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Chernobyl Dreams

A Study on the Role of Narrative
Imagination in Consumption Experience

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Chernobyl Dreams. A Study on the Role of Narrative Imagination in Consumption Experience

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Abstract:

This study attempted to elucidate the narrative articulations as a product of context imagination in the Chernobyl exclusion zone as it was captured from the qualitative interviews and photographs of three different visitor categories. With the assistance of qualitative and phenomenological methods this study explores the ways in which the heritage and cultural meaning of the exclusion zone is imagined and articulated in tourism at Chernobyl. The chosen methodology with the assistance of the theoretical framework of this thesis, four experiential domains of consumption imagination, *narrative, material, emotional* and *value*, produced a thematic structure with three different themes that describe visitors' narrative positions, narrative articulations, and performances regarding the heritage in the storyscape Chernobyl. These visitors' performances were further condensed from the point of view of the contemporary storyscape dynamics, *conformity, enactment, and contestation*. Visitors imaginaries and performances coproduce the site and at the same time they entail fluid and even conflicting narrative articulations on the site and its cultural significance This study provided a more nuanced understanding of the different visitor categories in the exclusion zone and their group specific ways to articulate, imagine and coproduce the storyscape Chernobyl.

Keywords:

tourism, visual sociology, storyscape, narrative, imagination, performativity

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All participants whose photographs are used in this thesis have given their permission for publishing of this work.

Berlin, August 2020

Veera

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1. Introduction

Chernobyl is not just a historical event but a particular kind of narrative with global significance. The story is known all over the world, in its significance and symbolism it equals to the sinking of the Titanic. Chernobyl sends a message of the technological failure of mankind and the exclusion zone stands as a tangible signifier of the disaster that happened 34 years ago. The Chernobyl exclusion zone has for years been an area of scientific investigation for researchers representing various disciplines and scholarly orientations. Due to the long-term and far-reaching social, cultural, and economic effects of the disaster, it has not been unnoticed in the social sciences either.

In the recent years there has been a rise in the popularity of tours organized to the Chernobyl exclusion zone. Little is known about the overall meaning of the Chernobyl exclusion zone from the visitors' point of view. Moreover, increased number of visitors provide their own dynamics in the given site. The strength of sociology as a discipline is that it may elaborate such dynamics and social processes. Therefore, Chernobyl exclusion zone provides interesting possibility to investigate the overall meaning of the area for the visitors and importantly the different visitors' articulations on the area. By elaborating these different articulations and ways of imagining the Chernobyl exclusion zone, this study will provide a more nuanced picture on the different types of tourists that visit the area and their specific ways of engaging with the site and producing its heritage.

In this introductory chapter I would like to primarily present to the reader the history of the accident and the gradual establishment of Chernobyl exclusion zone as a tourist attraction. After that I will connect the Chernobyl exclusion zone within the concept of storyscape in which narratives are the focal point of consumption. Lastly, I will explore the enablement of various narrative articulations of Chernobyl due to its high symbolism, and in the combination of both fantasy and reality.

1.1 Chernobyl – The Short History of the Nuclear Disaster

The accident that happened at the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl on April 26, 1986, is by its scale and the harm it caused, one of the largest catastrophes in the recorded history and the worst ever disaster in the history of nuclear reactors (Medvedev, 1990, Chernousenko, 1991). The events of that day are well established (Chernousenko, 1991, Marples, 1988, Medvedev, 1990, Shcherbak, 1989). During a procedural shut down of reactor number four at the Vladimir Ilyich Lenin nuclear power plant in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic a catastrophic surge of energy led to a vessel rupture and subsequently blew millions of curies of radioactive products in the environment which were to be spread with winds and air currents all over the northern hemisphere.

The accident was a combination of a flawed reactor design, mistakes made by the power plant personnel from the top managers to operators and a lack of safety culture. The destroyed reactor four and subsequent radiation leaks killed 30 firefighters and power plant operators within the next weeks. For the cleaning of the area and shielding the exploded reactor number 4 with a sarcophagus, about 200 000 people, so called liquidators were brought to the site from all over the Soviet Union. In the pace of the clean-up work in the subsequent months and years the number grew to 650 000-1 000 000 (Chernousenko, 1991: 43) as many were transported to the site to conduct tasks that range from bulldozing contaminated top soil and disposing it as waste to working in one minute intervals on the roof of the exploded unit shovelling radioactive debris and pieces of granite into the remains of the reactor. According to government agencies 25 000 liquidators have so far died (Smith & Beresford, 2005), but the actual death toll remains a highly controversial issue. The treatment and ultimate fate of the people who participated in the clean-up work is arguably one of the darker sides of the Chernobyl aftermath.

The young city Pripyat established for the powerplant workers and their families was evacuated on 27 April. Approximately 50 000 people were transported to different regions where families and collective farms were receiving the evacuees. Within 10 days, 116 000 people within a 30 km radius of the reactor were evacuated (Smith & Beresford, 2005). This area was officially declared as the Chernobyl exclusion zone and still requires a special permission to enter. Massive resettlement has resulted in a wide range of social and economic consequences (Chernousenko, 1991, Smith & Beresford, 2005). The people who were resettled lost their jobs, social networks and places of social and historical value, their houses, lands, and churchyards.

In Ukraine, the officially stated size of the territory, which has been exposed to the radioactive pollution is larger than 100 000 square kilometres (Chernousenko, 1991). Since the initial establishment of a 30 km radius of exclusion zone (2800 km²) the borders have been moved and adjusted several times. The exclusion zone grew by 2005 into the size of more than 4 700 square kilometres and now covers areas of north-western Ukraine and southern Belarus, all of it declared officially uninhabitable due to radiation (Higginbotham, 2019). Today, the exclusion zone is designated as the Polesia State Radiological and Ecological reserve, which creates a single administrative entity named the Zone of Exclusion and the Zone of Unconditional (Mandatory) Resettlement, which is under the liability of the State Agency for the Chernobyl Exclusion. Around 5 million people continue to live in the polluted areas in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine in which about 100 000 of them live in areas classified by authorities as areas of “strict control” (Who, 2020).

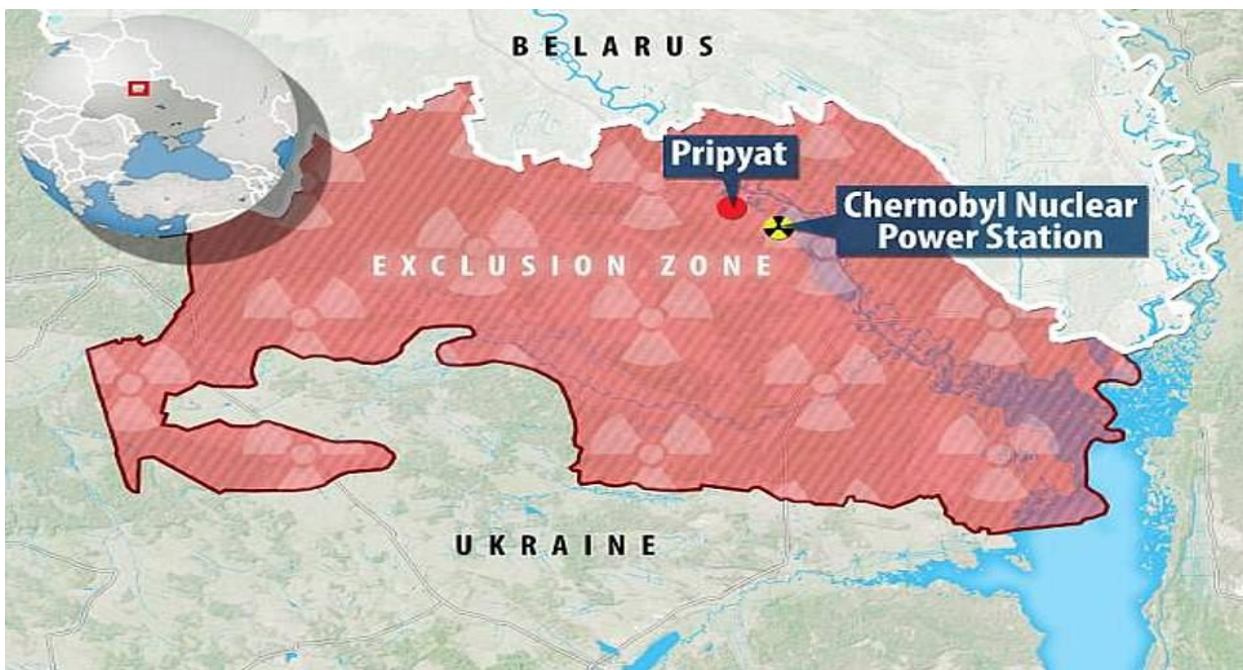


Figure 1. The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, Source: Daily Mail UK

As these numbers indicate the scale and consequences of the accident are hard to comprehend. Moreover, compiling the number of people that were impacted due to the accident is a politically charged activity (Brunsden & Goatcher, 2011) The reported number of deaths and disabilities caused by the disaster vary enormously, “including from the radioactive fallout that encroached great swathes of northern Europe, to the apparent generational health impairments that now affect local populations” (Stone 2013: 79). Initially the Soviet authorities wanted to denigrate the issue, whereas their opponents wished to exaggerate it (Chernousenko, 1991, Medvedev, 1990, Yaroshinskaya, 2011). Later, the Ukrainian authorities, international NGOs and the nuclear industry had different sets of criteria for the counting process, the Ukrainian state has a particular view that concerned the

affected citizens, which is different and driven by different motivations than the view of medical and compensation authorities (Petryna, 2013).

The full consequences of the disaster including long-term social consequences remain debated and under study. And yet, for many the accident is still an ongoing trauma. Many controversies, the unprecedented nature of the accident and the unknown nature of its consequences fuel its symbolic power (Dobraszczyk, 2010). Arguably the vagueness of the numbers presented above and the sheer difficulty to comprehend or measure accurately the full-scale consequences of the disaster have contributed for the creation of a mythical Chernobyl imaginary.

1.2 Chernobyl Exclusion Zone Becomes a Tourist Attraction

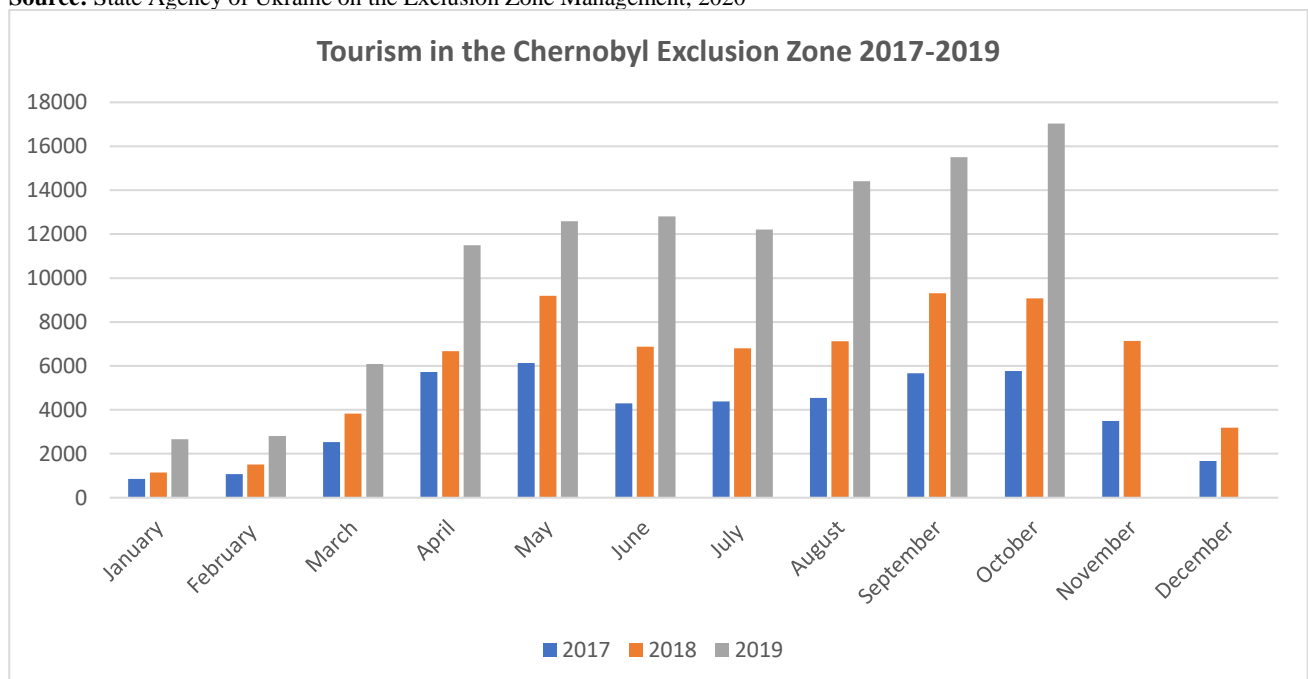
Even though the name “exclusion zone” suggests otherwise, it has never been a closed entity with solid borders. After the disaster many self-settlers, scientists, looters, and illegal explorers have crossed its borders regularly. Even before the first official tours, the exclusion zone was a sought destination among the so-called urban explorers, who possibly have visited the exclusion zone a decade illegally before the first official tours have taken place (Banaszkiewicz, Kruczek & Duda, 2017, Stone, 2013). The first official tour into the Chernobyl exclusion zone took place in 1999 (Banaszkiewicz, Kruczek & Duda, 2017). From the mid-90’s onwards there began the establishment of certain administrative structures in order to deal with the visitors (Banaszkiewicz, Kruczek & Duda, 2017, Brunsten & Goatcher, 2011). The first governmental structure to take care of these activities was the International Information Cooperation and Development Agency ‘ChernobylInterInform’ and in the subsequent year several tour companies started to organize excursion into the zone in cooperation with the ChernobylInterInform.

Since 2011 the exclusion zone has been open for tourists, and the State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management has been the governmental institute issuing permits to enter the exclusion zone. The decision to open the exclusion zone for visitors was based on radiological research, on the grounds of which safe routes were established for the visitors (Banaszkiewicz, Kruczek & Duda, 2017: 151). Along with it a new governmental body, new regulations were brought into the area that remain in force until today. The first limited visits to the zone took place along defined routes that are considered not to have a negative effect on visitors’ health if appropriate safety rules are followed. Visitors must sign an agreement whereby they verify that they understand the risks, and the tour operators are thus released from the possible consequences. As a part of this policy, entering inside the buildings has been officially forbidden since 2011 due to the high risk of collapse. The second principle states that every individual or group visiting the zone must be accompanied by

a licensed guide and a zone representative. The third principle states that a fee is to be paid for visits to the zone and written approval is required from the agency, which is checked at the main entrance Dytyatky (State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management, 2020).

After 2016 the influx of tourists has increased gradually, the growth in the number of visitors took place after the 30th anniversary of the disaster in 2016 and after the installation of the new dome on top of the exploded reactor four that significantly reduced radiation leaks. Several factors have contributed to the development of tourism, improvement in the infrastructure, construction of new accommodation spaces and sanitation facilities, the simplification of the visitor’s clearance process which has allowed the entrance procedure into the zone to become smoother. Data obtained from the State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management shows that the number of visitors has been constantly growing: in 2017 approximately 50 000 visitors, 70 % of them foreigners, came to Chernobyl. To give a context, it is an increase of 35 % compared to 2016 and 350 % compared to 2012 (TourismReview, 2020). In 2018, 72.000 people visited the exclusion zone, and in 2019 124.000 visitors entered the exclusion zone.

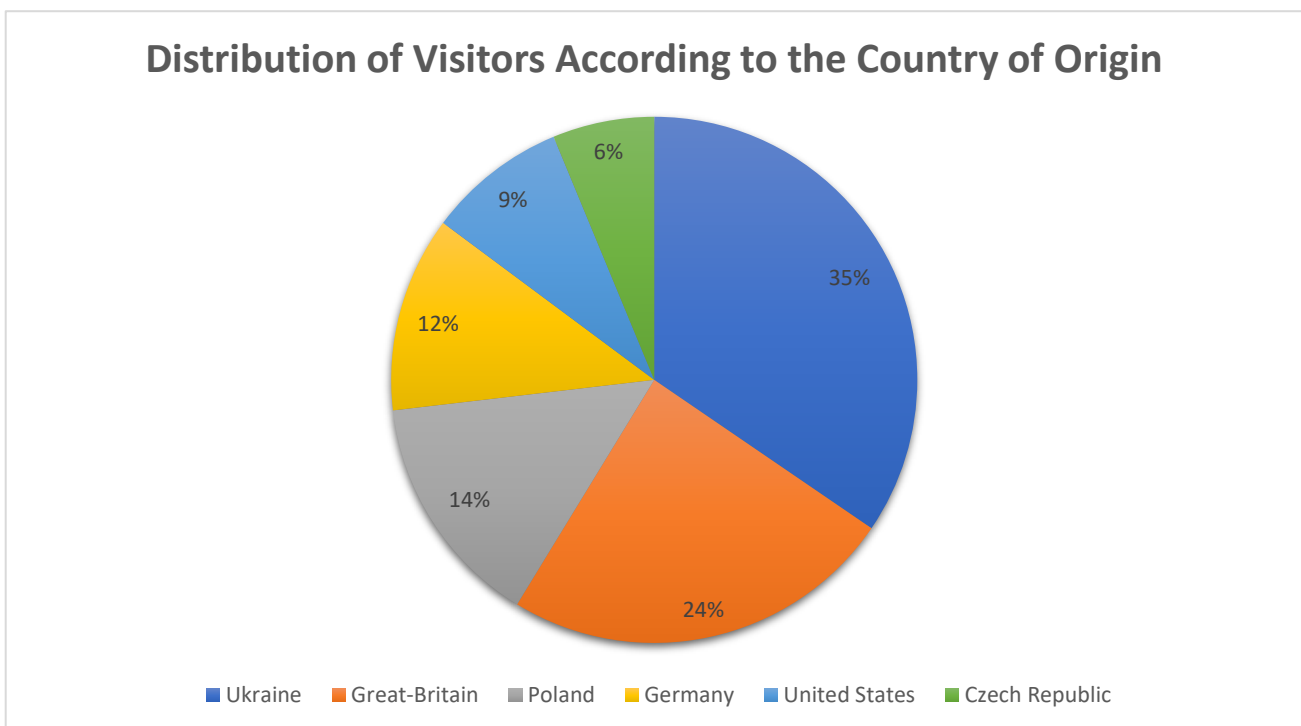
Figure 2. Tourism in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in the years 2017-2019
Source: State Agency of Ukraine on the Exclusion Zone Management, 2020



The year 2019 was a record year for the number of visitors in Chernobyl. In July 2019, the president of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky signed a governmental degree regarding the development of territories affected by radioactive contamination as a result of Chernobyl disaster. According to the degree the exclusion zone will be turned into one of the growth points of a new Ukraine. As a part of this plan, new spots for the tourists have opened. In October 2019, the control room of the reactor 4

was opened for the visitors and 21 new routes for the tourists have been scheduled to open in the near future. In addition, Ukrainian government recently approved river boat tours along the river Pripjat (Telegraph, 2020) Arguably there are several types of tourists with different interests for the area. As the Figure 3 indicates, exclusion received an influx of domestic visitors between 2017 and 2019. Foreign tourists account for the biggest share of visitors, with the UK, Poland, Germany, the United States and Czech Republic account for most. Banaszkievicz, Kruczek & Duda (2017) suggest that for the Ukrainians the exclusion zone is a place of cultural tragedy related to suffering and sacrifice as almost all Ukrainian families have someone who helped in the undertaking of the disaster or was displaced. Foreign tourists can be drawn by the history of the cold war, the experience of the disaster site itself, or the prospects of learning something about radiation and atomic energy. The interests reflect both experiential and sensuous dimensions: to experience an abandoned city, to witness the capabilities of nature to recover and the cognitive dimension such as photography or the functioning of the zone after the catastrophe. To meet the diverse set of visitors and their needs, there is a plethora of different tours available, varying from the one-day tour to the multiple-day private tours that can be fully customized to a client’s needs. For the visitors who are after an intense experience, it is possible to book the so-called illegal tour into the exclusion zone online. The latter presents itself as an alternative to the “mass-market tours” (UrbexTour, 2020).

Figure 3. Distribution of visitors according to the country to of origin 2017-2019
Source: State Agency of Ukraine on the Exclusion Zone Management, 2020



1.3 The Storyscape of Chernobyl

What can be drawn from the aspects discussed so far is that there is not a single narrative authority regarding Chernobyl. The competing narratives construct Chernobyl in different ways: “as a medical and financial crisis, a tale of government mismanagement, a warning to humanity or an ecological success story” (Hutchings & Linden, 2017: 209-210). The storyscape of Chernobyl consists of a plethora of symbolic meanings. Stone (2013) refers to Hetherington (1997) aptly when stating that:

“Chernobyl is a monument to the secrecy and failings of the Cold War, a warning from history of a nuclear energy utopia, and a place located in the “bad lands of modernity” that can provide surreal counter hegemonic representation of space” (Hetherington, 1997, cited in Stone, 2013: 79).

This multivocality has been enhanced by the biblical passages and coincidental literature analogies to the accident such as Strugatsky brothers’ *Roadside Picnic* (1972), and the subsequent film *Stalker* (1979) by Tarkovsky, which have shaped the cultural constructions of Chernobyl in often mythological ways. The landscapes of the abandoned city were further utilized in computer games such as *Call of Duty* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* which speaks to the fact that fantasy and fiction constitute a multi-layered composition of different rememberings, representations and imaginaries in Chernobyl. This diverse set of narratives and imaginaries is imagined and reconstructed in the storyscape, consumption places where narratives are the central object of consumption (Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, 2012)

1.4 The Purpose of this Thesis

The purpose of this research is to analyse the role of consumer imagination in the reconstruction of the story of Chernobyl exclusion zone and to investigate how visitor’s imagination shapes, constitutes, and interacts with the multitude of narratives in this particular research context. Visitors of the exclusion zone are going to be analysed as active stakeholders who contribute to the multivocality of this heritage site. Tourism in the Chernobyl exclusion zone has not gone without academic interests. This particular site has been approached within paradigms of dark tourism and toxic tourism (Brunsden & Goatcher, 2011, Hannam & Yankovska, 2013, Stone, 2013). Equally, there are studies conducted from the point of view of tour guides (Hannam & Yankovska, 2013, Rush-Cooper, 2020) as well as former residents and their perceptions regarding the tourism in the site (Hannam & Yankovska, 2018). Hutchings and Linden (2018) have analysed the content on the webpages of Chernobyl tour operators, proposing a new understanding of existential tourism to

understand the visitors' motivations to visit the exclusion zone. However, the voices of the visitors themselves and their interpretations of the storyscape and heritage site of Chernobyl have not yet been academically scrutinized. Equally little is known about how visitors reconstruct and imagine the narratives of the exclusion zone while visiting the site. Therefore, this study aims to replenish this knowledge gap by analysing the different narrative articulations on the storyscape Chernobyl as expressed by three different visitor categories.

The overarching question is as follows: how different visitor categories articulate and imagine the narratives of Chernobyl's storyscape. I will answer it through three following research questions:

1. What are the distinct tourist categories that visit the Chernobyl exclusion zone?
2. What are each group's specific conventions to approach the exclusion zone?
3. What are the mutual dynamics that these entities entail in the exclusion zone?

These questions are going to be answered with the synthesis of the existing literature and alongside original empirical research with the primary data that was collected by the author of this thesis.

1.5 The Organisation of the Thesis

Following the introductory section, I will present the theoretical framework of this thesis. The purpose of the following chapter is to provide the reader with the scientific ground for this thesis. By presenting the state of art of current knowledge regarding the topic of this thesis I will outline—based on the literature—the current knowledge gap and my original contribution of this thesis. The theoretical framework and analytical concepts that I employ in my research act as a foundation for empirical research that both informs the research design and facilitates the analysis of the findings. Following the theoretical part, I will elaborate on the research methodology employed in this research including the philosophical framework, research design, methods, and analysis of the data in order to explain how the study was conducted. After that I will present the empirical findings: the three visitor categories and their narrative articulations on the Chernobyl exclusion zone. I will finish by drawing conclusions contrasting my research with the findings of the previous studies and finally by suggesting possibilities for further research avenues.

2. Theoretical Framework and the Research Objectives

“Travel and travellers are two things I loathe – and yet here I am, all set to tell the story of my expeditions.”

Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1955, *Tristes tropiques*

This part will first introduce the theoretical framework of this study, by contextualizing the topic of this thesis—the exploration of visitors’ different narrative articulations and imaginings on Chernobyl exclusion zone—within the conceptual framework of dissonance heritage. Moreover, due to its attributes of otherness, I will supplement the dissonance heritage argument by connecting it with the concept of heterotopia. These different heritage articulations in the heterotopian context can be further framed within the theoretical orientation of performance turn. It acknowledges that visitors are active stakeholders in a given heritage site, who negotiate and produce the meaning of the given place. Visitors consume narratives in these sites but there is more to the picture than just reconstruing these narratives, which are lived through individual practices of engagement while visitors move through these places. I will employ the following concepts: embodiment, affect and imaginary in order to lay a conceptual ground for analysis of this thesis. After presenting the state of art, I will specify its theoretical framework of, the anchoring of consumer imagination in four experiential domains, *narrative, material, emotional* and *value*. I will finish the chapter by specifying my research question and objectives within this conceptual and theoretical framework.

2.1 Dissonance Heritage

As a result of increasing academic preoccupation for the forms of tourism that was interested in the darker aspects of life, during the years 1995-2000 three new concepts were introduced into tourism studies: dissonance in heritage, dark tourism and thanatourism (Hartmann, 2014). The concepts of dark tourism, thanatourism and dissonance heritage are often used to describe various forms of tourism into the places associated with death, suffering and atrocity, with nuances in content. Dark tourism is commonly defined as “the presentation and consumption of real and commodified death” (Foley & Lennon, 1996), whereas thanatourism is understood as “a travel to a location motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death” (Seaton, 1996). Dissonance heritage on the other hand proposes that heritage resources have different meaning and significance for different groups, so that heritage is by its nature dissonant (Light, 2017, Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). According to Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) dissonance heritage is located in the claim that all heritage is contemporary interpretation shaped by the narratives of history, therefore these different meanings give space for the lack of consensus.

Whereas previous literature on tourism in Chernobyl has mainly approached the topic within the paradigm of dark tourism (Brunsden & Goatcher, 2011, Hannam & Yankovska, 2013, Stone, 2013), this thesis will contextualize this particular form of tourism in the framework of dissonance heritage. I believe that this theoretical starting point will make more justice regarding the different narrative articulations about Chernobyl. The heritage of Chernobyl is not only related to the accident at the power plant and its aftermath, but the area also has a great significance in the cultural heritage of Ukraine (Chernobyl, 2020). For some the disaster in 1986 marked the end of the Soviet era, and today the exclusion zone stands as a signifier for the late-Soviet everyday life. For countless people Chernobyl remains an ongoing disaster and the area itself requires maintenance due to its radioactive heritage as it is estimated that the radioactive waste requires maintenance for the next 20.000 years (Hryhorczuk, 2019). This open-ended nature of the disaster justifies conceptually approaching the exclusion zone as a heritage site.

The investigation of the heritage from the point of view of tourism contains the notion that heritage is not a relic, but it has important instrumental dimension. Tourism produces special heritage outcomes because tourists have interest in special experiences, artefacts, and narratives in the context of the heritage (Šešić & Mijatović, 2014). This is the context of dissonance heritage in this study, the heritage making, and outcome is going to be investigated through different visitors' perception patterns in the exclusion zone. Leaving aside the assumptions on the nature of the visitors' motivations—why visitors choose to visit the site—dissonance heritage importantly guides the focus on those heritage making patterns and ways of co-producing the area as they manifest themselves in the present.

Heritage sites cannot be conceptualized as being fixed or static when they are open to multiple interpretations, which can be contradictory and highly fluid. The site of a heritage, whether it is a grave, monument or an area as big as the state of Luxembourg, is a tangible reminder of what has been lost and a material trace that has to be taken care of (Frihammar & Silverman, 2018). The exclusion zone, then, stands as a signifier for the accident that happened at the power plant 34 years ago and reminds visitors of the cause of the accident and price payed in human lives and health impairments. The abandoned villages and city of Pripjat reminds of those 120 000 evacuated residents, and the area will still require radioactive monitoring and clean-up efforts from generations to come. This remains a peculiar radioactive heritage site, which has to be maintained and approached with acknowledgement of the risks it retains. Importantly as a heritage site it is extremely polyphonic. The heritage belongs to various stakeholders, evacuated residents, those who lost their lives and health due to the accident, tourism promoters, those who administratively manage the zone, as well

as those who visit the area as tourists. A remarkable aspect in Chernobyl is that most of the former residents were displaced. As the authors Banaszkiwicz, Kruczek & Duda (2017) indicate, as a result the heritage interpretation happens on behalf of those who manage the zone and who visit the zone.

The case study of this thesis, Chernobyl exclusion zone is probably one of the world's famous sites with such a difficult and ongoing reconfiguration of the past. I would argue that Chernobyl exclusion zone as a destination for dissonance heritage promotes the more intangible and experiential aspects of heritage destination, such as the atmosphere, animation, and a sense of place. The abandoned landscapes stand as a signifier for the accident that happened 34 years ago, and nature has taken over the structures that were once inhabited. Phenomenologically this provides rather unique kind of sensory environment for individuals who travel to visit the exclusion zone. Therefore, dissonance heritage site provides novel attributes by virtue of its facilitation and the atmospheric attributes of a given location may demonstrate those novel attributes (Grebenar, 2018). The following chapter will focus on the framework of heterotopia in order to lay grounds for the symbolical meaning of Chernobyl heritage and the base for the experiences that visitors might acquire from such a site.

2.2 Dissonance Heritage and Heterotopia

In order to make sense of the visitors' experiences in the exclusion zone, I will further connect it to the concept of heterotopia. The concept of heterotopia is applicable to the heritage sites and heritage making patterns, as heritage as an idea and concept essentially reflects heterotopic features: heritage sites work as a mirror for society and it has certain utopic drives (Spanu, 2019). Heterotopian spaces due to the difference they stand for become defined as the Other (Foucault, 1984, Stone 2013). In the context of heritage, heterotopia creates an enclave "within the official ordering, where the alterity is accepted, acknowledged, reendowed with meaning, and protected" (Spanu, 2019: 461).

Foucault defined heterotopias as places that exists in every culture, a kind of counter-sites where the real sites of the given culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted (Foucault, 1984). Commonly used examples could be cemeteries, saunas, red light districts and mental institutions, but heterotopian spaces may emerge or disappear due to the processes such as gentrification and commercialization. The specificity of heterotopias is to counter-represent the order of the social world in which they exist. Gradual commodification of a tourist site could be an example of a loss of those attributes of difference that is attached to heterotopian sites. Heterotopias are universal, every culture has its own heterotopias, but they are not static, they are in constant movement that reflects the attributes and ethos of a given culture or society. If heterotopias offer a

sense of an alternative to the norms of the opponent places it can be said that they offer a sense of novelty to tourists (Stone, 2013), particularly in the face of identikit tourists services that erode the sense of place and the unique characters of the place (Heyd, 1999, Walsh, 1992).

There are six functioning principles for heterotopias that can be applied to tourism destinations with dissonance heritage. By using the typological model of Stone (2013), this thesis will now explore how a site of a dissonance heritage may display the properties and qualities of a heterotopia. Stone (2013) operationalizes Foucault’s six heterotopian principles in order to provide a typology which I use to examine the construction of dissonance heritage places and the experiences that are sought from there. Originally Stone (2013) discussed this typology in the context of dark tourism, but it is equally applicable to the locations of dissonance heritage.

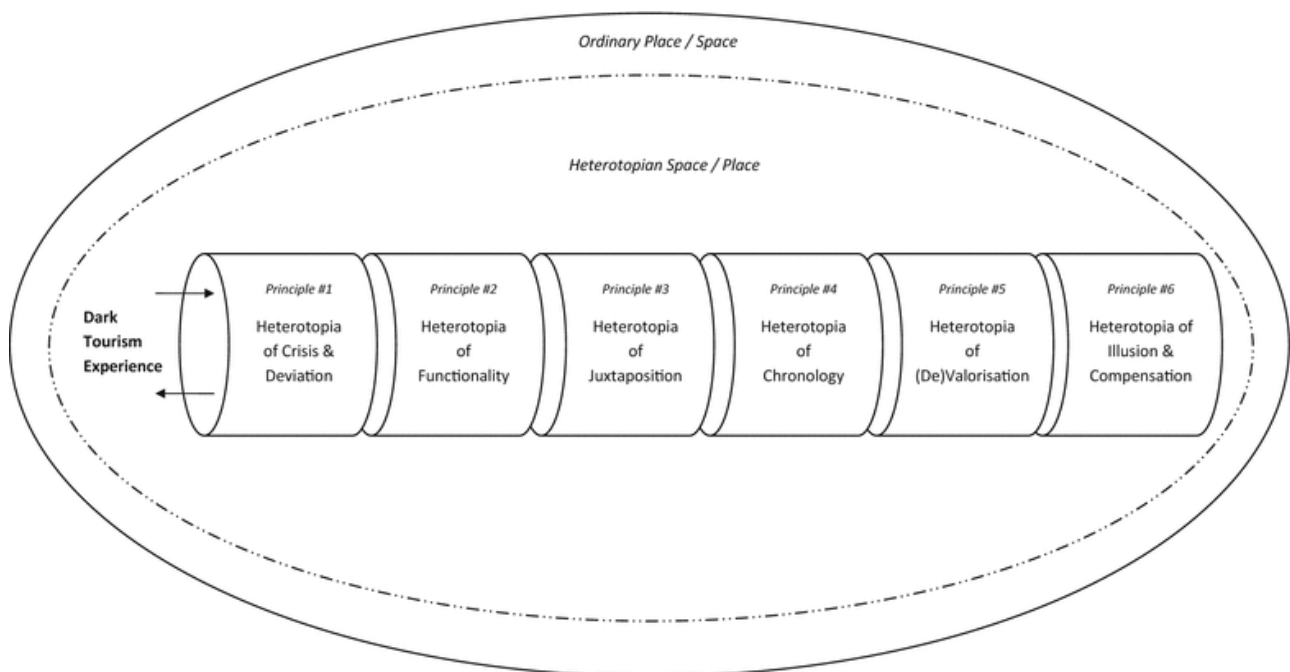


Figure 4. Heterotopian model, Source: (Stone, 2013)

The first principle *heterotopia of crisis and deviation* offers a complex convergence of past and present discourses which allows the consumption of the crisis of the past, (re)connection of present and the contemplation of future quandaries (Stone, 2013). Chernobyl exclusion zone is a clear example of this type of intense space-time convergence, as it allows the consumption of post-socialist landscapes and symbolism, yet visitors are connected to the contemporary world order and its manifestations. Regulated heterotopian places are “meant to shelter narratives or to solve repeatedly the identity crisis of society” (Spanu, 2020: 180). Therefore, the second principle *the heterotopia of functionality* suggests that each heterotopia has a precise and determined function in society (Foucault, 1984, Stone, 2013). These functions can be such as in the case of cemetery to maintain the

connection with the deceased family members and reflect on the nature of life. The symbolics of Chernobyl particularly have many functions, it can for example remind of the fragility of progress of the humankind. The ambivalences are typical for such places, by providing distance and connection, refuge and expose heterotopia allows the merge of diverse temporalities. It is a world that “mirrors, condenses, and transforms the space outside, simultaneously offering opportunities and dangers” (Johnson, 2013: 799).

The dualities and ambivalence lead to the third principle, *heterotopia of juxtaposition*, meaning that heterotopia has the power to juxtapose in a single real place several sites that are in themselves incompatible (Foucault, 1984). The juxtaposition of many incompatible places in one space could be compared to for example leisure travel, where one is temporarily able to step away from the context and pace of the everyday life, nevertheless never completely free from it. The landscapes of the exclusion provide many combinations of experiential juxtapositions, the impact of the past in present is ostentatious and manifests in the decay of the area. These juxtapositions allow one to consume the multi-layeredness of reality, which often manifests itself as strong embodied sensations. These affective atmospheres hold a series of opposites and through these ambiguities, the various juxtapositions of presence and absence, subjectivity and objectivity, definite and indefinite that individuals may reflect on as affective experience as “occurring beyond, around and alongside the formation of subjectivity” (Anderson, 2009: 77). It can be exactly these embodied and felt sensations that visitors seek to consume in heterotopian sites.

The fourth principle *heterotopias of chronology* addresses the temporal coordinates, heterotopian places function under a different flux of time, detached from the time context of the opposing places. Whether this connectedness with time is because of the accumulation of time such as in the museums or with the by passing of time, such as is the case with leisure travel, these heterochronies come together as an experience when individuals find themselves in completely different temporal mode with their traditional time (Foucault, 1984, Topinka, 2010).

According to the fifth principle, called *heterotopias of (de)valorisation*, these spaces imply a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. Heterotopian spaces must exhibit such a mechanism that controls the access to the given place and that the access is enforced and maintained through norms and regulations that define both the practices and the material form of the specific space (Spanu, 2020). The sixth and last principle described by Foucault identifies two opposing characteristic traits of heterotopia. Heterotopias of illusion and compensation brings binaries between real and surreal into focus. The illusion of the heterotopia is that it seems to expose all real places, and as a result through the lens and experience of Other, one may find ways to

compensate the realities and fears of the contemporary world (Stone, 2013), the passing of time and transient nature of existence for example. This presented framework is further applied to this study when analysing the engagement of the visitors in co-constructing the heritage site of Chernobyl. The strength of this model regarding this study is that it allows to specifically explore the heterotopia as it is experienced and expressed by the visitors of the Chernobyl exclusion zone.

2.3 The Performance Turn

As Hannam and Yankovska (2018) indicate, the problem with much of the literature on dark heritage and dark tourism is that it has a tendency to conceptualize such sites as being fixed or static when they are open to multiple interpretations, which can be contradicting and highly fluid. Therefore, by absorbing the concepts of dissonance heritage and locating the topic in the context of heterotopia, this study aims to further explain how this heritage is co-constructed by the visitors of the given heritage site by mobilising the concept of performativity. The concept of performativity as a part of theoretical orientation that goes beyond the representability of the experience, is an attempt to find a more embodied way of rethinking the relationships between determining social structures and personal agency. In tourism studies it is a shift in focus towards the acknowledgement of embodied nature of human existence (Nash, 2000). It can be used to elaborate, for example, agency and identity, in this particular study performativity is connected more precisely with the idea of visitors' mobility and their co-producing roles with the space (Lean, Staiff, Waterton, 2014).

Establishing the theoretical ground for the topic of this thesis about Chernobyl as a site of dissonance heritage and further conceptually presenting the heterotopic lens that can be used in order to analyse the functions of the *other spaces* and the experiences those produce, the next conceptual component follows the line of thought of the so called *performance turn*. It is theoretical orientation in tourism studies, formed in opposition to the representational approaches (e.g. MacCannel, 1999, Urry & Larsen, 2011) that privileges the vision and "tourist gaze" as the experiential domain of a tourist in a given site. Then, rather than just gazing upon the heritage site, visitors engage with the site with more of multi-sensuous ways, the engagement with the site happens through exteroceptive and proprioceptive senses, touching, smelling, hearing, in addition to vision with bodily sensations (Chronis, Arnould, Hampton., 2012, Ek et al., 2008). Visitors might engage with the heritage site with a plethora of encounters and various sensuous intensities. Therefore, considering tourism from the perspective of performance seeks to understand those encounters and actions, what tourists do and how they make sense of these actions (Crouch, 2004).

Furthermore, performance turn acknowledges the fluidity of a tourist site. As Ek et al. (2008: 125) argue, “tourism takes place upon various stages that often have fluid borders and little top-down, management, regulation, and choreographing”. Tourist entities consist of distinct performances such as photographing and exploration choreographies in a given site. In addition, they consist of alliances with their fellow travellers and communities where they might share and maintain their experiences before and after visiting the site. The particular habits and practices of tourists reproduce and challenge the social world. Tourists’ performances may consist of discursive and imaginative opposing expressions regarding other visitors’ performances in a given tourism site. Tourists do not necessarily stay on a beaten path, they may form new routes and spaces to discover a given site. While tourists move through the given site, they do so with their embodied actualized in that given space. Therefore, the essence of tourist subjectivity is essentially interactive. Nash (2000: 655) condenses incisively when stating that “performativity is concerned with practices through which we become ‘subjects’, decentred, affective, but embodied, relational, expressive and involved with others and objects in a world continually in process”.

Heritage places, nonetheless, regulated institutionally, are not places that would be over-determined stages, where visitors are reduced to the role of mere consumers. *The performance turn* directs the research analysis to uncover creativity in tourist practices, how they improvise their tour routes, how they co-produce the given tourist site and equally to pay attention to tourists’ choreographies and exploration systems (Ek et al., 2008). Tourists bring their own pre-knowledge with them to the given site, tourists are influenced intertextually by the visual materials they have previously seen, books they have read and movies they have watched. They seek individual engagement with the site and personal sensory encounters. Furthermore, the topic of this thesis about Chernobyl exclusion zone has established powerful place-myths due to its references both to popular culture and historical facts. Performativity might valorise this space of multivocality and multi-layeredness of meanings.

Performance turn argues that while tourists are influenced by the intertextuality, place-myths, tour promotion and tour guidance, tourists also enact and interpret the sites in their own ways. They improvise their routes, they express distinct tourists’ subjectivities, they comprise unpredictable ways of engagement and exploring in a given site. By concentrating only on the marketing and promotion of the heritage site, one would be unable to understand how tourists experience, imagine and communicate landscapes and tourism sites, therefore “*performance turn*” place the visitors themselves centre stage when seeking to understand tourism (Ek, et al., 2008, Franklin, 2003). This line of thought is further utilized in this research, when exploring and analysing the performances of

different visitor categories as emerged from this study and the mutual dynamics in the heritage site of this study, Chernobyl exclusion zone.

2.4 Embodiment, Affect and the Imaginary

As the performance turn blurs boundaries between sensuous engagements with a given site acknowledging the agency of a tourist as an active stakeholder and co-producer on the tourist site, there is a further borderline that should be elaborated and analysed. Heritage sites, particularly the heritage site of this research Chernobyl exclusion zone, are generally socially constructed, they have collective place narratives, but as stated above visitors do not merely inscribe landscapes with the stories, they produce tourism place and imaginaries through material performances and engagement with the site (Bruner, 2005). Tourists' embodied actions are key to understanding what tourists do and how this 'doing' may inform their experience of tourism (Crouch, 2004: 90). Tourists do not merely construe the narrative of the place, they do it by engaging with the site through their bodies and sensory encounters. They engage with the material objects and space, they comprise relations to other visitors and therefore the body is a central component of the tourist's experience and imaginary. Imagination is crucial to travel narratives and the way subjectivities are positioned within narratives and in the telling of travel stories. Imagination is often used to refer to the inner storytelling process, whereas imaginary refers to those collective, socially constructed shared imaginings, "into which the 'self' inserts itself, becomes a co-producer and an agent of the continuous circulation of manufactured imagined images" (Lean, Staiff & Waterton, 2014: 15). Equally in this study, both are in play, the visitors personal process of imagination and inner dialogue, but these are in interaction with the imaginaries that are collectively shared at the given storyscape.

Moreover, what manifests in the bodies of the visitors is the site and its narratives and imaginaries due to their capacity to evoke felt embodied reactions. The body of the visitor subject is crucial because those are the entities where knowing, feeling, and experiencing takes place (Lean, Staiff & Waterton, 2014). The tourist bodies have agency, and they are affected, which refers to those imperceptible, visceral, and embodied ways in which people are affected by the place before their conscious awareness of it and before they form an emotional response. Affect has the potentiality to unwrap processes that operates at the boundaries of, but in cooperation with multiple forms of sensory perception and in the meeting places between social life and representation. Affective places can be seen as indeterminate atmospheric corridor, where "the excess with intensive space-time is created" (Anderson, 2009: 80).

Chernobyl exclusion zone due to its material remains, imaginaries, narratives and reproductions of its place-myth and tragic events, creates a powerful and coherent assemblage of atmospheres which affects are perceivable (Buda & Martini, 2018). These further three concepts, embodiment, affect, and imaginary are attached into this study, in order to elaborate the consumption experiences of the visitors of the exclusion zone. The topic of this thesis, visitors' narrative imagination in the Chernobyl exclusion zone, allows to explore the dissonance between representations of the Chernobyl exclusion zone and the affective, embodied reconstructions of the imaginaries while visiting the material site of the exclusion zone. Laying the ground for the theoretical framework of this thesis, I would like to next present the state of art research in the field, what we know so far regarding tourism in the Chernobyl exclusion zone and how this thesis will contribute to the existing knowledge.

2.5 The State of Art – What We Know So Far

Previous studies on the topic of Chernobyl Exclusion Zone along with tourism, have analysed, and clarified the phenomenon from various angles. What these scholars share is the insight into the Chernobyl disaster and the multiple interpretations and realities of its aftermath. As this study is written from the point of view of sociology of tourism, this study benefits most of all those researchers that have approached the issue from the point of view of tourism. Common theme that this research shares is throughout the irrepresentability of the experience of the tourist and the difficulty to portray the landscapes of the exclusion zone and its traumatic historical events.

One of those pioneering studies in visual sociology is the research that was conducted by Brunsten and Goatcher (2011). The authors analysed several photographs that have been uploaded on the Pripjat.com website. By operationalizing the iconographic analysis, they attempt to reconstruct the motivations behind these creative representations and suggest that they can be read as attempts to capture a sense of unrepresentable anxiety created by what has been called a disenfranchisement of senses. The disenfranchisement of senses is the result of the uncanniness, the absent-present (Dobraszczyk, 2010, Brunsten & Goatcher, 2011), which can be depicted in the exclusion zone as the absence of familiar things and pace of cities and this encounter is impossible to represent accurately.

The essential question that arises from the authors is the desire for visitors to depict more than the visual surface of the scene, which is limited by the resources and technologies available for the visitors (Brunsten & Goatcher, 2011: 131). Referring to Beck (1995) and Adorno (1997), the authors argue that there is a fundamental division between the sensuous subject and the landscapes of the

exclusion zone as post-nuclear world, adjacent of this division is the sublime, uncanny sense of what these representations forward as they are attempts to represent the unrepresentable. However, visitors' photographs could be seen as an active attempt to bridge this gap. Visitors photographs are clues form particular social context, they can be read as acts of performances, they picture particular places and in addition the visitors imprint something of their embodied, social/cultural existence to the environment (Brunsden & Goatcher, 2011). These notions are further developed in this thesis, when analysing the visitors' engagements with the exclusion zone with the operationalization of narrative imagination and choreographies of visitor entities.

The catastrophe itself has already stylized the landscapes, marked them with a special atmosphere, thus turning them into a stage of mythological transformation (Bürkner, 2014). Continuing to approach the subject matter from the perspective of performance, there are few interesting recently written studies that this thesis benefits from and that clarify the idea of uncanniness and the absent-present (Dobraszczyk, 2010, Brunsden & Goatcher, 2011), from the point of view of the visitors' performance. Continuing with the orientation of performance turn- framework the authors Hannam and Yankovska (2018) explore those aspects of tourists' experience that might not be captured with the singular model of human subject.

The authors take a post-humanistic tourism mobilities approach in order to investigate the human subject as decentred. By blurring the boundaries between human and non-human, attending to those multi-sensuous practices, the authors investigate how tourists engage with the landscapes of the exclusion zone. The concept of spectrality, the attunement for those uncanny, ghostly, and absent features in the landscape, needs to be understood not just narratively or allegorically, but as central to the performativity of visitors of the exclusion zone (Hannam & Yankovska, 2018). The visitors engage with the memory and the historical past that is inscribed upon space. The authors indicate the alleged difficulty of the visitors to comprehend truly what they are witnessing, as well as the memory of the landscape coming to them as "an affect, disturbing temporal and spatial ordering of tourism" (Hannam & Yankovska, 2018: 330). There are two crucial aspect points that will be further developed in this thesis, firstly the continuation of the negotiation and constant re-definition of the area of the exclusion zone as the haunted landscapes are being recycled through memories and secondly the material practices of both, former resident and the tourists. Similarly, they consist of different spatial practices and therefore this thesis will show that even the visitors do not consume the area similarly.

Rush-Cooper (2020) further benefits from the concepts of embodiment, materiality, and agency in order to investigate the invisible attributes of the exclusion zone, namely radiation. Similarly, as authors presented above (Brunsden & Goatcher, 2011, Hannam & Yankovska, 2018), the author

argues that simple dualism and distance are not useful concepts when aiming to understand tourism in the exclusion zone (Rush-Cooper, 2020). As the uncanniness and spectrality are those embodied ways of engagement that blurs the borders between the subject and the materiality, Rush-Cooper (2020) argues that the bodily exposure for the threat of radiation could be followed as well as a line which through investigate the actions and performances of the visitors of the exclusion zone. By mobilising the concept of exposure, the author argues in contrast to Brunsdén & Goatcher (2011) and Hannam & Yankovska, (2018), the radiation does not belong in the void of absent-present, it blurs the boundaries because it exceeds the embodied, perceptual and representational world, and therefore “manifests as passivity in relations to affective materials and worldly forces” (Rush-Cooper, 2020: 159). This thesis develops this notion further, by providing a more nuanced picture of the visitors’ engagement with the site of radioactive heritage in Chernobyl and further reflecting on the meaning of it.

Whereas the studies mentioned above have investigated the embodied, affective qualities of the Chernobyl exclusion zone as it is manifested in the representations and bodies of the visitors, there are researches that have tried to clarify the reasons of visiting the place of the world’s worst nuclear disaster. A few studies have pursued to elucidate visitors’ motivations to visits the exclusion zone suggesting that the reasons might be more complex than it looks from the surface (Banaszkiewicz & Duda, 2019, Hannam & Yankovska, 2013, Hutching & Linden, 2018). Whereas the authors Hannam and Yankovska (2013) have investigated tour guides perceptions of the characteristic of the visitors of the exclusion zone, Hutching & Linden (2018) have analysed the webpages of the tour organizers and the discursive prerequisites that those create for consumption possibilities. They come into closure by proposing an alternative for the paradigm of dark tourism, the existential tourist, which is not primarily attracted to death but to experience that shakes one’s sense of meaning and provoke new understanding.

Banaszkiewicz and Duda (2019) instead approach the topic by limiting it to concern the influence of the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. videogames on the consumer experience and expectation it might create, but conclude equally that the exclusion zone provides deep, multisensorial and embodied experiences which cannot be simplistically correlated to the imaginary of a videogame. Essentially Chernobyl is a polysemous heritage site, generating layers of conflicting emotion, memory, and practice, where “existential tourism can be one resource to help make sense of this complexity” (Hutchings & Linden, 2018: 210). The authors Banaszkiewicz and Duda (2019) equally suggest that it is due to the intense embodied sensations, where the attractiveness of the exclusion zone stems from.

This thesis pursues in dialogue with these presented studies and the scholarly contribution they have made by analysing the visitors' experiences in the exclusion zone from their point of view. By looking at tourism in the Chernobyl exclusion zone this study stands in contrast to the most of researchers on the topic. There are studies conducted from the point of view of tour guides (Hannam & Yankovska, 2013, Rush-Cooper, 2020) and from the point of view of former residents and their perceptions regarding the tourism in the site (Hannam & Yankovska, 2018). Hutchings and Linden (2018) have analysed the content on the webpages of Chernobyl tour operators, proposing a new understanding of existential tourism to make sense of the content. Similarly, the data of the authors Brunnsden and Goatcher (2011) consisted of photographs that were uploaded on Pripyat.com website. There is a lack of literature dealing directly with individuals who visit the exclusion zone. Therefore, the purpose of this study is by analysing the visitors' accounts and presenting their photographic traces from their visits to the exclusion zone, to contribute for the existing knowledge by approaching the topic from the point of view of consumer imagination.

Thus, this far the presented theoretical and conceptual references represents the framework of this thesis as following, the exclusion zone as a site of *dissonance heritage*, supplemented with the concept of *heterotopia* and how the *heterotopian heritage* is done by acknowledging the role of the visitors as active stakeholders in concordance with the *performance turn*, the components of the visitors performances, *embody*, *affect* and *imaginary* is now going to be finished by presenting the theoretical framework of this study, the theory on visitors imagination (Chronis, Arnould, Hampton, 2012). This theoretical framework was chosen in order to provide information, how do visitors engage with the area, how do they use imagination to construe the exclusion zone and what is the cultural significance of the storyscape of Chernobyl for the visitors.

2.6 The Theory on the Role of Narrative Imagination in Consumer Experience

As noted above, little is known about the tourism in Chernobyl from the visitor's point of view. The aim of this research is to contribute to the existing knowledge by exploring tourism and its' manifestations from the point of view of visitors in the exclusion zone and discover their different narrative articulations and imaginaries in the area.

In order to achieve this goal, I will apply the theoretical framework on consumer imagination as developed by Chronis (2012) and Chronis, Arnould & Hampton (2012) as it provides a coherent and promising approach into the consumer behaviour and imagination and further enables to deepen the analysis with the overall visitors dynamics in the storyscape Chernobyl. The presented theoretical

orientations and concepts, the Chernobyl exclusion zone as a site of dissonance heritage, which is performed, perceived and produced in different ways through the stakeholders embodied and imaginative engagements with the area is now going to be consummated with the theory of consumer imagination. The theoretical framework as developed by the authors Chronis (2012) and Chronis, Arnould & Hampton (2012) targets to analyse consumer imagination in a given tourist destination by anchoring it into four experiential domains *narrative, emotional, material* and *value*. This theory therefore targets to elaborate how narratives are imagined at the *storyscapes*, that is the consumption of places where narratives are the focal object of consumption. As was noted and exemplified in the introduction part of this thesis, there is not a single narrative authority regarding the Chernobyl exclusion zone. Therefore, this theory was applied into this study without a priori assumptions of the values or narratives that the storyscape of Chernobyl contains, rather it pursued to capture them as those evoked from the accounts of the respondents. The four experiential domains of narrative imagination as theorized by Chronis (2012) and Chronis, Arnould and Hampton (2012) contains these four dimensions:

Narrative Anchoring

The first corner targets to elaborate and capture the narratives of the storyscape. Narratives can be collective but equally parochial. They can consist of metanarrative or smaller narrative units, but the working of imagination is consistent with these narrative articulations.

Material Anchoring

The purpose of the second corner is to indicate how stories are lived as “culturally significant narratives through embodied reconstruction within physical place” (Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, 2012: 280). Imagination functions through both narrative and material processes, at the material level memories of the past are sedimented in the land and artefacts. The landscapes, monuments and artefacts become parts of (re)imagining the storyscape. Imagination combines exteroceptive and proprioceptive engagement with the material world in which the narrative is construed between the interplay of materiality of the site and its imaginative narrative constructions.

Emotional anchoring

The third corner highlights the emotional anchoring of imagination. This sheds light on the presence of emotionality in the stories of the place, but also the ways these emotions and affects infiltrate imagination and generate association with the protagonist and actors of these stories, or equally as in the case of this study the place itself.

Value anchoring

The fourth dimension of consumer imagination is anchored in cultural values that the stories in a given storyscape forward. Again, similarly as the narratives that can be collective or parochial, the values can reflect the collective values of a group or it can be an imaginative expression of individual value construction. Imagination generates an edifying past that tells us what we should value and instructs as to what our attitude should be in the present. This gives more insights into the plethora of imaginaries based on diverse narrative articulations.

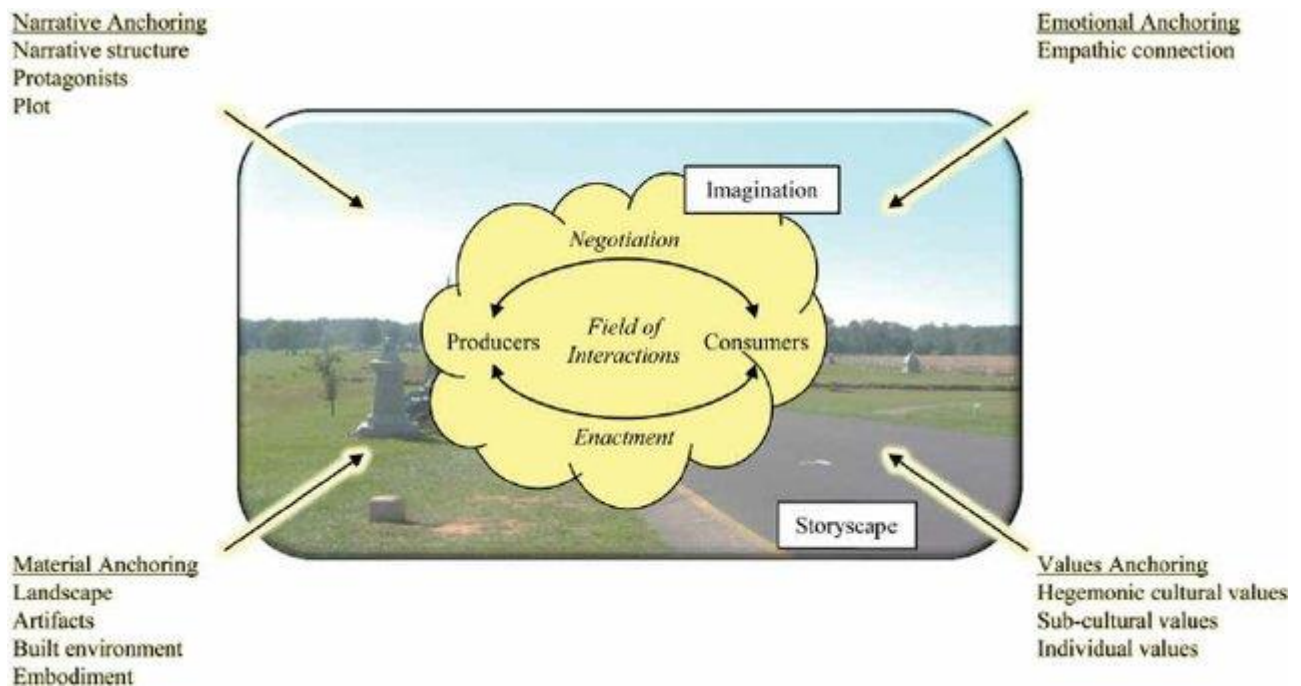


Figure 5. Imagination at Storyscapes, Source: (Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, 2012)

Moreover, as the framework developed by these authors allows to analyse the consumer imagination through four experiential and imaginative anchorings, *narrative, emotional, material* and *value*, I would like to supplement this framework by appending the *sought experiences* of a given tourist group into the picture. The *sought experience*, therefore, is characterised as the distinct narrative disposition (Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, 2012) of the given visitor's category, and these categories correspond in this study the visitor category specific approach for the visitation of the exclusion zone. As the authors initially developed their theoretical framework for imagination in the context of the Gettysburg battlefield, I am applying it more closely for the imaginative consumer experiences of different visitor groups. The visitors of Chernobyl exclusion zone may through different tour choices

frame the experience in the area in varying ways. I will be arguing that these experiential traces create different conditions for the workings of the visitors' imagination in the exclusion zone and therefore those reflects different narrative articulations on the storyscape.

The individually framed storytelling formats due to the tour choice and the opportunities for spatial exploration in the Chernobyl exclusion, "are defining contextual parameters that shape imagination in a distinctive way" (Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, 2012: 281). Therefore, the experiential domains of consumer imagination are supplemented in this research with elaborating the narrative dispositions, *sought experiences* of each visitor category more carefully.

2.7 Research Question, Aims and Objectives

With the assistance of the concepts that have been presented so far, to ground the Chernobyl exclusion zone into the framework of dissonance heritage, which is performed, perceived and produced in different ways through the stakeholders embodied and imaginative engagements with the area, this study will pursue to find an answer how the consumers imagine and articulate the storyscape of Chernobyl through their embodied performances and how the storyscape is shaped through these different narrative articulations.

The overarching question of how different visitor categories articulate and imagine the narratives of Chernobyl's storyscape, is going to be answered through three partial research questions as follows:

1. What are the distinct visitor categories that visit the Chernobyl exclusion zone?
2. What are each group's specific conventions to approach the exclusion zone?
3. What are the mutual dynamics that these entities entail in the exclusion zone?

These questions are going to be answered with the synthesis of the existing presented literature and alongside original empirical research with the primary data that was collected by the author of this thesis in order to provided clear outcomes. The next part of this thesis will present the research design and individual methodological practices and principles that was applied for this study in order to answer to the research gap it has indicated in addition to the research problem it presents.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This part of the thesis will present the research design and chosen methodology and the justifications for these particular research tools. First, I will ground the research design in phenomenological philosophy due to the characteristics of the research phenomenon. After this I present the approach of this study, the case study research and how I acquired the access to the field. This is followed by presentation of data sources that were used in order to build a comprehensive picture of the topic of this thesis, expert interviews, focus group interview and photo-elicitation. This will be followed by the presentation and justification of the data coding procedure, the narrative analysis, and the thematic structure it produced. I will finish this chapter with source critical reflections and ethical considerations.

3.1 Phenomenology

This study is guided by the framework of phenomenological research philosophy. Phenomenology is an increasingly prevalent research philosophy within the realm of tourism (Szarycz, 2009), and it suits the theme of this thesis equally, it pursues to understand how visitors of the exclusion zone articulate, imagine and give meaning to their experiences in Chernobyl. Essentially, phenomenology is an interpretative approach that prioritises the way in which individuals make sense of their world and therefore the actions of the actors must be interpreted from their point of view (Bryman, 2016: 26-27), under its premise, the nature of human experience is entirely subjective and is based on a posteriori experience (Szarycz, 2009, Muostakas, 1994). Phenomenology endeavours to understand “what the human experience is like” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), regarding the feeling and conception which it engenders in the individual, rather than to construe a positivist reality.

The initial phase in the phenomenological research begins with the acknowledgement, that there is a need to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of lived experience in order to be able to discover the meaning of it (Englander, 2012). That is reflected in the methodology of this research in general, but more specifically it also reflects the research aim and questions. This research examines the visitors’ imaginative articulations on the Chernobyl exclusion zone, the very nature of both of these aspects is grounded in the experiences of the visitors. Therefore, it can be argued that it must necessarily be investigated in a way which reflects the notion of individual experience. Phenomenology acknowledges this, interview questions can be posed under the assumption that it will evoke responses based on thoughts, imaginaries, and feelings of the respondent, which are based on a plethora of personal experiences and perceptions. (Gray, 2004, Husserl, 1977). By characterising

the experience as individual, multivocal and polysemous and by adopting a phenomenological research philosophy, the study outcomes may as a result, become richer and more indicative of the varied types of experience and their mutual dynamics consumed at a given site and at a particular site of this research the Chernobyl exclusion zone.

3.2 A Case Study - Chernobyl Exclusion Zone

The case study object of this research, Chernobyl exclusion zone is the site where the world's worst nuclear accident occurred 34 years ago, 26.4. 1986. Since 2011 the site has been officially open for tourists. The number of tourists has increased gradually and year 2019 was a record year with 124.000 visitors. It is the most visited Ukrainian tourist attraction and ranked by Forbes as one of the most exotic tourist destinations in the world (Unian, 2009).

In order to investigate the visitors' narrative articulation on the exclusion zone in addition to the mutual dynamics among visitors, the case study approach has guided this research design. This was a proper approach matter, as this study targeted to absorb a holistic picture of the focus group of this thesis, the individuals who visit the exclusion zone. Case study methodology was suitable for this research, as the aim of this study was to acquire in-depth understanding of the imaginative and performative patterns of visitors in a given location, that is Chernobyl exclusion zone. What characterises and guides case study approach, is that it is concentrated on contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, case study research is interested in a certain focus group in this context, thus the parameters (Creswell & Poth, 2018) that were initially placed, were the specific setting, the Chernobyl exclusion zone, the individuals who visited it in 2019 and in addition the intensive data collection that took place between September 2019 and early January 2020.

As the purpose of the case study research is acquiring a comprehensive understanding of a given context, which is to be interpreted by the researcher with the theoretical framework of the study, the knowledge of this context was acquired through multiple sources of information. The examination of the setting (Bryman, 2016) started as fieldwork which took place in Ukraine over a two-months period September and October in 2019. This time was used for intensive examination of the topic, and the familiarization with the research context consisted of the author's journeys into the exclusion zone, expert interviews with various stakeholders and geographical observations. These established the ground for the data collection which consist of semi-structured interviews with n=40 research participants and their photographs that they have taken during their visits to Chernobyl. This type of

collection of information through multiple sources is a classical character and strength of case study research (Bryman, 2016, Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In alliance with the phenomenological research philosophy, this study targets to elaborate the performance and activities of visitors in the exclusion zone in a given point of time in 2019, acknowledging that this knowledge must be collected and interpreted from the point of view of the visitors, as opposed to the relation of context where this activity took place.

3.3 Access to the Field

The initial familiarization with the research setting started in September 2019 when the author of this thesis started a fieldwork in Ukraine that spanned over two months. This stay was supported and guided by Mohyla Academy in the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, which means practically that the author had the privilege to attach herself into an academic community in the context of the research topic, which then provided crucial local information and know-how regarding the topic of this thesis.

The purpose of this visit was to familiarize myself with the research context, following the principles of case study research (Bryman, 2016, Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the familiarization with the research context multiple methods were combined “because these were conducive to the generation of an intense detailed examination of the case” (Bryman, 2016: 61). This geographical proximity due to the fieldwork enabled my personal journeys into the exclusion zone. For the purpose of this research I was able to attach myself to two different tours into the Chernobyl exclusion zone with two different tour companies. The tours offered different level of structured instruction, along with highly distinct modes of engagement with other tourists and the landscapes of the exclusion zone. I paid attention to the construction of the tour, the reactions of other visitors and the type of performances they consisted in the area through their movements and levels of engagement.

My engagement with the tours and the overall visit in Ukraine provided a useful overview of the types of tours currently available in the area, and this knowledge was further supplemented with experts’ interviews that consisted of a diverse set of stakeholders, journalists, photographers, and tour organizers. The familiarization with the research setting included a conscious sensitivity for multiple voices and approaches regarding the exclusion zone. The research context familiarization due to the journeys into the exclusion zone, geographical observations in and around the exclusion zone and expert interviews therefore assisted the author of this thesis to build an understanding of the research

context through various standing points.- This context knowledge was further utilized when continuing the interviews with the actual focus group of this thesis, the visitors of the exclusion zone.

3.4 Expert Interviews

In order to proceed with an excessive context research, expert interviews were conducted during a time period from September 2019 to April 2020 (Appendix, 1). A case study context research was supplemented by semi-structured interviews and informative discussion with six individuals who possessed expertise knowledge regarding the Chernobyl exclusion zone. These expert respondents were official tour guides and tour company entrepreneurs, an illegal tour guide, a professional photographer and a journalist who provided a lot of information about their goals, promotion techniques, narratives, observations, and personal interactions in the exclusion zone. This information enriched the consumer data with additional insights as they offered personal perspectives on visitor's demographics, tourism behaviour, attraction preferences, emotional expressions, and visitation patterns.

3.5 Focus Group Interviews

The context research in the case study style was further supplemented by semi-structured interviews with the focus group of this thesis, the respondents who had visited the Chernobyl exclusion zone. As the topics of this thesis comprise individual meaning-making processes, the most suitable way to approach such an interpretative sphere is to attend an elaborative reciprocal discussion with the participants of the research. A semi-structured style was chosen for this study, because whereas certain themes are predetermined, the participants of the study have the possibility for unrestricted and descriptive speech thus allowing themes to emerge which are relevant for them and this style of interviewing allows the researcher to state relevant follow-up questions. The benefits of qualitative interviews are highlighted by Bryman (2016: 395), who remarks that qualitative interviews are useful in the case that "the research objectives centre on understanding opinions, experiences, attitudes, values and processes" from the perspective of the people being studied.

The sampling method of this study was the a priori purposive sample, I sought respondents who seemed likely to epitomize the analytical criteria of my study (Bryman, 2016, Warren, 2001). In such there was an initial criterion that a person must have visited the Chernobyl exclusion zone. As the context research in Ukraine established the ground for the focus group interviews, the interviewees

were reached out to on Facebook social media platforms during the months of October 2019 – January 2020. The establishment of these Facebook platforms is around the idea of collective commemoration of the Chernobyl disaster. On these platforms, the members usually publish their photographs and share their experiences from their visits into the exclusion zone. I simply approached the members of these online communities by sending them private messages, where I introduced myself and the purpose of my research. This way of approach seemed functionable regarding the proximation of individuals, as they could decide whether or not they want to participate. In most cases the participants had visited the exclusion zone a while before, ranging from a few months to a few weeks thus enabling the participants to have some time to reflect upon their experiences. This facilitated the study as well as allowed it to maintain its' transnational focus as most of the focus group interviews, 34 out of 40 were conducted with the assistance of Skype. Two other respondent interviews were conducted in 2019 September and October in Kyiv, Ukraine. In addition, 4 respondents wished to provide the answers to the questions literally.

The interviews were continued until the data saturation, the point when the collection of additional data does not provide further insight into the topic of investigation (Bryman, 2016). A total number of forty $n=40$ semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted during a four-month period from mid- September 2019 until the early January 2020, ranging in length from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. Interviews consisted of broad open-ended questions (Appendix, 2) that covered the respondents' motivations to visits Chernobyl exclusion zone, their experiences there and their practices of photographing. Rather than being a strict followed protocol, the interview guide was more of an ancillary, guiding the line of thought and structuring the interview occasions. The looseness of the interview guide and the overall semi-structured style assisted to being open to developing meanings and arising themes during the interview situation (Warren, 2001). I pursued to establish a balanced interview occasion between the interviewer and interviewee. Indeed, as I had visited Chernobyl two times equally, I pursued to run the interviews with the style of reciprocal sharing of experiences.

As the social media platforms enable communication across the globe, the total sample number of the research participants $n=40$, are coming from the 17 different countries of origin. Their ages vary between 21 and 59 and come from different occupational classes in society. Men are more presented, as the interview requests were more commonly accepted by men, although I pursued to send interview requests equally to men and women. I believe that this transnational perspective on the focus group of this study provided a rich research data. More importantly it also allowed the emerging characteristic of different visitors' categories to be visible which were further processed into themes of this study when conducting the data analysis. The section 3.7 will clarify the data coding procedure

that was applied for the primary data of this thesis in more detail and the Figure 6 below represents the profile of the qualitative interviews

Figure 6. The Profile of Qualitative Interviews n=40

| Subject | Sex | Age | Origin | Type of Tour* | Year of Visit** | Number of Visits | Occupation |
|---------------|-----|-----|----------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|------------|
| Respondent 1 | M | 46 | Sweden | Illegal | 2017 | 4 | B |
| Respondent 2 | M | 22 | United Kingdom | Illegal | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 3 | M | 46 | Denmark | Private | 2019 | 1 | NS |
| Respondent 4 | F | 33 | United Kingdom | Group | 2016 | 1 | P |
| Respondent 5 | M | 25 | Belgium | Group | 2019 | 1 | B |
| Respondent 6 | F | 31 | Ukraine | Illegal | 2016 | 5 | P |
| Respondent 7 | M | 52 | United Kingdom | Private | 2018 | 2 | P |
| Respondent 8 | M | 33 | United Kingdom | Illegal | 2019 | 1 | P |
| Respondent 9 | M | 31 | Italy | Group | 2019 | 1 | P |
| Respondent 10 | M | 53 | United Kingdom | Private | 2016 | 3 | CE |
| Respondent 11 | M | 29 | Belgium | Illegal | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 12 | M | 34 | Belgium | Private | 2019 | 1 | P |
| Respondent 13 | M | 28 | Germany | Private | 2019 | 1 | P |
| Respondent 14 | M | 34 | United Kingdom | Private | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 15 | F | 43 | United Kingdom | Group | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 16 | M | 44 | Austria | Private | 2017 | 2 | P |
| Respondent 17 | M | 34 | France | Illegal | 2019 | 2 | CE |
| Respondent 18 | F | 38 | Poland | Private | 2018 | 3 | P |
| Respondent 19 | M | 45 | France | Private | 2014 | 7 | P |
| Respondent 20 | M | 42 | Australia | Group | 2016 | 1 | P |
| Respondent 21 | M | 44 | Belgium | Private | 2017 | 2 | CE |
| Respondent 22 | M | 49 | United Kingdom | Group | 2016 | 2 | CE |
| Respondent 23 | M | 59 | United States | Private | 2019 | 1 | NS |
| Respondent 24 | M | 25 | Norway | Private | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 25 | M | 44 | Germany | Group | 2019 | 1 | NS |
| Respondent 26 | M | 38 | Germany | Private | 2012 | 10 | CE |
| Respondent 27 | M | 42 | Belgium | Private | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 28 | M | 32 | Germany | Group | 2019 | 1 | P |
| Respondent 29 | M | 52 | Australia | Private | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 30 | M | 26 | United States | Private | 2019 | 1 | S |
| Respondent 31 | M | 29 | United Kingdom | Private | 2013 | 4 | CE |
| Respondent 32 | M | 37 | Germany | Private | 2019 | 1 | NS |
| Respondent 33 | M | 43 | Portugal | Illegal | 2019 | 1 | NS |
| Respondent 34 | F | 38 | Finland | Group | 2019 | 1 | P |
| Respondent 35 | M | 21 | Sweden | Group | 2019 | 1 | S |
| Respondent 36 | M | 44 | United Kingdom | Private | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 37 | F | 30 | Netherlands | Private | 2019 | 1 | P |
| Respondent 38 | M | 32 | Finland | Group | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 39 | M | 38 | Czech | Group | 2019 | 1 | CE |
| Respondent 40 | M | 40 | Poland | Private | 2012 | 2 | P |

*) If a respondent had visited the exclusion zone with several type of tours, the category equals the one that respondent preferred

**) If a respondent had visited the exclusion zone more than once, the category equals the year of first visit

M= Male F= Female

B= Businessperson, CE= Company Employee, NS= National Service, P= Professional, S= Student

Source: Author's data

3.6 Photo-Elicitation

A further method this study absorbed was photo-elicitation. Formulated simply, photo-elicitation is ‘based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview’ (Harper, 2012: 156). The research design was supplemented with this method followed by an initiative that was originating from the interviewee. After an interview occasion, a respondent proposed that we could exchange pictures that we both had taken while visiting the zone. This deepened and stimulated the level of discussion as both the interviewee and interviewer could make observations on each other’s ‘pictures, this strength has been usually attached to the photo-elicitation as a method (Harper, 2012, Rose, 2016). It was a logical supplement for the interview questionnaire as well, as the interview questions covered questions concerning the respondent’s photographic practices in the exclusion zone (Appendix, 2). The participants’ photographs therefore assisted to elaborate the individual engagement with the exclusion zone and the place- specific narratives and imaginaries that could not have been expressed only linguistically.

Out of 40 research participants 37 supplemented the interview with photographs from their trips to the exclusion zone. Respondents were asked to send the author of this thesis 3-4 photographs that they took while visiting the exclusion zone and that describe the place and their experiences on that place most accurately. The participants photographs were then interpreted by investigating the vitalities that are attributed to images (Mitchell, 2005), the agency, aura, desire, and imaginaries. As the respondents have chosen the photographs themselves, they are their visual narratives on that place, they must be treated as data *per se*. These produced initial thematic structure, and the interplay between the narrative coding of the interview transcriptions and the analysis of the visual material have mutually supported each other. Both data sources have been analysed separately, and the relationships of visual and textual data have been further explored. This type of analysis was chosen for this study as it allowed the specific roles of photographs and interviews and the relationships between them to be conspired and analysed more directly (Rose, 2016), specially on this study it enabled different visitors’ articulations on the exclusion zone to develop.

The usage of the respondent’s photographs follows further in the analysis part the principles of photo-essay (Rose, 2016). The participants photographs are used in an evocative style, they emphasise and elaborate the arguments given and provide a narrative window into each visitor category.

3.7 Narrative Analysis

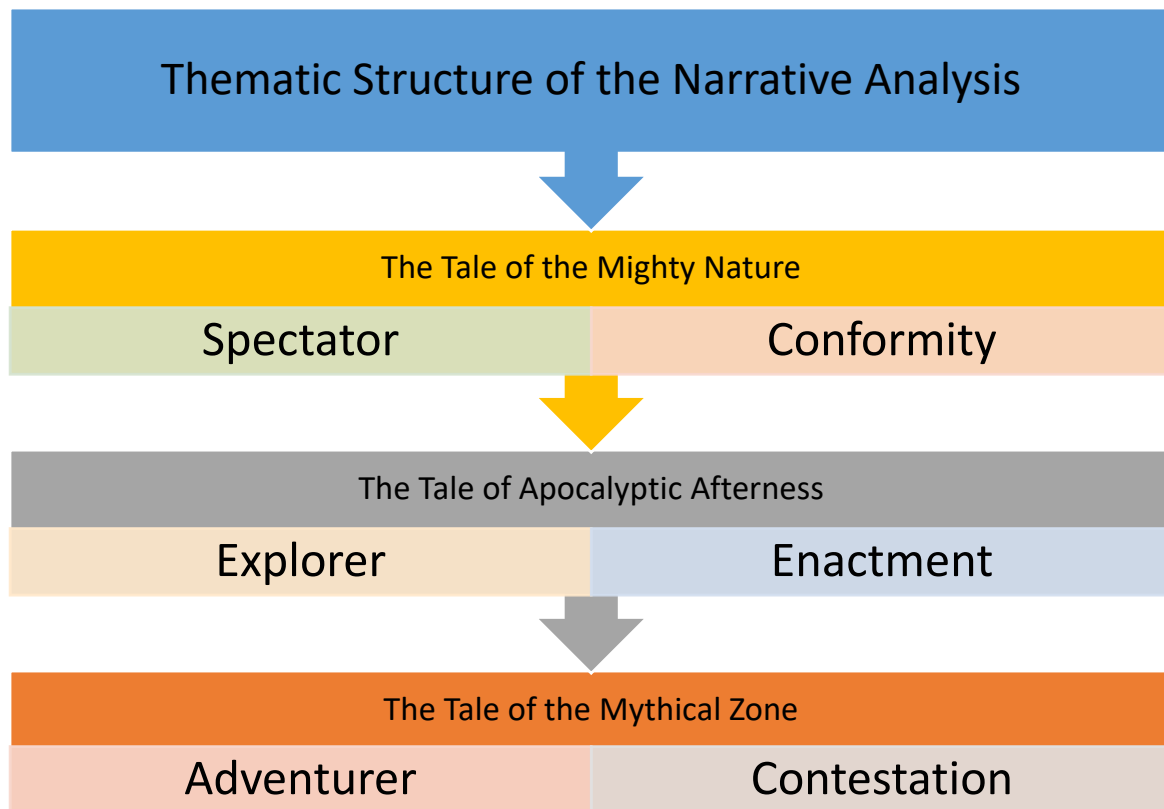
Data analysis serves to turn raw data into meaningful knowledge, thus essentially answering to the objectives of the research. The primary data presented in this chapter, semi-structured interviews and respondents' photographs therefore were further analysed with the approach of a narrative analysis. Narrative analysis was chosen as it is suitable for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in order to understand the particular phenomenon through story (Saldaña, 2016). As this study investigates respondents actions, practices and imaginaries in the context of this research, those substances are necessarily expressed in words and the working of imagination is connected to the existing narratives, therefore the logical data analysis method was narrative analysis.

The role of the researcher is to interpret the deeper meaning of the given account based on the language in isolated passages, in conjunction to linking responses from within the interview to form over all discourse. In narrative analysis the focus is on “the stories that people employ to account for events” (Bryman, 2016: 590), which is in concordance with the overarching research question of this thesis: “How different visitor categories articulate and imagine the narratives of storyscape in Chernobyl”. The narrative analysis was used as a means of unpicking the details within a given account from a participant (Grbich, 2013: 216), and the deeper meaning of the details in used language and expressions was further processed into discourses and sub-themes. In practice this was done by reading and re-reading the verbal and visual data in order to gain a familiarity with the material (Arnould, 1998), and in order to identify anticipated and emergent themes in the text by linking those themes to each of the research questions and the theoretical framework of this study, the four experiential domains of consumer imagination.

This type of data analysis was chosen due to the phenomenological research philosophy and the case study approach. The case study approach allowed the author of this thesis to familiarize with the research context. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, which involved the method of photo-elicitation, prior knowledge of the research context was deemed imperative for deep and full understanding of the research findings. At the end of the coding a data analysis program Atlas.ti was used in order to investigate the data findings as comprising a unity and from the point of view of separate themes and their interrelations.

This narrative coding depicted a thematic structure, which is further presented and attached to the research questions in the part of empirical findings of this thesis:

Figure 7. Thematic structure of the narrative analysis



This thematic structure answers the overarching research question: how different visitor categories articulate and imagine the narratives of Chernobyl's storyscape. This overarching question is distributed into three sub-themes and partial research objectives that elaborate this overarching question in more detailed: firstly, by presenting the different visitor categories, secondly by identifying the each visitor category specific way to approach the zone and thirdly by analysing the mutual dynamics these visitor entities entail in the storyscape Chernobyl exclusion zone.

In concordance with the partial research objectives, and on the basis of the narrative analysis premised on different tour approaches, group, private and illegal, the thematic structure exemplifies the distinct visitor categories and the narrative dispositions they constitute: *spectators*, *explorers*, and *adventurers*. The second object exemplifies the category specific narrative articulation, *the tale of the mighty nature*, *the tale of apocalyptic afterness* and *the tale of the mythical zone*. The last part of the thematic structure corresponds the visitors' category specific conventions to consume and co-produce the storyscape through performances of *conformity*, *enactment*, and *contestation*.

3.8 Source Critical Reflections

The data of this thesis consist of rich variation according to the type of tour and the visited year in Chernobyl. This richness consisted its challenge equally as to, what comes into analysability and representability of the data. This concerns especially those respondents who have visited the exclusion zone once or twice before the year 2019, three of the respondents belonged into this category. The accounts of these three respondents were difficult to place within the categories that emerged from this research: the group tour, private tour, and illegal tour, as those research participants described their experiences essentially differently.

This could be used as an indicator that the tourists' experiences and performances have changed which recurrently alleviates one of the central themes of this thesis, the fluidity of heritage sites and heritage making patterns. Nevertheless, because those respondents described essentially such a different style of reconstruing their experience while visiting Chernobyl, it should be clarified that the following presentation of empirical analysis is based on the accounts of the respondents who have taken the trip in 2019. The following representation of empirical analysis can be used in a case study style to elaborate a phenomenon in the context of this study in given point of time, in the year 2019.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

| Ethical Consideration | Action |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Informed consent of participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants received an explanation of the research aims • Participants were able to ask further questions before consenting |
| Protection from harm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject of the research were made clear from start • All participants were aged 18 or over • All participants were given the opportunity to maintain anonymity |
| Visual material | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants were asked for a written permission to use their photographs in the research |

Figure 8. Ethical considerations

These ethical considerations were found to be appropriate for this thesis. Before the interview started participants were given a clarification about the research and its goals. Before finishing the interview, participants were asked if they had any question or if they would like to add something. This is the first principle of informed consent (Bryman, 2016). Second ethical consideration concerns protection from harm: the identities, taped material and transcribed material are to be treated with confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants should be maintained. Participant photographs that are used in this research do not present individual participants so that it would be possible to recognize them. The third ethical consideration concerns the usage of visual material, the participants were asked to consent to specific uses of the images that became part of this research project (Rose, 2016). The written permission was requested, and the audience of this thesis was explained for the participants.

4. Empirical Findings

This part of the thesis presents the empirical findings of this research. This analysis incorporates both elements of the research from the semi-structured interviews in addition to respondents' photographs and synthesises findings of both methods into a set of emergent themes. The initial visitor categories: group tour, private tour and illegal tour produced a thematic structure in the narrative analysis and this part of the thesis presents this thematic structure. First the narrative analysis identified three different narrative dispositions, *spectators*, *explorers*, and *adventurers*. The second result of the narrative coding identified three group specific narrative articulations: *the tale of the mighty nature*, *the tale of apocalyptic afterness* and *the tale of the mythical zone*. The third finding of the narrative analysis further developed and named the narrative performances as follows: *conformity*, *enactment*, and *contestation*. The theoretical model for the consumer imagination in a given consumer context as developed by Chronis, Arnould & Hampton (2012) that covers four experiential domains, *narrative*, *emotional*, *material* and *value anchoring* of consumer imagination is going to be applied to the thematic structure of this thesis as presented. This analysis consists of empirical evidence alongside the interpretation of the researcher and will produce outcomes relevant to the questions that this thesis covers. The overarching question: "how different visitor categories articulate and imagine the narratives of Chernobyl's storyscape", is going to be answered through three partial research questions as follows:

1. What are the distinct visitor categories that visit the Chernobyl exclusion zone?
2. What are each group specific conventions to approach the exclusion zone?
3. What are the mutual dynamics that these entities entail in the exclusion zone?

The first part of the analysis addresses the first two objectives by presenting the different tourist entities *spectators*, *explorers* and *adventurers* and their distinct narrative articulations: *the tale of the mighty nature*, *the tale of apocalyptic afterness* and *the tale of the mythical zone*. The last objective is going to summarize these findings and further develop the interaction of these tourist entities by analysing the dynamics they entail at the storyscape Chernobyl exclusion zone, by applying the concepts: *conformity*, *enactment*, and *contestation*.

4.1 Exploring the Storyscape Chernobyl with a Group Tour

To give the reader a context, I would like to first present each visitors category specific tour approach. When visiting the Chernobyl exclusion zone with a group tour, visitors follow the route itinerary that consists of the main sights in the exclusion zone such as Duga-radar, Chernobyl town, Kopachi kindergarten, the nuclear power plant and the abandoned city Pripyat. The group size usually varies between 10-25 people, and visitors are accompanied by the tour guide whole time. Tour guides structure the visit by providing information on each location visited, not only regarding the history of the site but informing about the levels of radiation which is demonstrated in some places with the assistance of a dosimeter. Starting early morning in Kiev, the tour buses arrive at the exclusion zone couple of hours later, and after passing the main checkpoint Dytyatky where the verification of the identity of the visitors take place and they receive personal dosimeter, the buses scroll into the exclusion zone.

The first stops most frequently are the nearest abandoned villages nearby the border of the exclusion zone such as Zalissyia and Kopachi. Spending a full day in the exclusion zone, visitors have a lunch at the canteen for the power plant workers, where they are often accompanied by the maintenance workers of the power plant. After lunch visitors usually continue towards the direction of the power plant and from there to the abandoned city of Prip'yat. The two last mentioned stops were often the most anticipated sights of the tour. Usually the tour ends at the Chernobyl town where visitors stop by at the monuments such as the Angel of Doom and For Those who Save the World. The one-day group tour is the most standardized type of tour, where the locations are planned before hand and the visitors follow the tour itinerary. What characterizes visitors entering the exclusion zone with a group tour is that they were often visiting the zone for the first time and the decision to travel was rather spontaneous.

What type of narrative disposition did these respondents carry?

Figure 9. Azure-swimming pool in Pripyat, Source: respondent 9



4.1.1 The Narrative Disposition of a Group Tour

As it is noted in literature on toxic tourism and disaster tourism (Hannam & Yankovska, 2013), Chernobyl is a reference to one of the worst nuclear accidents and technological disasters of all times. After 34 years of the disaster, what stands as a tangible consequence is the exclusion zone with its radioactive and symbolical fallout. As sites of dissonance heritage are essentially polysemous, the exclusion zone can be articulated through various narratives. Visitors of the exclusion zone are one category of stakeholders that participate in articulating and producing these narratives of place. The results of narrative coding as presented above revealed three different visitors' categories that articulate and imagine the storyscape exclusion zone in a visitor specific style. Different visitors' categories consist of individuals who engage with the exclusion zone in different ways and these engagements are further named narrative dispositions of a given visitor category (Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, 2012). The first visitor category that this study identified and could be used to exemplify the first type of heritage engagement consisted of respondents who visited the exclusion zone with a group tour.

A respondent (35) described his decision to visit the exclusion zone:

"It was very spontaneous trip because I just saw cheap tickets. And I book the journey."

The decision to travel and visit the exclusion zone could have been done rather spontaneously, there were not necessarily any pre-expectations regarding the visits or its content. This characterized accurately the type of engagement that respondents from the group tour category sought. They simply wished to see the place with their own eyes, this is further elaborated by another respondent (15):

“That given its change nature will find the way and I wanted to go and visit the abandoned town. And see the fact that nature has started to recuperate things and living really, it is the sort of going around a ghost town, that’s the main reason.”

As it comes clear, the abandoned town which is slowly covered under the nature was a sufficiently exiting travel destination for these respondents *per se*. The spontaneous decision to visit the exclusion zone and activity of “going around the ghost town” describe incisively- the group tour visitors’ category specific style to travel to the exclusion zone and the relationship with the storyscape they sought to experience. These attributes of travel decision and the sought experience were identified in the thematic narrative analysis as comprising distinct narrative dispositions regarding the storyscape Chernobyl. As the authors Chronis, Arnould & Hampton (2012) argue, there are multiple refigurations and imaginaries on the given heritage site, which are grounded on consumers narrative disposition towards the meaning of the site. Visitors brought their own preference into the Chernobyl experience, which was reflected on the level of engagement that the respondents sought when visiting in Chernobyl. Therefore, the first narrative disposition that the thematic coding of the narrative analysis identified was the disposition of *spectators*.

But how do spectators articulate the tale of the exclusion zone?



Figure 10. The Pripyat Ferris wheel, Source: respondent 35

4.1.2 The Tale of the Mighty Nature

This study identified three narrative articulations regarding the Chernobyl exclusion zone. This articulation was a combination of visitor specific narrative disposition, and their specific choreography in the exclusion zone. The first narrative articulation was produced by the *spectators* due their specific ways of engagement with the storyscape Chernobyl, that could be characterised as distant contemplation. Approaching the exclusion zone within a disposition of *spectator*, the respondent did not seek to create a specifically pronounced engagement with the storyscape. They simply wished to see the place and visit the place. In comparison to two other visitors' entities that will be discussed shortly, the spatial choreographies of the *spectators* were mostly concentrated on the exterior surfaces in the exclusion zone.

Due to this type of visitors' choreography, respondents engaged and further articulated the storyscape through its environmental attributes. Thus, a pronounced heritage articulation was the tale of the mighty nature. Next, I would like to present this group specific ways of engagement with storyscape. The theoretical framework of this study, the anchoring of consumer imagination in four experiential domains, *narrative, material, emotional* and *value* (Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, 2012) is going to be applied for the *spectators* narrative articulation, *the tale of the mighty nature* in order to elaborate

the group specific style to imagine and comprise this articulation outcome. The photographs are used as a window that clarify and exemplify visitors' engagement with the area.

4.1.3 The Material and Emotional Anchoring of Imagination

The tale of the mighty nature, the storyscape articulation of the *spectators* was reconstrued and imagined through material and emotional engagement with the storyscape. As the *spectators* explored the exclusion zone mostly by engaging with the exterior surfaces on the site, they recognized the nature and its spatial outcomes in the area. Equally they observed the built environment, its decay, and the disappearance of its silhouettes under the vegetation, which was a powerful sensory encounter. The abandoned buildings evoked deeply felt embodied reactions, that reminded about the loss as respondent (5) expressed:

“The abandoned villages (...) that's really frightening to see how people used to live over there, how they used to have a life, with all kind of buildings all kind of facilities, and see how it is all now abandoned and destroyed that's really frightening, that was most impressive of all of it.”

The materiality of the place connected respondents to the events that occurred there, and the topography was used as a source of narrative inspiration.



Figure 11. Bumper cars in Pripjat amusement park, Source: respondent 5

These embodied transects are generative for their sadness, the imaginative experience of human suffering overflowed into strong emotional expressions as the respondent described. Respondents developed empathic connection with those impacted by the disaster by walking through the same yards that they had once walked. These often ambiguous and strong sensations evoked emotions of sorrow, but equally the meaning of the accident was framed by lighter connotations due to the nature's capability to recover. The role of the landscape connected respondents to the Chernobyl imaginary, and it came in a direct way that involved senses. The tale of Chernobyl was not an abstract narrative, but it was felt through the body by looking and testifying the ruined landscapes, that impressed the respondents due to the loss they presented. The imaginative experience of abrupt loss overflowed into strong emotional expressions. The exterior surfaces did not only have an impact on the respondents due to loss that those reminded of, but because the landscapes signified otherness:

“I remember one point when the ground started to odour like really nice smell of fresh ground, and I thought that I cannot breathe because I don't know if I will be breathing some particles, but I think you manage in that world if you just stick with the rules.” Respondent 34

What characterised the spectators similarly was that they sought to engage with the storyscape exclusion zone from the position of a distant contemplation because they evaluated the possible risks of being in the area differently than the two other visitors categories that will be discussed shortly.

Figure 12. Radioactive sign front of the Red Forest, Source: respondent 35



Therefore, they sought in conformity with the storyscape, not to outweigh it by entering into it. These choreographies therefore consisted of outside explorations and observations on the marked routes.

In consequence, they construed and imagined the story by moving through its exterior surfaces and by being impressed by what they saw. The decaying silhouettes of the city and villages were “impressive” to look at, but they contained dangers and risks, and looking at them from the position of distant contemplation or spectator was sufficient level of engagement for these respondents.

4.1.4 Value Anchoring of Imagination

As Chronis, Arnould & Hampton (2012) argue, imagination in consumers generate a value articulation, which tells what we should value and what our attitude regarding the heritage site should be at the present. The Chernobyl exclusion zone simultaneously impressed and horrified the respondents, but the value specific anchoring of imagination was that the respondents’ accounts and pictures spoke on behalf of the nature’s capability to recover:



Figure 13. Mural in Pripjat, Source: respondent 5

“I would say the city of Pripjat was amazing and yeah it's quite impressive to see such a young city because the city was only started in the year 1970, so it was only like 16 years old before the accident happened. So, it was really impressive to see such a big city being totally abandoned and to see how life continues even after such a horrible disaster.” Respondent 5

As this excerpt illustrates the city of Pripyat and its story was a powerful one for the respondent. Despite devastating incidence, the respondent in question was able to frame it with lighter connotations due to the nature's capability to recover. Similar thoughts were shared by another respondent (34):

"I think the earth, for some reason I am very attached to ground and little rocks and dirt and stuff like that and the thought how the ground is doing, how it is processing the radiation. It looks so beautiful, but at the same time it is so different because it has to fight for its survival in this new mode of existence and at the same time it is horrifying and beautiful because it can do that, the new order of earth."

What can be concluded from these excerpts is that the accident indeed remains outside of the comprehensibility, but the *tale of the mighty nature* is the balancing power that can give a different meaning after such a devastating disaster.

As these respondents' accounts and photographs illustrate, the visitors who joined the group tour construed the tale of the heritage of Chernobyl by engaging the exterior surfaces on the area. It moved and impacted them deeply due to loss that these landscapes signified but equally due to nature's capability to recover. Similarly, to witness the forest conquering the infrastructures of the cities and villages is deep, multisensorial, and embodied experiential narrative articulation. This is in concordance with spectators' specific tour choreographies and performance: they reconstrue the narrative by engaging with the environment by moving through the exclusion zone, maintaining themselves on the marked routes, mostly engaging with the exterior surfaces. Through the choreography of spatial exploration and engagement of distant contemplation, the spectators can be perceived as a performance trace that will be named as *conformity*.

4.2 Exploring the Storyscape with a Private Tour

The second visitor's entity that this study identified consisted of respondents who visited the exclusion zone with a private tour. Similarly, to give a context for this type of visiting I will shortly present the private tour's visitation conventions in the exclusion zone. In practice this means hiring a private guide or booking a private tour through one of the existing tour companies. Private tours visit the main sites of the exclusion zone such as the power plant, Pripyat and Duga-radar, similarly to group tours, but they often spend a longer time in the exclusion zone and thus they have the possibility to familiarize themselves with objects that are further away from the basic tourist routes. Private tours can be booked for one day but most often the visitors spent at least 2-3 days in the zone, staying the night in one of the hostels in Chernobyl town. In addition to the main objects in the exclusion zone visitors might wander through the numerous abandoned buildings in Pripjat such as hospitals, schools, kindergartens, Jupiter plant and apartment blocks. Schools and kindergartens of the former Pripjat are some of the most memorable sights for visitors as artefacts and belongings of the residents can still be found right where they were left when the catastrophe occurred.

The maximum number of individuals who participate in private tour is seemingly smaller than the group tours' and the visitors have the possibility to choose which locations they wish to see and have an impact on the time spent in each location. It allows less restricted possibilities for spatial exploration of landscapes and most importantly buildings and artefacts that can be found inside the zone. Interpreting the existing safety regulation more loosely, private tours enable individuals to enter the abandoned buildings and perhaps to see objects that are off the track of the regular group tours. Visitors who enter the exclusion zone with a private tour range of a diverse set of individuals. The respondents who belonged into this group might have visited the exclusion zone with a group tour first and come back with a private tour as they wished to explore the area more freely. Some of the respondents even took a private tour on their very first visit as it appealed more to them due to its customized and personalized character. In both groups, be it first timers or multiple timers, individuals appeared to be keen on photographing, influenced by urban exploration, the history of the site or to otherwise curious to experience the atmospheric sides of the exclusion zone.

4.2.1 The Narrative Disposition of a Private Tour

In this chapter, I will specify and distinct the difference within the narrative disposition of the second visitor group of the private group part-takers and how that affected their experience as explorers compared to the one of group tour visitors. The second visitor group that emerged from this study and contributed for the multivocality of the heritage site (Frihammar & Silverman, 2018), were respondents who visited the exclusion zone with a private tour. Similarly, as the previous presented visitors' entity, the *spectators* who consisted *the tale of the mighty nature*, the narrative analysis of the interview data identified the second narrative position regarding the style of visitor engagement, which consisted of those respondents that visited the exclusion zone with a private tour.

In distinction to group tours, the spectator's category presented previously, respondents chose a private tour because they wished a deeper and more personal engagement with the storyscape exclusion zone. This visitors' category choice of tour was characterised by the desire to shape autonomously sensational and emotional experiences in the exclusion zone. A common denominator in the experience of visitors from the private group category was equally that they were less satisfied with common, regulated patterns of tourist activities in the area. A respondent (13) reasoned his decision to take a private tour with the following argument:

“Like this really honest and personal and good opportunity to see which are not just touristic, I did not know exactly what you will do, but I knew it will be some kind of non-touristic not so guided as the other tour, that is what I expected and what happened.”

This excerpt describes accurately that the respondent sought with distinction to avoid the more regulated tours, as those would essentially give too much determination over their experience. In contrast to top down -style of tours through the exclusion zone, respondents who travelled to the zone with a private tour sought equally to avoid the crowds of other visitors. Another respondent (29) continued:

“Tourists and buses were not what we were looking for we wanted to explore, where we wanted to, as long as we wanted to, we did not want to be among other tourist, we wanted to explore buildings and artefacts complete on our own.”

As it comes clear from these excerpts, personal engagement, possibility to actively shape one's emotional and sensory experiences and more freedom for spatial exploration where those determining experimental aspects that respondents sought from private tour. Indeed, private tour enables to explore the insides of the buildings and artefacts, as it interprets the existing safety policies more

loosely. As Chronis, Arnould and Hampton (2012) remind, the consumer imagination is equally shaped by the distinct narrative dispositions that a given consumer entity consist. There can be multiple dispositions, and visitors bring into the heritage context their own prior knowledge and the sought level of engagement with the storyscape.

In contrast to the visitor's category that was presented previously, the group tour, the respondents who took the private tour, sought a deeper level of engagement with the storyscape. They wished to create their own experience and own sensuous encounters with the surroundings in Chernobyl. These sought ways of engagement were used in the narrative analysis that was conducted to the primary data to conceptually characterise the visitor's engagement with the storyscape and these attributes were identified in the thematic narrative analysis as consisting distinct narrative dispositions regarding the storyscape Chernobyl. In addition to previous visitor category, which consisted *the narrative disposition of spectators*, the narrative disposition that would describe the sought narrative engagement within the private tour category, referred as the *explorers*.

Next, I would like to present the explorers specific narrative articulation regarding the storyscape Chernobyl.

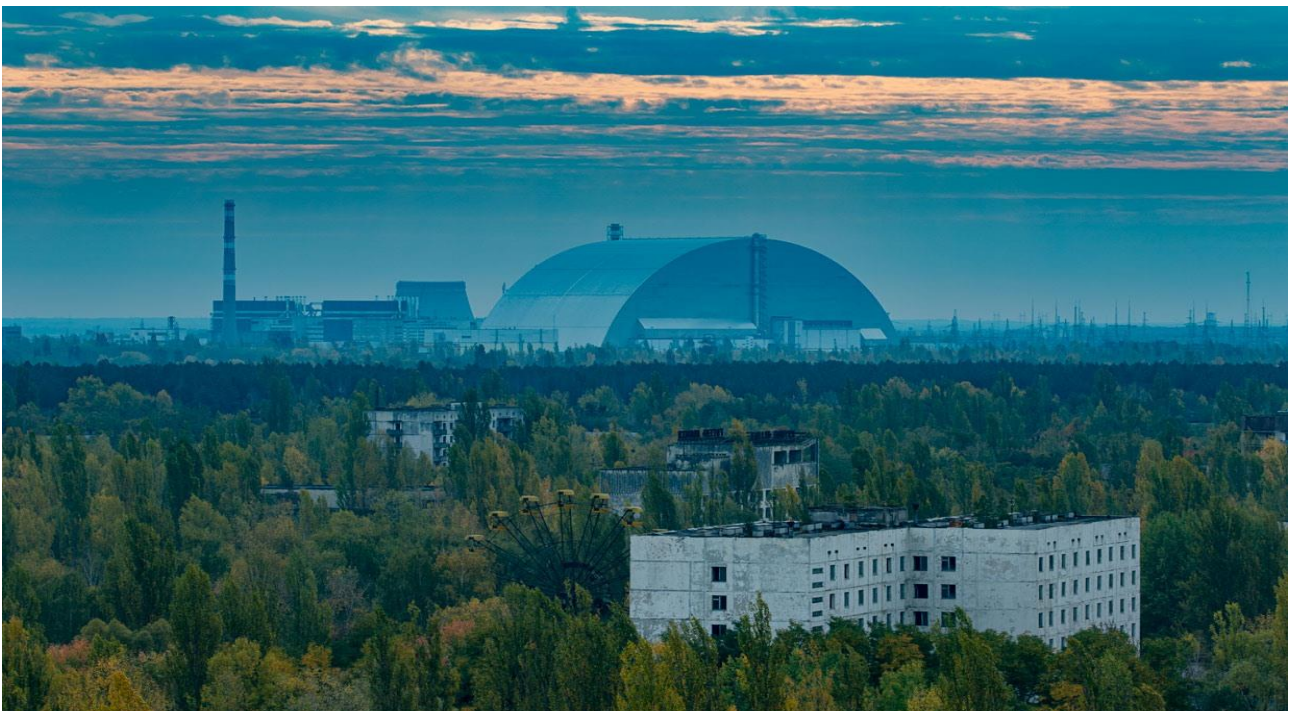


Figure 14. An evening view over the city of Pripyat, Source: respondent 10

4.2.2 The Tale of Apocalyptic Afterness

Whereas the first presented narrative disposition of spectators who articulated and reimagined the zone through the tale of might nature, the second narrative disposition on the other hand articulated and engaged with the narrative of the zone in a visitor's category specific style. The second visitors' articulation regarding the storyscape Chernobyl that this study identified was *the tale of apocalyptic afterness*.

Approaching the exclusion zone within a disposition of an explorer, the respondents wished to ensure a more personal and intimate engagement in relation to the storyscape Chernobyl. In addition to personal engagement with the area, the respondents sought to actively shape the emotional and sensuous interaction with the storyscape. Notably the respondents searched more freedom for spatial exploration and to minimize the presence of other visitors during their tour. Due to this type of visitors' choreography, respondents reimagined the storyscape through its attributes of *absence*. Therefore, the tale of apocalyptic afterness was a pronounced part of the heritage articulation.

Next, I would like to present the explorer category specific ways of engagement with storyscape and how this heritage articulation is produced. The theoretical framework of this study, the anchoring of consumer imagination in four experiential domains *narrative, material, emotional* and *value* (Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, 2012) is going to be used in order to exemplify a visitor's category specific construction of narrative imagination, *the tale of apocalyptic afterness*.

4.2.3 Material and Emotional Anchoring of Imagination

Material anchoring of imagination in the storyscape consists of engagement with landscapes, artefacts and built environment, and it is sensed and construed through embodied engagement with the environment (Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, 2012). The visitation trajectories of explorers consist equally a plethora of locations with narrative raw material. Visiting same locations as the group tour, the private tour enables the possibility to visit more unknown locations in Pripjat and in the wider exclusion zone. Whereas spectators consisted this engagement mostly through sensory encounters with the landscape, a pronounced engagement among the explorers was the artefacts and the insides of the buildings. An important material engagement for explorers and one of the reasons to visit the exclusion zone with a private tour, was specifically the possibility to access the ruins of the exclusion zone and investigate the artefacts that can be found inside.

As Dobraszcyk (2010) has acknowledged, the ruins of Pripjat offer many opportunities for sensory pleasure but equally due to the sheer scale of the ruined environment it can overwhelm the visitors. Indeed, the ruined environment provided a deep contrast for the everyday surroundings of the respondents due to its atmosphere of absence. The experiences from the inside of the ruins were a combination of sensory reactions due to various sensory stimulus, the absence of life, the lack of sound and the amazement for the objects that could still be found inside, which easily create the sense of overwhelming, due to the excess of meaning generated by the recognition of familiarity in unfamiliarity. These were the essences that explorers sought to capture while visiting the zone. Due to the ambiguous, affective, and embodied sensory encounters, the inside exploration of the houses is a prime example of this type of sensory consumption. The respondents sought to create an intimate relationship with the ruins and decaying structures of the exclusion zone. The experiences in relation to the ruins were to be captured by multi-sensuous engagement:

“The place is abandoned for the most part, 50 000 people (...) So being there with big groups you miss the soul of this, the place, you miss being sat in a building because the 10 of you can’t go inside the buildings and just sat there and listening to the wood creek from the window outside. You miss that if you are in a big noisy loud group.” Respondent 14

The main information we can retrieve from this excerpt is that it describes accurately the experience that *explorers* sought for when visiting the exclusion zone. It exemplifies equally the distinct performances of this group entity of private tour respondents. They wished to reconstruct the narrative through imaginative experiences that echoed the embodied, sensuous, and felt side of the zone.



Figure 15. Inside the Jupiter Plant, Source: respondent 19

Clearly, the possibility to generate material sensory engagements that were originating from the visitor subject itself was a pronounced way to reconstrue and imagine the narrative of the storyscape. Explorers were attentive to those ambiguities of atmosphere (Anderson, 2009), through which they reconstrued the narrative due to its attributes of absence, and which evoked strong sensory responses and sensitivity to engage and recognize the environment not only visually but with auditory senses equally. The ambiguity was acknowledged by respondents as a contributing factor for the establishment as a possibility for more intimate engagement with those material remains, that now signify the disaster. The narrative of the disaster was not to be merely reconstrued, it was to be felt through the material engagement and imagination: A respondent (19) condensed:

“It has history, and you feel it by the artefacts that show the human presence.”

Figures 15 and 16 exemplify accurately this type of multi-sensuous engagement that explorers sought from private tours. The photograph in Figure 15 was taken in the Jupiter Plant in the outskirts of Pripyat and the photograph in Figure 16 in the Pripyat barber shop. Both rooms show explicit signs of devastation and absence brought by the natural decay. The plaster and paint of the wall are chipped and in the Figure 15 door to the posterior room is open, which shows the disorder of the furnitures, whereas in the Figure 16 floor is covered by garbage and empty bottles. These impressions are warmly illuminated by the sunlight that comes out of the window. They both represents the special relationship that the respondent sought to perceived with their surroundings. It could be the sensitivity for the sounds of the zone as a respondent described above or to sense the light or wind.



Figure 16. Pripyat barber shop, Source: respondent 16

The tangibility of the place in addition with the sensory experiences evoked were crucial in connecting the respondent with the side of the exclusion zone that they sought to consume, the apocalyptic afterness or *absence in present*.

In addition to the atmospheric sensory engagement with the contradictions and ambiguities of the ruins, another way how respondent who belonged to the explorer's entity reconstructed the narrative imagination was through the observations of the artefacts that can be found inside of the buildings.



Figure 27. Golden Key kindergarten in Pripjat, Source: respondent 27

Indeed, the engagement with the artefacts of the former residents appeared as one of the main contributing factors why the respondents in this category chose to enter the exclusion zone with a private group. The narrative of the accident was emotionally reconstructed when the respondents could observe and photograph these reminiscences of the people who once inhabited the area. It seemed that respondents created special relationships with their surroundings through the artefacts. The tangibility of these artefacts was a crucial aspect in connecting the respondents to the exclusion zone and its narrative. It is exactly this type of visitors performances, decentred, affective, but embodied, relational, expressive and involved with others and objects in a world continually in process (Nash, 2000) that respondents used to construe the narrative and the group specific ways to consume the narrative. These embodied experiences created moments of presence, which brought forth a powerful emotionality, as expressed by a respondent (13):

“These were the moments to me which were most moving. I tried to find... yeah you can read a lot of books you find a lot of material, really special, like for example these ones (...) it is really a wow moment you can't capture with words.”

The moments that respondents described as those presence moments, or moments of being-there (Chronis, 2012), were generative for deeper understanding of the past, where narrative imagination is informed by the particularities of the environment. The ruins of Pripyat and generally the ruins of whole exclusion zone are in contemporary condition a result of systematic looting rather than natural decay (Dobraszczyk, 2010: 381), and visitors themselves might organize the artefacts through the means of photography so that those consist particular constellations. It is still the emotive value of these artefacts that functioned as a channel to the residents that possessed those once, that created emotional and material anchoring of imagination.

There is an abundance of artefacts left behind in the schools and kindergartens of the former residents of the exclusion zone when the catastrophe happened. These places were repeatedly mentioned by respondents as enabling the strongest material and emotional anchoring of imagination to reconstrue the narrative in a group specific way, again highlighting the aspect of absence.



Figure 18. Kopachi kindergarten, Source: respondent 12

As the following respondent (27) explained, there is a certain kind of imaginary re-construction, that is possible though embodied presence within the physical space of the evacuation:

“When you enter the place like Kopachi kindergarten, it was like nails to the ground. There were little beds there in perfect shape, and the dolls and puppets still laying there, they did not take anything, it was all just left over there, and the stuff was still laying there. There were children that used to play with that their own dolls (...) it really gets into your head.”

The abandoned apartment blocks, schools and kindergarten evoked intense sensory experiences and respondent evaluated most of all personal interpretation and the possibility to maintain the sensibility for multisensory experiences while moving through these spaces. The materiality of the site, the peeling wallpaper, composing furnitures, artefacts that were left, moss growing on the floor, - the erosion of the site due to the passing of time evoked intensive embodied sensations. Respondents from the private group category experienced these explorations in relation to the narrative reimagination of this respondent entity, *the apocalyptic afterness*.



Figure 19. Hospital no. 126 in Pripjat, Source: respondent 3

Clearly the surrounding environment and the physicality of the site provide a direct experience that is not possible with secondary sources. What is also clear from the previous excerpt is that visitors

do not maintain only position of external observers in the storytelling process, but rather through their presence and movement through the space, they actively engaged with the story and reimagined it with a visitor entity specific style. The stories of former residents of the area are actualized in the space, respondents did not simply imagine through storytelling, they reconstructed the past by doing it while wandering through the abandoned landscapes. This is enacted through the narrative disposition that this visitor entity consisted, the respondents sought to explore the narrative through personal exploration, and they consumed those absent in present qualities of the exclusion zone.

4.2.4 Value anchoring of Imagination

The explorers consisted a narrative articulation, *the tale of apocalyptic afterness* and this was construed through the material anchoring of imagination in relation to the inside of the buildings and the artefacts that was possibly to find there. The emotional anchoring of imagination of explorers was evoked by the sensory encounters with buildings and artefacts which reminded of the loss, simultaneously seeking ways of emotional engagement with the exclusion zone itself. Equally there is value anchoring of imagination that can be identified, which is equally reflected through the following visitor's specific style of engagement with the area:

"It is a place of reflection what can still happen to us. All of these guys should visit there and visit schools and give people an idea what stupid decisions can lead to. Leave as it is, as a monument to nuclear disaster." Respondent 29

Whereas spectators construed the value of the exclusion zone due to the engagements with the nature and its capability to recover, the explorers indicated same value articulation, but by absorbing a slightly different interpretation, the exclusion zone as a monument to nuclear disaster.

As these respondent's accounts and photographs illustrate, the visitors who joined the private tour construed the tale of the heritage of Chernobyl by engaging with the interiors of the exclusion zone. Therefore, they construed their group specific articulation by engaging with the interior surfaces, buildings, and artefacts. The type of trace that explorers left on the storyscape could be named enactment. This enactment was due to the deeper personal engagement they sought, they wished to enact their possibilities for the narrative engagement by choosing a private tour which would essentially give them more freedom for exploration and unrestricted sensory engagement with the storyscape. The forms of enactment as this analysis discovered were the consumption of the storyscape through atmospheric and what is felt, embodied experiences, by pursuing a deeper proximity with the storyscape, than just distant contemplation. Therefore, the explorer category performance is further named *enactment* of the storyscape.

4.3 Exploring the Storyscape with an Illegal Tour

When one wishes to visit the exclusion zone with so called “illegal tours”, the visitors enter the exclusion zone with their guide by sneaking into the exclusion zone by passing underneath the barbed wire and hiking through the exclusion zone towards its epicentre Pripyat and back. They might camp and spend a night in one of the abandoned villages during the hike and they usually would have spent one night in one of the abandoned apartment blocks in Pripyat. Due to the necessity to stay unnoticed illegal visitors move mostly during the night-time. The length of the hike is around 60 km, and the usual duration of the illegal trip is 4 days. The hike through the forest provides the possibility to see small houses, churches and cemeteries covered with the vegetation and the possibility to discover nature and wildlife equally. Some of the objects that the illegal tour itinerary provides are anti-aircraft missile system “Volkhov” and the Duga-radar in addition to Pripyat itself. The radar system which is 700 meters long and 150 meters high is one the main attractions of the illegal explorers, they often climb on the top of the radar and capture some breath-taking views over the exclusion zone.

As the name of the tour already hints the illegal tour is not obligated to follow the official safety regulations of the zone. Instead of negotiating the choreographies in relation to the existing safety policies, illegal visitors must be aware of the security personnel of the zone and legal visitors. Visitors who enter the exclusion zone with so called illegal tour are often influenced by urban exploration, so the abandoned landscapes are a highly appreciated destination for the individuals who enjoy the sensations and atmospheres of abandoned ruins. Thus, illegal tourism forms discursive opponents for the mainstream tours, as well as promising the possibility to be “a Chernobyl explorer and discover new life experiences, instead of mass market of plain and boring tours” (UrbexTour, 2020).



Figure 20. Illegal visitor on top of the Duga-radar, Source: respondent 6

4.3.1 The Narrative Disposition of an Illegal Tour

This thesis approached visitors of the exclusion zone as active stakeholders who shape and produce the study object of this thesis, the heritage site and storyscape Chernobyl exclusion zone. Indeed, heritage sites are not immutable. The heritage of the past is always reached out from the present. Places may change over time, when the nature of tourist performance changes, so that new tourists' places can emerge onto the stage, while other places may decline or stop happening (Sheller & Urry, 2004). A further approach into the storyscape Chernobyl that this study was able to identify was the narrative disposition of visitors who visited the zone with an illegal tour. As noted above, the illegal visitors enter into the exclusion zone without permission. In practice this means that the illegal visitors placed themselves outside the official safety regulations of the exclusion zone, they access the area with illegal guide, they explore the area outside the marked routes for the visitors and they enter the ruins and buildings of various kinds in the zone. This provided an interpretation frame that rejected the established regulations regarding the visitors' performances in the exclusion zone.

The storyscape exclusion zone stands for the accident that happened 34 years ago. The abandoned landscapes stand now as remainders of the disaster and evacuation. Essentially it is an area without a presence of human beings. This heritage outcome spoke for the third group of visitors, those who entered the exclusion zone illegally. Therefore, the illegal tour provided a noteworthy alternative to those respondents who sought to engage with the storyscape without regulations or conforming to the legal safety rules. Similarly, as the respondents who belonged to the previous visitor's entity, illegal visitors sought a personal engagement with the area, and in addition they were drawn by the excitement of illegality of the trip. Placing their visitor subjectivities and bodies in the closest proximity with the storyscape, by literally moving through it, they part-took a choreography where the respondent allowed the storyscape to go through them.

“And if you do it like illegally you push it kind of through yourself and it becomes part of you. Your own knowledge that you gathered, not from the others, you get it on your.” Respondent 6

What is informative in this excerpt is that it is not a mere extension of a visitor's knowledge but an embodied, physical understanding and reading of the storyscape and its events that respondents sought. Illegal visitors therefore sought through a direct physical experience to engage with the storyscape and with the narratives it presented for them. This physical proximity with the storyscape and the rejection of more regulated tour activities in the area consisted crucial motivational factors to visit the exclusion zone illegally.

A respondent (2) described his motivations for illegal trip and the rejection of the legal tour into the exclusion zone in a following way:

“It is scripted, there is never any excitement (legal tours), I want to go on the extra mile to fall on experience and to do what I want to do than have scheduled stick and obviously just to go with them. I want to explore what I want to in my own time and see inside the buildings and look at the history and experience it all instead of spend there a day and to go home at night.”

The freedom for exploration was pronounced desire among the illegal visitors’ group. Another respondent (17) continued:

“During the illegal tour you can do what you want, there is frequently policemen and soldiers who walk around the buildings you are visiting, so you have to be fast and act in silence but that’s all.”

Thus, the physical proximity with the storyscape zone, a desire for a unique unrestricted encounter with exclusion zone were pronounced articulations of engagement among respondents from this visitor category. These attributes of engagement were used in the narrative analysis to expose the visitor category specific desire for the engagement with the storyscape Chernobyl. Due to the corporeal proximation with the storyscape and visitors placing themselves outside the established rules regarding the exclusion zone, the narrative coding found a common engagement attribute for this visitor category, the third narrative disposition this study identified and further named consist of *adventurers*. How does the narrative about the exclusion zone of the adventurers differ from the other aforementioned groups of spectators and explorers?



Figure 21. Under the electricity pylons, Source: respondent 17

4.3.2 Tale of the Mythical Zone

Whereas the two previous narrative dispositions, the first one of *spectators* who articulated and imagined the zone through *the tale of the mighty nature*, and the second disposition of *explorers* who reimagined and articulated the exclusion zone through *the tale of apocalyptic afterness*, the *adventurers* furthermore articulated the narrative of the zone in a visitor's category specific style. The third visitor articulation regarding the storyscape Chernobyl is the one this study identified as *the tale of the mythical zone*.

Approaching the exclusion zone within a disposition of adventurer, the respondent placed themselves within the physical proximity of the area and outside the official regulations regarding the exclusion zone. In addition to personal engagement with the area, the respondents sought a total freedom regarding the movement through the storyscape. The close physical proximity with the exclusion zone, special movements through area in the night and the necessity to stay undetected were those patterns of exploration that characterized those respondents' experience whom were part of the adventures' category. Moreover, due to this style of visitors' choreography, respondents imagined the storyscape through the mythical attributes they attached to it.



Figure 22. Inside Pripyat morgue, Source: respondent 6

4.3.3 Material and Emotional Anchoring of Imagination

The trip into the exclusion zone that was done illegally consisted of intense engagements with the materiality of the storyscape. For the third respondent category, the imaginary of Chernobyl was articulated through the landscape, but similarly as the previous visitors entities articulated and reconstrued the imaginary in a group specific way, the adventurers equally imagined and reconstrued the narrative of the zone through their visitor specific engagement. Adventurous contestation of the storyscape was the hike through the forest from the border of the exclusion zone towards Pripyat. What became evident from the respondents' accounts was that the materiality of the forest assisted with intense physical encounters to reconstrue the exclusion zone with mythical connotations and reconstrue the area with heterotopic attributes:

“Time flows in a different wave, you travel mostly by night so that alone... It turns the way you have used to live upside down... it is a lot to describe really.” Respondent 33

As it is described in this excerpt, the narrative disposition of adventurers, their visitor specific approach for the exclusion zone attended to intense involvement with the materiality of the storyscape and this type of embodied encounter with the storyscape reconstrued the zone with mythical attributes, as a place which have the capability to turn the ordering of the world upside down. Walking through the forest of exclusion zone is not a mere intense leisure exercise but the enactment of a specific place narrative and its implications on the landscape. As a result of the accident, the zone stood as a mythical void with secrets to discover and due to this visitors' articulation, it had the power to evoke intense material heterotopic imaginaries. Visitors engage with the exclusion zone, through its heterotopic qualities, as an area without human, as an area that consists its own heterotopic counter reality, where time flows in a different wave. A respondent (33) described the most memorable part of his journey in a following way:

“The landscape and the road to Pripyat and from Pripyat because you see a lot of nature and animals. And one thing which is interesting is the lack of people and the nature, it is like going to another planet. Because sometimes you go a lot of time without seeing anyone and you do not see any traces of human presence. You do not see houses you do not see roads it is different from day to day life where you are always surrounded by people cars and buildings. It is different experience. “



Figure 23. Hiking through the forest of exclusion zone, Source: respondent 6

As in other cases of visitors' representations that this study has identified, it is through the landscape and material artefacts that visitors' imagination is sustained. What is indicative in the excerpt above is that respondents pursued to reconstrue the imaginary with the materiality of the storyscape. The type of engagement and chosen tour choice impacted on the imaginary reconstruction on the storyscape. The adventures lived up their narrative articulation of the mythical zone through intense sensory experiences. Equally the trip through the surrounding forest, was not merely perceived as any forest, it was the forest of the exclusion zone, where there has not been presence of humans for over 30 years. It was left by its residents due to the nuclear accident, and the adventurers

were encountered by this untouched radioactive nature, which was striving and exiting due to the lack of presence of human population. It added a layer in the visitor's imagination:

"When you are there you really have this feeling like a box of Pandora in the room, because everything is empty over there and you have the feeling it can be there, you know it is not there but your imagination start to work there." Respondent 11

This demonstrates the critical role of imagination in the travel experience and the embodied performativity of the visitor specific consumption style. The adventures reconstrued the imaginary through their narrative disposition and adventurer's subjectivities, through which they articulated the exclusion zone with specific connotations, *the tale of the mythical zone* and this was further supported with their choreographies and performance. As the respondents' accounts indicate, it was exactly those mythical atmospheric parts of the exclusion where respondent attended to by entering the exclusion zone with illegal tour. This narrative imagination was acquired directly through

exteroceptive and proprioceptive senses, the immediacy of the sensory experience combined with the visitor's specific narrative articulation of the area:

“You feel that you are alone in the world, in legal tours you can be there few hours and you have always people around, but if you go across the zone and see the small abandoned villages and you go to the forest through countryside you see a lot of more and the quietness, you really have the feeling that you are the last people on Earth when you walk in there. It is like apocalypse happened, that feeling is quite wonderful because it is not crowded with people.” Respondent 11



Figure 24. *Illegal visitors rest while hiking through the zone, Source: respondent 11*

Figure 24 exemplifies aptly the illegal adventurers' spatial practices. What is descriptive in the picture is not only the adventure it wishes to communicate, portraying the group of illegal visitors under the starry night sky, but it challenges the other visitors' choreographies in the area and the commonly held understanding of the area as polluted and dangerous. Illegal adventurers gave another set of meaning for the area through their specific narrative articulation and choreography which contested the storyscape.

The type of unofficial choreography that adventurers absorbed, consisted a whole different type of experiential dynamics as the following respondent (1) described:

“I think I described to someone after my first trip when I got home, I said that it feels a bit as if you are in video game but without weapons. You have to keep away from the people (...) Adrenaline kicks a lot in the form of excitement and the risk of being exposed if you get stuck. So, it added another dimension to the curiosity of everything in the zone. You do not get to see if you go as a regular tourist.”

Therefore, the adventures reconstructed the narrative of the exclusion zone through its symbolical value because it was the exclusion zone. But in addition, through their particular choreographies in the area, the adventurers had intense emotional anchorings with the storyscape through their specific style of exploration. These excerpts equally describe a different use of the space, the adventures contested the storyscape by consisting innovative ways of exploring the storyscape outside official routes.

“My favourite part was the night we came to Pripjat, we came 25 km hiking and the last 10km were very difficult and we had a lot of stress because you have to take the official road to go to Pripjat. The problem is the road is occupied by cars of Chernobyl workers and policemen. So, when you see lights you have to jump in the bushes- it was like in the movie, very stressful moment. When I finished the trip to Pripjat I was on the roof of a building and seeing the dark night and the reactor 4 laying in the night, it was a beautiful moment with a bottle of beer.” Respondent 17

As this excerpt illustrates, the adventures gave a plethora of other meanings and imaginaries for the storyscape. It was not described as an area to be afraid of or to approach cautiously and observe from



Figure 25. Illegal visitors on the roof top in Pripjat, Source: respondent 6

the distance. Rather it was a place which with create an intimate relationship and which gave a sense of mystery and adventure in the lives of the respondents.

4.3.4 Value Anchoring of Imagination

As it is discussed so far, the adventures sought through close physical proximity and choreographies of illegality to create intense material and emotional engagements with the storyscape Chernobyl. Adventures echoed similar value anchorings of imagination as the previous visitors' categories again with a visitor's category specific articulation:

“For me it was like visiting in futuristic world, I think one day humanity will end like the zone, for different reasons, money, money money, you know what I mean, it is a potential future for the humanity and we have to respect that and take some lessons from the meltdown.” Respondent 17

As presented, the third visitors' entity that this study identified was the narrative disposition of *adventures* who articulated the narrative of the exclusion zone as *the tale of the mythical zone*. The narrative disposition they consist, the corporeal proximity with the storyscape and the exploration of the storyscape outside the official framework of tourism consisted peculiar visitors' choreographies and ways of reimagining the narrative of the exclusion zone. Adventurers engaged with intense embodied encounters with the materiality of the storyscape, that evoked intense emotional responses.



Figure 26 Pripyat Ferris wheel by night, Source: respondent 8

Moreover, these *adventures* co-produce discursively the storyscape by consisting and innovating new routes and by addressing it with different connotations as the two other visitors' categories *spectators* and *explorers*. Therefore, the type of trace that the adventures leave on the exclusion through their performances, their specific choreographies and practices of exploration is going to be further named as the *contestation*. These concepts that this thesis has developed so far, are the narrative dispositions of *spectators*, *explorers* and *adventures* and their narrative articulations *the tale of the mighty nature*, *the tale of apocalyptic afterness* and *the tale of the mythical zone* is going to be next analysed and further developed with each visitor category specific performances, *conformity*, *enactment* and *contestation*.

4.4 What are the Mutual Dynamics of the Storyscape?

The three narrative dispositions Chronis, Arnould & Hampton, (2012) that this study was able to identify were the dispositions of *spectator*, *explorer*, and *adventurer*. These descriptive labels for each visitor entity exemplify the depth of the interactive engagement with the storyscape of Chernobyl and are in concordance with the three types of tours that visitors can attach themselves when visiting the exclusion zone, group, private and illegal tour. Moreover, this study identified three different articulations on the storyscape of Chernobyl. Different visitor categories, *spectator*, *explorer*, and *adventurer* reconstruct the imaginary of the Chernobyl exclusion zone with different connotations and different choreographies. The first visitor category of *spectators*, the respondents who visited the exclusion zone with a group tour construed the narrative articulation with the emphasis on *the mighty nature*. The second category is *explorers*, respondents who visited the exclusion zone with a private tour, were attending more into the apocalyptic attributes of the area, therefore *the tale of apocalyptic afterness*. The third visitor entity, *the adventures* who entered the exclusion zone illegally articulated the area through the narrative *the tale of the mythical zone*.

Similarly, the different narrative articulations, the tale of the mighty nature, the tale of apocalyptic afterness, and the tale of mythical zone, were actualized through consumer imagination in the context of this study, the Chernobyl exclusion zone. These identified and presented visitor categories consist peculiar engagements with the storyscape of Chernobyl, these traces of the visitors' categories on the storyscape were further conceptualized as follows, first visitor entity, *spectator* category consisted the engagement of *conformity*, while they move through the landscapes of the exclusion zone, they construe the reimagining of the storyscape simply walking through it, exploring the exterior surfaces within the position of distant contemplation. It was not important for these respondents to engage

with the storyscape deeply. They were impressed by what they witnessed. Moreover, spectators stay on marked route, therefore their choreography and visitor's performance could be condensed to place itself in concordance with the storyscape.

The second group, private visitors consist the second layer of the story scape, those visitors who enact the storyscape, through their particular narrative articulation and use of storyscape. Initially choosing a private tour, these respondents placed themselves in closer proximity of the storyscape. They did not wish to walk through, they wished to engage with it through sensory experiences and personal interpretations regarding the objects and artefacts they could see. They engaged with the storyscape personally and searched through unmediated sensory experiences atmospheres and material engagement trough which replenish the narrative. The enactment of the storyscape in the style of exploration they sought for, they negotiated more freedom themselves to explore the area and deepen the experience. In addition, they enacted the storyscape by negotiating themselves personal exploration routes and experiences. Moreover, *explorers* consisted a distinct category of performance due to the fact they were less satisfied with more restricted tours. Therefore, they consisted a performance of *enactment* on the storyscape.

The third visitor entity of illegal tourists contribute into the storyscape by consisting a narrative engagement that forms the third layer of the storyscapes visitors' patterns. The narrative analysis identified this visitors' engagement by naming it the contestation of the storyscape. This is due to the peculiar movements through the exclusion zone, placing themselves outside the existing safety regulations and official tourists' routes this group of visitors interpret the area through intense physical and emotional sensations. What is more is that they gave the storyscape a plethora of their visitor's category specific meanings. Therefore, the specific performance of *adventures* can be named as the *contestation*. These are examples of visitors' category specific ways to articulate and perform the heritage site of this study, Chernobyl exclusion zone. These performative categories leave equally their traces on the storyscape, they engage with its heritage by following these consumption needs, they have specific practices and choreographies, and they are forwarded as a form of different visual narratives. Indeed, the photographs are examples of different ways to imagine and consume the area and its visitor specific narratives.

Furthermore, while these different visitor entities demonstrated different degrees of engagement due to varying intensities with material landscapes of exclusion zone, there is a further tendency that these visitor entities could be interpreted demonstrating. These different tour approaches expressed the satisfaction regarding the standardization of tourism. Therefore, these visitors' choreographies exemplified the stakeholder's active practices of producing the style of exploration that would be free

from regulations. Therefore, there is further dimension that these visitor entities stand for as this excerpt reveals:

“It is not emotion or imagination (the legal tours) the guide is just telling what this and that is. I want to like dig into the story, the exact things that were left behind, that kind of things is better to explore by yourself in your own time, to get a full picture exactly what they went through.”

Respondent 2

What is informative in this excerpt is the tendency for tourists to always search for new places to go, places that would be untainted by the commercial emotional management of the tourism industry (Brunsden & Goatcher, 2011). Indeed, the desire for freedom for exploration and determination over one’s sensory encounters can be seen as a crucial motivational factor for one to choose a private tour and illegal tour.

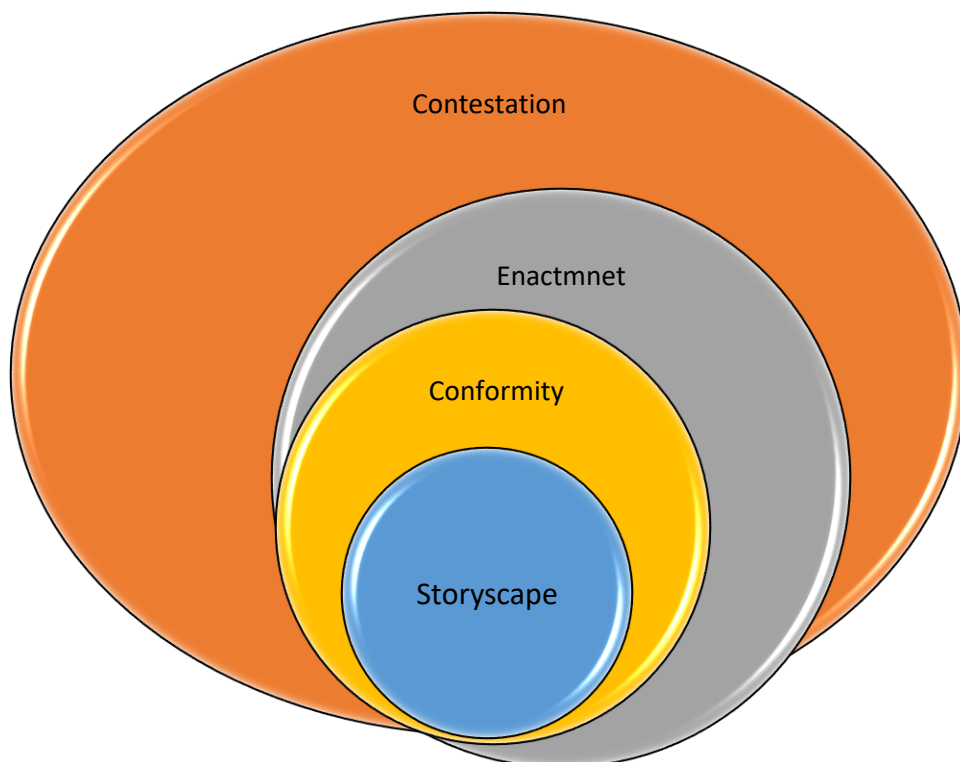


Figure 27. The dynamics of the storyscape

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis presented a question: “how the different visitor categories articulate and imagine the narratives of Chernobyl’s storyscape, and sought to answer it by posing three partial questions. This overarching question was distributed into three sub-themes and partial research objectives that elaborated this overarching question in more detailed: firstly, by presenting the different visitor categories, secondly by identifying the each visitor category specific way to approach the zone and thirdly by analysing the mutual dynamics these visitor entities entail in the storyscape Chernobyl exclusion zone.

The outcomes of this thesis indicate that there are three different visitor categories, group, private and illegal visitors, which contribute in the multivocality of the heritage site. The study reveal that visitors engage with the area with highly diverse set of embodied and sensuous engagements. The level of engagement and the narrative articulation it produced were identified in the narrative analysis as *spectators* and *the articulation of the mighty nature*. The second visitor category consisted of *explorers* and their articulation of *the tale of apocalyptic afterness*. The last category were the *adventurers*, and their articulation were *the tale of the mythical zone*. This study further processed these articulations and narrative dispositions into distinct visitor performances that shape the storyscape and its heritage, due to *conformity*, *enactment*, and *contestation*. These outcomes became visible with the theoretical framework of this thesis and with the narrative coding that was produced for the primary data.

This study was able to indicate that there are different visitor categories and different ways of engagement with the landscape of Chernobyl exclusion zone. As the varying choreographies and heritage practices that this study has elaborated exemplify, there is not only one way to engage with the heritage in Chernobyl. As Frihammar and Silverman (2018) characterizes the sites of dissonance heritage as polysemous which generates layers of conflicting emotion, memory and practice, the topic of this thesis, tourism in Chernobyl exclusion has indicated with clear examples how different tourist groups approach this heritage, how they deal with this heritage and furthermore indicated how these visitors’ narrative articulations mutually reproduce and shape the storyscape.

In concordance with theoretical orientations of this study, this study exemplified how tourists participate in the polyvocality of the heritage cite, by consisting distinct performative ways, through which they consume particular aspects of the area. Tourism produces special heritage outcomes because tourist have interest in special experiences, artefacts, and narratives in the context of the heritage (Šešić & Mijatović, 2014). As was shown in the analysis, the consumption performances of

these different visitor categories reflected these different interests. What these categories revealed especially was that the intensity of the sought experience varied between these visitor categories. Indeed, the identified visitor categories exemplify a desire for a determination over the sensory and embodied experiences over one's visitors' subjectivity. This again draws attention to the power of physical place in every tourist experience, and especially in the analysed heritage site of this thesis the Chernobyl exclusion zone. The dissonance of heritage in Chernobyl depends on the reaction of people to that place and the intensity and nature of experience which through they sought to construe their heritage articulation. This was possible to capture with the concepts and theoretical framework that this thesis applied, performativity and consumption imagination.

This thesis can therefore further align with the authors Hannam and Yankovska (2018) and Rush-Cooper (2020) who have sought to analyse with concepts of performativity and embodiment the more unrepresentable part of the experience of the visitors of the exclusion zone. This study was able to supplement these researches by providing an insight on performativity and embodiment that was grounded on the perspective of the respondents themselves. There is not a single type of tourists who enter the exclusion zone. As this study indicated there are several patterns of performativity and visitors engage and negotiate these patterns on the basis of different tour choices. As Hannam and Yankovska (2018) argue that visitors spatial mobilities are highly different than the ones of the former residents, this study was able to exemplify that even the different visitors' categories spatial practices area highly different. Moreover, this study challenges the notion of these authors that for the visitors "the mobilities experienced are somewhat less embodied and more visual" (Hannam & Yankovska, 2018: 327). Clearly visitors sought varying intensities of embodied sensory experiences, while visiting the zone. Indeed, this was one the most crucial components behind the material anchoring of narrative imagination in Chernobyl.

The initial research question that this research posed did not seek to investigate the motivations of visitors of the Chernobyl exclusion zone. It sought to expose the different narrative articulations of the different visitors' categories and how they imaginatively reconstrue these narratives while visiting Chernobyl. It found that there is a wish through different consumption intensities to engage with the exclusion zone. It does not give an explanation on the motivations *per se*, but it contributes to the discoveries of previous scholars such as Hannam and Yankovska (2013), Hutching and Linden (2018) and Banaszkiwicz and Duda, (2019) who have proposed different drives and motivations for the type of tourism in the exclusion zone. Hannam and Yankovska (2013) conclude from the point of view of tour guides that visitors expect an educational experience in order to explore the impacts of the disaster. Hutching and Linden (2018) propose that there are existential motivations behind the

tourism in Chernobyl and Banaszekiewicz and Duda, (2019) investigate the impact of the videogames in the consumer experience. This study elaborated how different visitors performed and articulated the exclusion zone. In such it gave a more elaborated account on the performances and embodied drives of the visitors through the holistic approach it absorbed. Therefore, this study equally contributes to the discussion on the visitors' motivations by providing a holistic picture on sought experiences in the heritage site of Chernobyl. Chernobyl exclusion zone as a destination for dissonance heritage promotes the more intangible and experiential aspects of heritage destination, such as the atmosphere, animation, and a sense of place, and these are the means how the visitors construe their experiences.

A furthermore research with which the finding of this research can be contrasted is the one conducted by Brunnsden and Goatcher (2011). The authors have proposed that the visitors' pictures taken in the exclusion zone are attempts to present the unrepresentable, "attempts to create an attentive representation of the pervasive anxiety of risk society" (Brunnsden & Goatcher, 2011: 132), this study challenges this notion. This study was able to present three type of sets of photographs that the respondents had taken during their visits. These photographs cannot be read only as traces of sublime tourists, rather these photographs exemplify highly different modes of engagement with the area and different visitors' styles to articulate the area. I would further argue that the three different visitor categories of this thesis provide three different experiential windows into the exclusion zone and the interpretation of its socio-cultural meaning.

Whereas Brunnsden and Goatcher (2011: 131) proposes that there is "a divide between a proposed desire to depict more than the visual surface or experience, which remains uncapturable with camera technology", I would challenge this notion by arguing that the visitors' photographs exemplify the tour specific ways of explorations and the experiences that visitors sought from the zone. Pictures may not replicate the deeply felt, embodied sensations as those are lived in the actual space, but those forward the visitor specific ways to reconstrue and co-produce the space. These visual and performative articulations that this study identified were as follows, *the tale of the mighty nature*, *the tale of apocalyptic afterness* and *the tale of the mythical zone*. Indeed, these pictures can be seen as tour specific practices of consuming the narratives of Chernobyl's storyscape.

Chernobyl exclusion zone and the heritage it stands for does not create a single narrative authority. It is exactly due to this heritage character why it enables varying narrative articulations in one place. The contribution of this study is that it could identify these different narrative articulations. Moreover, it exemplifies the heritage making patterns of the tourists by elaborating those embodied sensory engagement with the heritage site they sought. The drive of this type of tourism seems to lie on its

affectivity and the dynamics that it consists is located on the individuals desire to determine over the embodied affective encounters with the given place. This comprises the dynamics of the storyscape, and the tourist desire to seek places that would be untainted by the commercial emotional management of the tourism industry (Brunsden & Goatcher, 2011). This study might provide explanation power regarding the future tourism dynamics and the development of tourism in the exclusion zone.

5.1 Limitations

As the case study style of this thesis already indicates, the object of this study is geographically located context, the Chernobyl exclusion zone. Furthermore, as this research was conducted in a case study style, it elaborated the tourism dynamics in this given context. It will provide a certain contribution to the discussion of performativity and tourist's imagination generally, but the discoveries of this study stem from a rather unique heritage site. Therefore, the dynamics that this study discovered and especially the narrative articulations that this study identified are suitable for making sense of the tourism in the context of this research particularly.

5.2 Avenues for the future research

As this thesis has covered the development of tourism and tourism imaginaries in the Chernobyl exclusion through three different tourist groups, there would be several possible avenues to continue from here. I would argue that the dynamics of commercialization and gradual marketization would provide a unique lens, through which to analyse the differentiation of heritage making patterns and possible changes in the experiences of the visitors and heritage outcomes in the zone.

As this study absorbed the concept of performativity from the point of view of mobility and consumption imagination, performativity could be used in a sense that it would more investigate the characteristics of these different visitor categories that this study identified by turning the analytical focus of the performativity towards these different visitor entities. Indeed, interesting follow-up study could continue with the performativity from the point of view of agency. Equally the concepts of place-attachment and risk perceptions could provide more insights into the topic of tourism in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.

The branch of visual sociology could engage with this topic equally, there could be a further study which would investigate more carefully the evolution of the tourists' photographs from the early years of tourism in the exclusion zone.

I would encourage to absorb creative usage of different methodological tools. Therefore, I would suggest more experimental approaches which would combine various sources of data, such as photographs, video, and audio material. More participatory and ethnographic approaches would be suitable for attending to the complexity and multi-layeredness of this topic and its social realities.

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Figure 3. Distribution of visitors according to the country to of origin 2017-2019. State agency of Ukraine on exclusion zone management, 2020. Chernobyl tourist boom: over 100,000 people visited the zone of alienation this year. [online] Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/dazv.gov.ua/photos/a.610552405641548/2982945531735545/?type=3&theater>> [Accessed 8 August 2020].

Photographic References:

Cover Page, Pripyat Ferris Wheel, author's own collection

Figure 9. Azure-swimming pool in Pripyat, respondent 9

Figure 10. The Pripyat Ferris Wheel, respondent 35

Figure 11. Bumper Cars in Pripyat amusement park, respondent, 5

Figure 12. Radioactive sign front of the Red Forest, respondent 35

Figure 13. Mural in Pripyat, respondent 5

Figure 14. An evening view over the city of Pripyat, 10

Figure 15. Inside the Jupiter Plant, respondent 19

Figure 16. Pripyat barber shop, respondent 16

Figure 17. Golden Key Kindergarten, respondent 27

Figure 18. Kopachi Kindergarten, respondent 12

Figure 19. Hospital no. 126 in Pripyat, respondent, respondent 3

Figure 20. Illegal visitor on top of the Duga-radar, respondent 6

Figure 21. Under the electricity pylons, respondent 17

Figure 22. Inside Pripyat morgue, respondent 6

Figure 23. Hiking through the forest of exclusion zone, respondent 6

Figure 24. Illegal visitors rest while hiking through the zone, respondent 11

Figure 25. Illegal visitors on the roof top in Pripyat, respondent 6

Figure 26. Pripyat Ferris wheel by night, respondent 8

6.1. Appendix 1

Interview Questionnaire - Expert Interview

1. How long you have been involved in the area and in which roles?
2. What are the changes in the area that you have been witnessing during this period?
3. What are the traces that increased number of tourists leave in the area?
4. Has the character of the area changed as a result of increased tourism?
5. When I look at pictures that have been taken in Chernobyl more than 10 years ago, those seems to me to have a different style. Certain dramatic language with gas masks and dolls has been intensified, what is your interpretation on this?
6. As the number of tourists has increased, is the photographic behaviour of tourists different?
7. Photographing is big part of the tourism in the exclusion zone, what do you think about it?
8. It is quite evident that some scenes are staged, who is behind this staging?
9. What do you think about the commercialization of the exclusion zone?
10. How do you see the future of the exclusion zone?

| Respondent and the date of interview | Area of expertise |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Kirill Stepanets, October 2019 | Illegal guide |
| Taras Shumeyko, October 2019 | Journalist |
| Pierpaolo Mittica, December, 2019 | Journalist, photographer |
| Mário Lobo, December, 2019 | Tour entrepreneur, Iron Curtain Tours |
| Olena Fomina, March, 2020 | Tour entrepreneur, Gamma Travel |
| Alex, April, 2020 | Tour Guide, ChernobylLab. |

6.2 Appendix 2

Interview Questionnaire – Respondent Interviews

1. When did you visit the exclusion zone?
2. What type of tour it was?
3. On what basis you chose the particular tour?
4. How did you became interested to visit Chernobyl?
5. Did you have any pre-ideas before you went there?
6. From which type of sources you have gathered your pre-knowledge of Chernobyl?
7. Could you describe me freely your tour?
8. What were the most memorisable parts of it?
9. Before your visit, were you familiar with visual material and photographs that have been taken in Chernobyl?
10. What was the impact of this material on you?
11. What was interesting to you to photograph in Chernobyl?
12. Was there something that was not?
13. What is the meaning of the exclusion zone for you?
14. Are you planning to visit the exclusion zone again?
15. What would be the best way to preserve the area?