself first. So I wouldn't have said: Oh, I'll do the tour and then have a look. I also read about it first, what is it like with the radiation and then I said, yes, that's okay. I mean, as a flight attendant, you always get a bit more radiation than everyone else anyway.

Interviewer: Yes, I also read about the comparison between Chernobyl and airborne radiation.

Respondent: Yes, exactly.

Interviewer: And how did you decide what tour to book? There seem to be several operators.

Respondent: So I think I took the one with the highest rating actually. I booked it through Get-a-guide. Hm, so apart from the fact that I also got a discount because of my flight miles, they just had very good ratings. The guides were also important for me, that you can ask a lot of questions, and they really gave you great information. And it was also super entertaining, it was a really exciting day. I was totally exhausted afterwards, but it was very exciting.

Interviewer: So it was very important to you to learn more about the history?

Respondent: I think, because of the fact that I had already seen the series, I already had relatively much knowledge. They showed a few videos during the bus trip there and the guide told us a lot, which of course already coincided with the series. So there was nothing new for me really, which I did not know from the series already. So education was not my primary reason.

Interviewer: Okay, got it. Did you expect to see anything paranormal on the tour, since Pripyat is a ghost town?

Respondent: No, not at all. Not at all. I found it actually really beautiful there, as strange as it may sound. But that's just somehow because you don't see this radiation and you don't feel it and nothing. And this scenery, this city, that used to be a prefabricated building, was totally green, because nature is reclaiming everything. It's really beautiful, I have to say. It's really amazing. So if you ever have the opportunity, go there.

Interviewer: Yes, I can imagine.

Respondent: I would definitely also go for two days with an overnight stay.

Interviewer: Have you dealt with the topic of death before or are you interested in death and afterlife in general?

Respondent: Not really. I think I found it rather frightening how much it was played down, because the official number is still insanely low. If you think about how many people have really died from it and still have these late effects. That is really shocking. Our guide also told us, I don't know, was it last summer or the summer before? There was a pretty big fire in the forest area of Chernobyl, and everything moved over to Kiev. And they also had warnings from the government, that they should close everything there and so on, because there is still radiation coming over. I did not think about the death in this moment. But when I was back in the hotel room, I really had problems falling asleep, because there were so many things in my head. Then this carousel of thoughts started in my head. Before that, during the tour, all these impressions just hit you and you don't really think about the death and the victims.

Interviewer: Very interesting. Regarding the emotions, you said that the tour triggered rather positive feelings in you. Was there something else, like fear or sadness?

Respondent: I was not afraid. I think if you deal with it a little bit beforehand, also with the radiation, then you don't need to be afraid. During my tour, there was a nuclear scientist, no, he was a nuclear physician. He came from New Zealand but now actually lives in Sweden and always works in different places, because he still has problems with his visa. And he had a completely different background knowledge about radiation and also had his own Geiger counter with him. And he also said that you really don't have to worry about it in that sense. I think, with this sentence he took away my fear a little bit. And I mean the tour guides are there almost every day. I think that's extreme. But I also took every advice they gave us. Afterwards, wash off the skin with cold water, because the warm water opens the pores and what you have absorbed comes out. After that I already felt better.

Interviewer: Did you have the feeling, when you were there, that Pripjat was embellished a little bit for tourists? For example, I have seen many pictures with old dolls. Did you have the feeling that this was pushed a little bit again or that this was really the way it was back then?

Respondent: I would say that the things from back then are still there, but they were probably placed differently. Exactly in this kindergarten, it was actually like that with these dolls and in the school as well. We were not allowed to go inside the school because everything is at risk of collapse, but at least we could visit the kindergarten. You can already see that these are really old things. I mean, what was lying around. I still know the toys from my school days. And there was a lot of dust. Everything is so contaminated. You don't take anything with you. That's what I found so impressive. In such places, where tragic things happened, everything is often somehow destroyed and broken, and nothing is left. Because of the radiation, everything is still there. And that's what impressed me so much, that you can still see everything like that.

Interviewer: Right, I never thought about that before.

Respondent: But of course, it's clear that they're earning money with it. You can't even get there without money because you must book a tour. But I think you shouldn't go there by yourself anyways. There are still areas where the radiation is very high. I mean the guides, they know it, then you just go around it. We were a group of about 10 people.

Interviewer: I also read that after the series the booking went extremely high.

Respondent: I read that as well. I think my group was still small, also because of Corona probably. But there was a checkpoint where passports were checked. And there was so much going on. There were so many tour buses, some of them were really big tour buses. I also

found that frightening. So I have read it, but I would not have imagined that so many people actually go there.

Interviewer: You get the feeling that it's already quite a tourist attraction, is that what you are saying?

Respondent: Yes, it is. I confess it's a bit like going sightseeing, I did watch it, but I found it kind of frightening in parts. It's kind of hard to put into words.

Interviewer: When you came back, did you tell a lot of people that you were there?

Respondent: I posted a picture on Instagram. My brother saw it and therefore knew. That's how my parents found out about it. I hadn't told them because I honestly wasn't sure how my mom would react to it. When I told them, I didn't really let my mum interrupt me. Later she said that she would have been interested in that, too. My best friend was also very sceptical and didn't want to know anything about it afterwards. She works in the medical field and has to work with X-rays and radiation. If someone had just asked me out of the blue: Would you go there? I would have said no, absolutely not. I don't think I've told that many people. If I talk to colleagues now and then and it somehow comes up in conversation then yes, but otherwise no.

Interviewer: And besides Chernobyl, have you been to any other places where disasters happened?

Respondent: I must think about that... I was in Dachau in the concentration camp. That was when I was at school, it was a school trip. So not really my decision to go there.

Interviewer: Would you go to Chernobyl again?

Respondent: It was very impressive. But well, I mean, in the end, you see the same thing again. I'd be curious to see what they do with it. Because the things there are very dilapidated. Everything is falling apart and officially you're not allowed to go into these buildings anymore, ever since something collapsed. Um, unofficially they let you into some buildings at least. So I'm actually curious to see how things will continue when they really collapse. How it will continue, because I don't know if you necessarily want to see such a pile of rubble.

Interviewer: Yeah, it will probably be harder to sell then.

Respondent: Yes, I don't know how it will continue. But I also have to say, I found the ghost town of Pripyat more impressive than Chernobyl itself, because above this nuclear power plant, there's this huge, I'll just say coffin, above it, and that makes it a bit... gone. So I think that, because you don't see anything burnt down or whatever, it somehow didn't seem so real to me. If you have seen the series or a documentary, you still have these pictures in your head. Then you try to compare it a bit, but that's difficult, at least that's what I found.

Interviewer: Do you think it looked more dramatic in the media then?

Respondent: Yes, exactly. And what I didn't realize until then was that it could have ended completely differently. It could have caused even more damage if it hadn't been for those miners. I was really not aware of that at all until then. The whole world could have been affected. On this subject: I don't know if that's of any use to you. I have listened to a podcast on Deutschlandfunk Nova. It's called Weltenbummler ('Globetrotter'). There's also an interview with someone about Chernobyl. You can listen to it on Spotify.

Interviewer: That's great, I'll have a look.

Respondent: Maybe that will further help you.

Interviewer: Thanks so much for your time!

Interview 2 (Austrian, 37, male)

Respondent: Hello!

Interviewer: Hello, this is Lisa. I texted you earlier.

Respondent: Yes, no problem.

Interviewer: Great. Right. I prepared a few questions.

Respondent: Feel free to ask the questions and then if I think of anything beyond that, I'll be happy to tell you a few more things.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Do you still remember when you first heard about Chernobyl?

Respondent: I knew it from stories, so to speak. I was too young. I have older siblings and I know from stories that they told me that they were not allowed on playgrounds at that time, for example, because of this radiation. But somehow the scientific findings were not that advanced back then. And those are my first memories that I have of it. And then later I investigated more and read a little bit about it.

Interviewer: Interesting, and where did you find more information?

Respondent: Many people watched the series. I'm sure you know it too. I didn't, for example. I was there two years ago and I hadn't seen the series before. It was more that I thought afterwards that I would like to watch the series, just to see how close it is to the real thing and how realistic it is and whether you recognize the places that you've seen yourself. I actually did most of my research online, through Google and I looked at blogposts. So you can only get there via a tour anyway. However I think that was the motivation for many, especially younger people, to recreate what is shown in the series or that the series sparked some interest

at least.

Interviewer: Ah yes, I understand. Was Chernobyl the main reason for you to fly to Kiev?

Respondent: Well, I travel a lot. I have been all over Europe. So at some point, Kiev or Ukraine was also on the agenda. But I have to say, Chernobyl was one of the main reasons to fly there or one of the things of the trip where I had the most expectations, somehow, I was looking forward to it the most.

Interviewer: What would you say was your main motivation to go there?

Respondent: I have to say that I'm a journalist and therefore I have a fundamental interest in current affairs anyway. And I often read things and want to know how something happened and somehow also have this urge to say I'm interested in seeing it for myself and then judging.

Interviewer: Would you say this trip was part of your sightseeing?

Respondent: I mean I booked it and found it on TripAdvisor. Sightseeing might sound a bit disrespectful though. For me it was more than just where you tick a box on your travel list and its done.

Interviewer: And how did you book the tour? What factors were important?

Respondent: I looked for reviews on TripAdvisor and then decided after that. Quite simple.

Interviewer: Would you say the media influenced your decision to travel to Chernobyl?

Respondent: I wouldn't say so, I have always been interested in historical events.

Interviewer: Did you previously visit any other dark tourism attractions?

Respondent: As a journalist I went to quite a few places, Auschwitz for example. Sometimes out of personal interest and sometimes for my job.

Interviewer: Do you know anyone who was personally affected by the accident?

Respondent: No, not at all.

Interviewer: Are you interested in topic around death and afterlife?

Respondent: No, I haven't even thought about that.

Interviewer: Are you interested in paranormal activity or/and did you expect to see anything like that in Pripyat?

Respondent: No, not at all either. I know it is an abandoned town but I do not believe in ghost. I also don't think about the death too much. But the interest for this town was already there and it was also really impressive to see how, for example, how nature has reclaimed the place.

Interviewer: I've also seen that in pictures. How important would you say was education for you?

Respondent: So that was an important factor for me, that I just get a little bit of the event classified because I have not experienced it myself. That was very important for me.

Interviewer: Okay, interesting. And how did you feel when you were there?

Respondent: It was interesting. Whereas, first and foremost, it was impressive. I think impressive describes it the best. I thought it was interesting to just see all of this, something that was on the news for weeks. At a time when I was just a toddler.

Interviewer: Okay. And did you feel that Chernobyl was still authentic and still the way it was back then or do you think they ‘rearranged’ a few things for tourists?

Respondent: It might be that there is a bit of an arrangement with the dolls. I think that they also told us that there are always people who go into this area without authorization and then, for example, they leave things behind or something. But there were dolls in this school or kindergarten. Yes, I can still remember them well. There were just a few. So to discuss this tourist factor: What bothered me and what you can describe a bit as this experience factor of the tours is that, for example, each visitor gets a measuring device to check the radiation at each point. And with the organizer we had, the person who measured the highest radiation got a prize at the end. That had the character of a competition. So I found that quite frightening. And I did not measure at all. Sure, I took a look out of interest. But I wasn't interested in getting a particularly high value. If you read through the descriptions of these tour operators, you can buy such measuring devices or you can get them there. I even think that this is for additional money. And there are already souvenirs that you can buy. And then these are also very frightening things that I don't need. There are breathing masks and something like that.

Interviewer: I've seen a lot of pictures of that on social media as well.

Respondent: Exactly, I think that's over the top. That's not what I envision when I visit this place. And it's also not something that I kind of need or something that would have enhanced my experience.

Interviewer: Did you tell a lot of people that you were there?

Respondent: Yes, I did. I did, but at work it's also a different situation, because they are all journalists. There it happens automatically that somehow questions are asked and one talks about it. Security was a very important topic, when I told people about the tour. Is it safe to go there? Yes, I think this fear still resonates a bit.

Interviewer: Okay, did you then also write about it afterwards or did you go primarily out of personal interest?

Respondent: Out of personal interest. But I think I could have written about it if I wanted to. But then I would have really chosen this aspect, this disaster tourism aspect.

Interviewer: Very interesting. I think that's about it from my questions as well. Many, many thanks in any case.

Interview 4 (Irish, 28, male)

Interviewer Hi. It's Lisa, we talked 2 days ago. I got your contact from x and he told me that you have been to Chernobyl already.

Respondent: Yeah he said that you will be in touch. So where can I start. I mean I have kinda been interested in going for like a few years. I had seen dark tourist documentaries and the Chernobyl tv show and stuff like that. I was always kinda curious about seeing it. There was something mysterious about it and it was cool that you could actually visit it. A lot of similar places are restricted, you can't go to them. It was on a long list. I started to travel a bit more. So I thought why not give it a shot. It was actually easier to visit that I had expected. So you just fly to Kiev and then there's a bus and they handle basically everything. It was very fascinating, and you go deeper than I expected. It is like a day trip. The tour guides just let you explore by yourself a bit and go into the abandoned buildings. You can rent the Geiger counter and check the radiation. There was this one spot where the radiation was high so I took a lot of pictures. It was surreal because the city is still there, like everybody just left. There is homes, offices, supermarkets and this theme park. Most of the stuff is still there. It does really feel like being in a movie, you know. A set of a war zone or zombie movie or something like that

Interviewer: So it does feel like a ghost town?

Respondent: Yeah exactly, like a ghost town and when I visited there were some tours happening, but you didn't really see anybody while walking around. It's not like in Disneyland where it's full of people. You just come across the people you're with, so it still feels like a ghost town. I went in March 2020, right before the pandemic started. So I feel like I brought this crazy disease with me from there. Just kidding. It was quite. But maybe it is more packed normally.

Interviewer: Do you still remember the first time you heard about Chernobyl?

Respondent: When did it happen again?

Interviewer: 1986. So about 35 years ago,

Respondent: I wasn't born yet but I did hear about it like I mean, I remember that I knew about it in the nineties because I remember they used to send a lot of Children over. There was a charity and I remember they sent kids over to vacation in Ireland, where I'm from. It was like Chernobyl Children's charities and things like that, where they did fundraise and all this kind of stuff for kids who end up suffering from all the radiation. So I do remember that. So I did hear, about it you know, when I was pretty young. My interest in going there

probably came, like, five years ago, so I think probably when I watched a documentary on TV and discovered that you could actually go. And a show on Netflix called the dark tourist. That kind of inspired me to go, But I do remember, like when I was younger in the nineties. Yeah, but I do remember in the 90s Chernobyl was something that I knew about.

Interviewer: Okay, so was that the primary reason for visiting the Ukraine, or was it just a side effect of being there?

Respondent: No, it was It was the primary and only reason to go there because I talked to a lot of people already, and yeah, some of them just visited Kiev and then that kind of story. You know, it was just a weekend trip just to see Chernobyl. So it was the main motivation of the trip. There wasn't really much going on there in Kiev so Chernobyl was definitely the most interesting part.

Interviewer: And would you describe it as sightseeing?

Respondent: Yeah you could say that.

Interviewer: Okay. And how did she decide what tour to book? Because I think there are several operators, right?

Respondent: Yeah, I think it was probably just one of the top recommended ones. I don't remember exactly. I probably have, like, it's somewhere my emails, but yeah, it's probably like one of the top three recommended ones. So it was just simple like that. It was easy. I booked it online.

Interviewer: Okay, and do you know anyone personally who has been affected by the accident?

Respondent: No, I didn't actually know anybody who has ever been there before either. The only person I know are myself and my friend that I dragged along with me, but just the two of us. I've never met anybody else being there.

Interviewer: Okay, what would you say was your main motivation to go there?

Respondent: It was probably to get to know more about it, to hear the tour guides. And then to see it in real life, you know, because on TV it is kind of glamorized, maybe, Or, like, made into more of a movie and I wanted to see what it was really like. And see what the people are like there, because there's still people that live and work in the area Like I was fascinated to see how they were still there and still living. And what the opinions of the Ukrainians were as well. So just to learn more. To experience it firsthand. A lot of people, I think they are really scared. Thinking it's like, really bad for your health. Yeah, but I think for like visiting for a day. I mean, the tour guides worked there all day, every day, so I don't think it's dangerous.

Interviewer: Interesting. Well, since it's a ghost town, some people were kind of interested in having some spiritual and mystical experiences there. Was that the same for you?

Respondent: No, not really. I thought, like maybe it would feel creepy or haunted or something. Like some moments, I kind of I think a lot of it was more sad than mystical. Er, I don't know, you know, like, because you could see how kind of real life it was and see all the possessions of people left behind. I think it was more sad, I guess except for the workers in the plant it's not like lots of people died in there, you know. So it's more that people abandoned their homes and then maybe died elsewhere whenever they escaped in the hospitals and things like that, you know? So it's more of just kind of a city left behind, it didn't feel like a Ghost Town like creepy spiritually, and that is not for me anyway.

Interviewer: Are you interested in topics around death?

Respondent: Nah, not at all. Did not think about that.

Interviewer: And when you were there, did you have the impression that it's still like it used to be? Do you think it's more designed for mass tourism now?

Respondent: Yeah, I'm not sure about that. Like some of the things did look like set up. Yeah, just for a good photo. But I don't know. I think it's a mix of both. It may be a few buildings that the tour guides bring you to and like, there's an obvious perfect photo moment of an abandoned doll. Or, like there's a room full of gas masks, You know, that kind of thing. Okay, I think they might be. Maybe not so true. I don't know for a fact but some of the things feel kind of set up and then some just definitely look abandoned. There's a little kind of a tourist shop. Not very big, Very tacky, But there's a little shop at the beginning. Yeah, but it doesn't feel like a theme park or anything. It's just like this. Quite subtle. But there is one little shop there.

Interviewer: Have you been to any other so called dark sites?

Respondent: Uhm, I have been to the London Dungeon if that counts. Other than that I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay, I think. Yeah, that's all I wanted to know so far.

Respondent: If there's any other questions, like in the future. Anything. Just drop me a message, here to help.

Interview 16 (American/Russian, 29, male)

Interviewer: Hey, thanks for answering some questions. Do you still remember when you first heard about Chernobyl?

Respondent: Hi there. Um, so let's go through the questions. Um, well, considering I was born in Russia, I heard about it, when I was probably five or six, I didn't know, really early on. It's deeply embedded in the culture there.

Interviewer: Where did you find more information later?

Respondent: Um, I read about it a bunch over the years, but definitely the Chernobyl, um, TV show sparked more interest, but throughout the years, I got more interested.

Interviewer: What was the main reason for your journey to Kiev?

Respondent: I wanted to visit some friends for a few days.

Interviewer: What was the main reason for your journey to Chernobyl?

Respondent: Um, it's one of those special places, right? There's like few places in the world that had so much attention. I guess dangerous yet interesting. Um, I think that why I wanted to go. And, um, you know, like, I guess here's the most fascinating part. If you go to World War two Memorials or world war 1, for example the Vietnam Memorial, you see the memorial, but you can't like go and see the battle. Right. But in Chernobyl, you saw the TV show and you can go and actually experience it. You can walk on a building and see that clothing that was shown on HBO, the gear that was shown. So it's a unique way to go from something like at TV show to reality. And that's pretty crazy.

Interviewer: Have you visited Chernobyl before? If yes, how many times?

Respondent: No, this was the first time. I live in the States now, it's far.

Interviewer: How did you decide what tour to book?

Respondent: Um, there are a bunch of tours on an airplane in person, uh, through the government., You can do a multiday tour. You can do a private tour, etc. I picked the one in English and basically on the day that I was interested, there was only sort of one available. So it was just, um, I picked what was working for me time wise.

Interviewer: Do you know anyone personally who has been affected by the nuclear accident?

Respondent: Um, there was about half a million of liquidators roughly throughout the years. Um, I had a lot of stories through like relatives, like friends of friends who were, um, liquidated. So I don't know anyone personally, but my family and my friends knew bunch and they heard stories about them.

Interviewer: Did the media influence your decision to visit Chernobyl?

Respondent: Uh, the HBO show kind of influenced spark my interest, but I would go regardless. Uh, I was here visiting Kiev and I decided before the documentaries, um, it was about experiencing right, like visiting that place.

Interviewer: How important was the educational aspect for you?

Respondent: It wasn't about learning. I think I learned a bunch before from documentaries and the series. It was about experiencing. Just seeing buildings and Pripyat. Like it used to be one of the towns of the future in the Soviet Union. Um, seeing it in person turning into the forest, was pretty surreal.

Interviewer: Are you interested in paranormal activity or/and did you expect to see anything like that in Pripyat (since it's a ghost town)?

Respondent: I don't believe in paranormal activity so this didn't influence me at all.

Interviewer: Are you interested in topics around death & afterlife?

Respondent: I wouldn't say so. Surprisingly what I learned, not many people died from the accident. Um, also I was surprised to learn that you really have to try to get a crazy dose of radiation to get hurt. learned a lot of things. As a result of this tour, I talked to one of the top nuclear scientists in America, basically before going there. I asked him to sort of debrief me on what to do and what not to do. Right. And, um, what I learned you, you really have to try sort of to get enough radiation to get like serious damage that you feel it. So the official death rate, I forget it's something like 30 people died directly and some numbers died from cancer. I don't think these numbers are that high surprising. Unless I'm wrong. I never think about afterlife either.

Interviewer: Would you describe the tour as sightseeing?

Respondent: Yeah, well as I said I kinda wanted to compare it to the series.

Interviewer: Do you think it was still authentic or designed for tourists?

Respondent: So having watched the series, I think you expect to see the same. Maybe they arranged some items in another way.

Interviewer: What emotions did you feel during the tour?

Respondent: I felt strangely comfortable. Like when you walk there in Prip'yat and to Chernobyl and all those little villages around you realize how temporary we are on this planet and how sort of, uh, everything is just very temporary. I don't know. I felt very common, very, uh, strangely comfortable. Others around me expressed different feelings. Maybe I'm just not sensitive enough lol.

Interviewer: Did you tell many people about Chernobyl after the tour?

Respondent: No, I didn't, I totally think just a couple of people, the nuclear scientists and, uh, and a couple friends.

Interviewer: Thanks for your time!

Interview 24 (Ukrainian, 23, female)

Interviewer: Hi again. Thanks for answering a few questions.

Respondent: Sure

Interviewer: When did you first hear about Chernobyl?

Respondent: Knew about Chernobyl from childhood. They talk about this tragedy at school and in families. I am from Ukraine, so I know very well about the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. It's part of my history.

Interviewer: Where did you find more information later?

Respondent: I read on the Internet, asked teachers, asked questions to those who were evacuated from there. I know some people personally. Rather, my teacher knew. Most have already died.

Interviewer: What was the main reason for your journey to Kiev?

Respondent: I live in Kiev. I was born here.

Interviewer: What was the main reason for your journey to Chernobyl?

Respondent: To look at the scale of the accident. I'm more interested in the tragedy itself, the pain itself. It was interesting how people live there now, there are still few people who didn't leave and how the power plant itself functions.

Interviewer: Have you visited Chernobyl before? If yes, how many times?

Respondent: No. This is my first trip, but now I'm going more in the future.

Interviewer: Have you been to any other places before where disasters happened?

Respondent: No, I did not go.

Interviewer: How did you decide what tour to book?

Respondent: I travelled with colleagues at work, we joined an existing group. We did not solve this issue on our own. They ask and we go with them.

Interviewer: Do you know anyone personally who has been affected by the nuclear accident?

Respondent: Of course. And this is far from one person. I know many people that have to move away from Pripyat because of this accident. Very sad. Some don't like to talk about it, I respect.

Interviewer: Did the media influence your decision to visit Chernobyl?

Respondent: A bit. But even before the HBO series came out, I wanted to visit the Chernobyl zone as much as I did after the series. As I said, I know it from my childhood.

Interviewer: How important was the educational aspect for you?

Respondent: There is hardly anything you can learn during the tour. Only to watch and feel the pain of many generations. In fact, you want to run from there. And the faster the better. Fear bordering on tragedy is strongest.

Interviewer: Are you interested in paranormal activity or/and did you expect to see anything like that in Pripyat (since it's a ghost town)?

Respondent: No. I knew immediately that I would only see an empty city. Due to the large number of tourists, it does not completely resemble as empty one.

Interviewer: Are you interested in topics around death & afterlife?

Respondent: Not really but I experienced all the pain much earlier when I heard stories from residents. Now it was just very sad.

Interviewer: Would you describe the tour as sightseeing?

Respondent: No, I wouldn't. Maybe for foreigners there but for us Ukrainians no. We use this place to feel the pain and understand. I did not like tourist posing there.

Interviewer: Would you say it's still authentic there or do you think they have 'beautified' Chernobyl and Pripyat a bit for tourists?

Respondent: I remember a souvenir shop for foreigners and due to many tourists it looks not so much like a ghost city anymore.

Interviewer: What emotions did you feel during the tour?

Respondent: Sadness. And then delight because I did it. I went there, I made up my mind. This was my goal. The trip itself, as such.

Interviewer: Did you tell many people about Chernobyl after the tour?

Respondent: My family knows but they did not want to come. I told a few friends as well.