Visiting death and life: Tourists' motivation for engaging in dark tourism

Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree

Bachelor of Business Administration in

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Submitted to Marion Garaus

Kathrin Gauß

1611068

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Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

_19.8.2020_

Date

1 Abstract

Dark tourism has become the dominant term for any tourism site associated with death, disaster, suffering, or violence (Boateng et al. 2018). In recent years, the media attention and the interest in visiting sites where adverse historical events occurred emerged immensely. However, research about the tourists' overall experience at dark sites is rare.

As a result, this bachelor thesis investigates tourists' motivation for taking part in dark tourism using the example of the *Mauthausen memorial site* in Austria. The researcher used an exploratory research design to examine the main reasons for the visit and the emotions experienced on-site.

On the one hand, data was gathered from academic literature and analyzed thematically. The findings show that the motivation partly affects the dark tourist's experience and that individual emotional reactions affect the tourist experience itself. Moreover, researchers found that the interaction between the tourist and the attraction plays a significant role in the experience.

On the other hand, primary data necessary to reach this paper's aim is contributed by sixteen in-depth interviews. The implications of the findings are provided and critically discussed at the end of the paper.

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4 Introduction

Visitors to the *Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial and museum* have increased to 2.3 million per year, the *9/11 memorial and museum* attracts up to 3.5 million tourists, and the *Anne Frank House* welcomes around 1.3 million dark tourism enthusiasts annually (Anne Frank Homepage 1 2019; Mehr als 2,3 Millionen Menschen besuchten 2019 ehemaliges NS-Vernichtungslager 2020; Yan et al. 2016).

Places known for a natural or anthropogenic disaster are not merely places of remembrance but instead became tourist attractions in recent years (Kang et al. 2012). Cemeteries, mausoleums, battlefields, and sites related to mass death are among other so-called dark tourism sites (Kang et al. 2012).

The phenomenon of traveling to places with this background is well recognized under terms like thanatourism, war tourism, black spot tourism, holocaust tourism, and military tourism. Dark tourism is the term most widely used by researchers and the media (Kang et al. 2012).

Nowadays, dark tourism sites are found worldwide, with only a few countries excluded from human tragedy over time (Krisjanous 2016). "Dark tourism contributes to economic growth and creates an avenue to reflect on experiences of societies" (Boateng et al. 2018: 104). The tourist experience is composed of everything a tourist undergoes at an attraction or destination, involving the individual behavior, perception, cognition, and emotion (Oh et al. 2007). Tourists as consumers are self-directed, active, and self-expressive while being co-creators of their own experience (Piet 2004, cited in Bosangit et al. 2015: 2).

The primary goal of this bachelor thesis is to get a deeper understanding of the tourists' motivation for dark sites related to the growing interest in dark tourism itself (Kang et al. 2012). This research focuses on the demand side of dark tourism by evaluating visitor experiences at a contemporary dark tourism site: the *Mauthausen memorial* in Austria. The *Mauthausen memorial site* memorializes and commemorates the cruelty of the Holocaust in Europe between 1938 and 1945. The dark site opened in 1949 and provides its visitors with historical and political enlightenment (Mauthausen Homepage 1 2020).

4.1 Problem definition

It is essential to highlight that dark tourism is young and unexplored in many ways and that this particular form of tourism has become a field of study relatively recently (Yan et al. 2016). As a consequence, not much academic literature is available so far. Considering this, the researcher was especially interested in going in-depth with the matter from the tourist's perspective, away from the supply side of tourism.

Experiences are sold by the tourism industry every day (Bosangit et al. 2015). Kang et al. (2012) believe that dark tourism attractions can offer a vital tourism experience while simultaneously raising new anxieties and consciousness (Ashworth & Hartmann 2005). Here the question arises if it is ethical to *sell* a disastrous event or not. Ethical concerns will always be present when places associated with death have turned into attractions for financial gain. It is necessary to figure out if and how these attractions supply educational services to their visitors and what the actual tourists, who are deciding to see such places think about this issue themselves (Kang et al. 2012).

Dark tourism attractions provide individual experiences (educational, emotional, or entertaining), as intentions, beliefs, expectations, and tourists' motivation differ extremely (Kang et al. 2012). Therefore, it is significant for researchers to investigate the tourists' perspective of dark tourism and examine what motivates tourists to visit sites allied with cruel events to comprehend them and their behavior more. However, this is not merely interesting for researchers, but rather valuable information for the dark tourism attractions and stakeholders to provide the best quality and service. Their focus should be on offering memorable, positive experiences, making tourists revisit or recommend the site (Chandralal & Valenzuela 2013).

4.2 Aim of this research

The researcher's main aim was to identify the reason and motivation for visiting sites with a negative association and what feelings visitors experience on-site. Humans' interaction with their physical and social environment, motivation, and emotions are subjects of interest for researchers for quite some time (Grove & Flick 1997). Emotions are subconscious reactions to environmental stimuli and the physical needs of a person (Gnoth & Zins 2009).

Based on field-related academic literature, surveys, and interviews, the researcher will answer the following *two* questions:

• What motivates a person to travel to a dark site?

• What emotions does a person experience at a dark site?

The researcher chose a qualitative research approach by conducting sixteen in-depth interviews. Dark tourists from different European countries were interviewed about their visit to the *Mauthausen memorial site* in Austria. Furthermore, experts working at the *Mauthausen memorial* were the focal point in trying to answer the research questions.

Additionally, literature from academic sources was used to get a better idea and explain the findings accurately. It was of high importance that the researcher closely watched and examined the content in order to conclude the discussion topic.

5 Background of the study – Literature review

5.1 The concept of dark tourism

Dark tourism is defined as traveling to sites and attractions related to historically noteworthy death, horror, atrocity, human tragedy, and disaster (Dunkley et al. 2011; Podoshen 2013; Yan et al. 2016). Lennon and Foley (2000) were the first researchers that introduced the concept of dark tourism in their book *Dark Tourism. The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. They thematized it as a phenomenon located in heritage tourism with meanings deduced from media and encounter with rational behavior (Lennon & Foley 2000).

Seaton (1996, cited in Podoshen 2013: 264) states that the interest in death is a general affair, rather than person-specific. Nevertheless, it is a unique social phenomenon for many researchers, as the fascination among tourists has promptly grown over the last years (Yan et al. 2016). From 2001 to 2010, more memorial museums and dark tourist attractions opened worldwide than in the 20th century (Williams 2007).

Dark tourism serves as a connection between humans and death and allows death to be a significant part of societal discussions (Stone & Sharpley 2008). Moreover, it provides an educational as well as emotional tourism experience. Dark tourism attractions deliver vital messages about the past and transform the horror of yesterday into today's business while serving an emotional or therapeutic function (Kang et al. 2012).

In 2006, Stone came up with a dark tourism spectrum, extending from the darkest to the lightest aspects (Yoshida et al. 2016). He wanted to be able to analyze the supply side of dark tourism better. As shown in *Figure 1*, this spectrum involves elements such as the political influence and ideology of an attraction, affinity, the educational orientation on-site, the purposefulness of the supply, and the perceived authenticity of the tourism product and location (Yoshida et al. 2016).
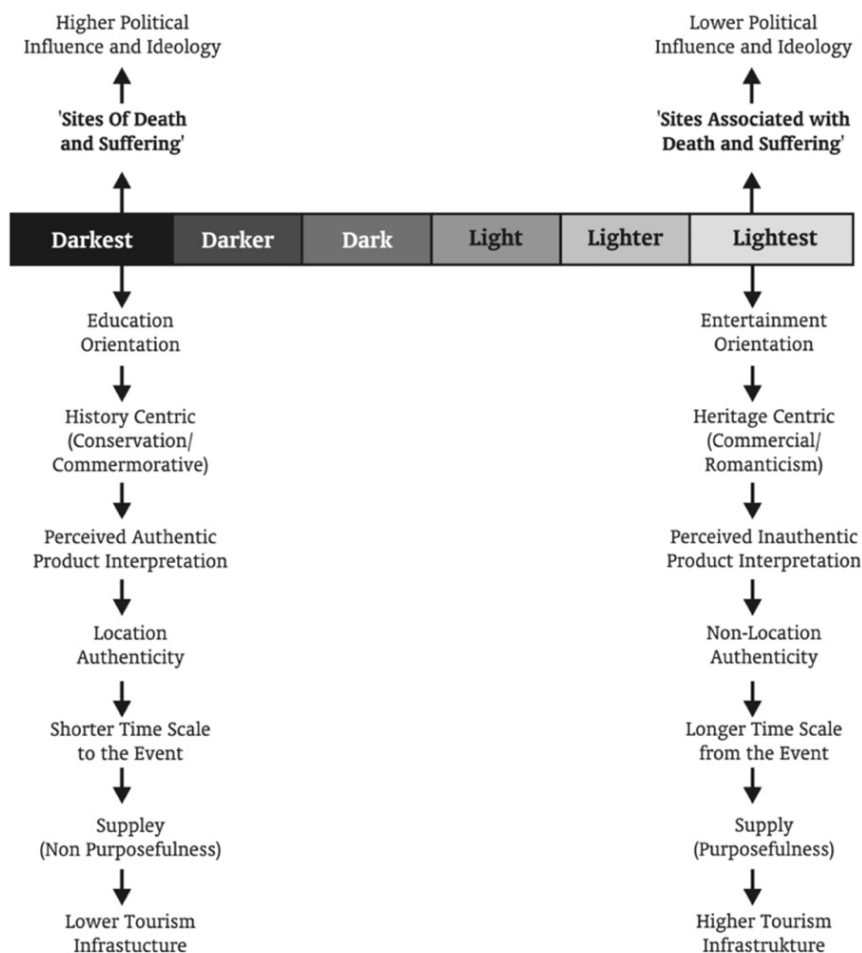

Figure 1: A Dark Tourism Spectrum (Stone 2006)

For a better understanding, Miles (2002) brought the example of the *Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial* in Poland and the *US Holocaust memorial museum* in Washington. Even if both sites are connected through the same history, the *Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial* is darker, according to Stone's dark tourism spectrum. "The main contention is that the US Holocaust Memorial Museum is merely associated with death, whilst Auschwitz-Birkenau is of death and possesses a crucial locational authenticity within its product design" (Stone 2006: 152).

On the other side of the scale, and a very light form of a dark tourism attraction is the *Dracula Park* in Romania (Dracula heads for Bucharest 2003). It is an example of a so-called *dark fun factory*, were entertaining the visitors is in the foreground, rather than delivering actual product, historical, and educational content. However, it is clear that sites related to death and tragedy progressively form an essential part of the modern tourism landscape (Lennon & Foley 2000).

5.2   Examples of well-known dark tourism attractions

Dark tourism attractions investigate, remember, and pay tribute to some of the cruelest tragedies' humans have self-imposed in history (Madden 2019). They are found worldwide and differ in authenticity, educational services offered, and darkness of the attraction, depending on the event that occurred on-site (Madden 2019).

Besides the well-known attractions mentioned in the *following chapter*, researchers conducted surveys and interviews based on some other dark tourism attractions to understand the dark tourists' behavior better. These are namely, the *Merry Cemetery* in Romania, *Sichuan* in China, the *Cape Coast Castle* in Ghana as well as the *Jeju April 3rd Peace Park*, located in Korea (Biran et al. 2014; Boateng et al. 2018; Kang et al. 2012; Mionel 2020).

5.2.1 Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial and museum, Poland

Figure 2: Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial (KZ-Inschrift "Arbeit macht frei" in Auschwitz gestohlen 2009 / Photo: dpa 2009)

With more than 1.1 million people dying there between 1940 and 1945, the *Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp*, located in Poland, was the largest German Nazi death camp and extermination center (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & Museum Homepage 1 2020). There, prisoners were conquered to inhuman medical experiments, forced labor, and mass killings (Khan 2016). It consisted of the main camp *Auschwitz I*, the extermination camp *Auschwitz II*, which had plenty of gas chambers, the labor camp *Auschwitz III* and several subcamps. On 27th January 1945, the Red Army liberated the survivors from the central and more than 40 subcamps. Since 2005, that day is known as the *International Holocaust Remembrance Day* (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & Museum Homepage 2 2020).

The *Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial and museum* opened in 1947 by Poland and is an essential symbol of the Holocaust. Today, it serves as an archive, research and publishing center, and the most well-known dark tourism attraction, which raises consciousness and memorializes the victims and educates (Hodgkinson 2013). 1979 the *Auschwitz-Birkenau museum* was inscribed on the *World Heritage List* by UNESCO (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & Museum Homepage 3 2020).

Visitors of the *Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial* not merely see the original grounds, camp blocks, barracks, and guard towers, but rather a collection of items from former prisoners, such as shoes, suitcases, striped camp garments, and thousand kitchen utensils (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & Museum Homepage 5 2020).

The *International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust (ICEAH)* is a part of the *Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial*. It was established to inform and educate the history of the *Holocaust* and the *Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp* (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & Museum Homepage 4 2020). The center's activities are mainly made for pupils, students, and teachers and include educational projects, conferences, thematic sessions, e-learning opportunities, exhibitions, and individual school class visits on-site. The *Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial and museum* tells the story of former concentration camp prisoners, the *Holocaust*, and enlightens at the same time the current generation (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & Museum Homepage 4 2020).

5.2.2 Anne Frank House, the Netherlands

Figure 3: Anne Frank House (Das Anne-Frank-Haus n.d.)

Anne Frank was a Jewish girl, born in Frankfurt am Main in 1929, who moved to Amsterdam with her family, due to the unfortunate economic situation and the hatred of the Jews, that took place in Germany at that time (Anne Frank Homepage 2 2020). During the Netherlands' squatting through the Nazis in 1942, she hid in an annex in the house, which later became the famous *Anne Frank museum*. She wrote a diary while hiding, which became one of the most read and vital books in the world. Anne Frank died in 1945 in the *Bergen-Belsen concentration camp* due to exhaustion (Anne Frank Homepage 2 2020).

The *Anne Frank museum* was founded in 1957 together with Anne Frank's father, Otto Frank, and opened in 1960 (Anne Frank Homepage 3 2020). He also was the person responsible for the publication of Anne Frank's diary.

The *Anne Frank museum* provides its' visitors with information about Anne Franks' life through original items, photos, videos, and quotes. Tourists' have the opportunity to visit Anne Frank's room, the annex, and temporary exhibitions such as *The other home of the Frank family.* Moreover, a diary room, where the original diary is on display, that Anne Frank received for her 13th birthday (Anne Frank Homepage 4 2020). The museum tells the story of Anne Frank in the most authentic and non-committal way.

Educational services are offered on-site and online for people of every age (Anne Frank Homepage 5 2020). Especially, pupils and students can learn a lot about the persecution of the Jews, Anne Frank, the *Second World War*, and human rights. The Anne Frank House offers digital lessons and workshops, a memory walk, and the *Anne Frank Youth Network*. Among others, small exhibitions, potential school projects, and interactive online lesson material about discrimination are provided (Anne Frank Homepage 5 2020). The *Anne Frank museum* is a major dark tourism attraction that raises awareness of the *Holocaust* and the *Second World War* (Busby 2015).

5.2.3   National 9/11 memorial and museum, United States of America
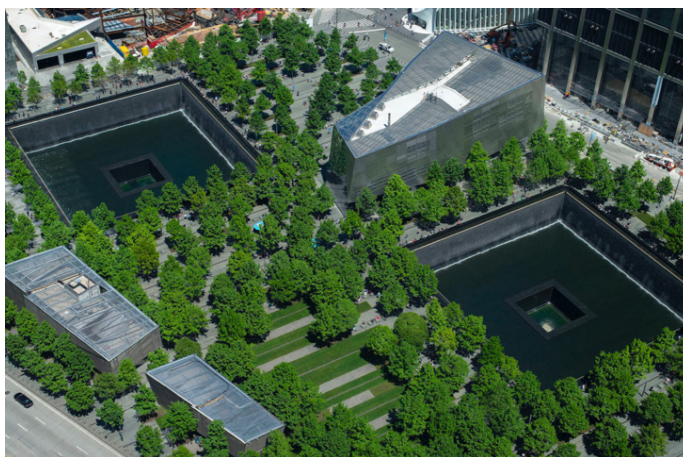
Figure 4: Ground Zero (9/11 Memorial & Museum Homepage 1 2020 / Photo: Jin S. Lee n.d.)

On 26th February 1993, six people died during the bomb attack at the World Trade Center in New York City, and on 11th September 2001, almost 3000 people were killed in the terror attacks there (9/11 Memorial & Museum Homepage 2 2020).

The *9/11 memorial* opened on 11th September 2011, exactly ten years after the act of cruelty took place. The *9/11 museum* was inaugurated in 2014 in the presence of former President Barack Obama (9/11 Memorial & Museum Homepage 1 2020). The

9/11 memorial is constituted of two *memorial pools*, built in place of the original North and South towers, having the names of all victims engraved on bronze parapets. Moreover, around 400 swamp white oak trees, called the *Survivor Trees,* fill the space between the two pools, and a *9/11 memorial glade*, honoring the sick and dead, was erected. Under the memorial, the *9/11 museum* serves as the countries' leading institution for telling, teaching, and enlighten the events of 9/11 to the public (9/11 Memorial & Museum Homepage 1 2020).

The *9/11 memorial and museum* offers learning opportunities and essential information for pupils, students, teachers, and other interested parties who want to dispute further with the subject matter (9/11 Memorial & Museum Homepage 3 2020). By providing educational content and services online and on-site, such as film screenings, workshops, panel discussions, online lessons, and guided tours, the *9/11 memorial and museum* wants to show the importance of the 9/11 attacks and inform about terrorism in general. Especially for visitors with children, the *9/11 memorial and museum* offers age-appropriate activity stations, where children learn about the continuing impact of terror attacks in the United States of America and globally (9/11 Memorial & Museum Homepage 4 2020).

Visitors get to know personal stories of loss, recovery, and hope by showing videos, narratives, and a collection of authentic artifacts (9/11 Memorial & Museum Homepage 4 2020). They can immerse themselves in the world of terrorism and exchange opinions through communities, constituted by the *World Trade Center Memorial Foundation*. The *9/11 memorial and museum* is one of the world's most famous dark tourism attraction, by enlightening its visitors about the human tragedy that occurred on-site nineteen years ago.

5.3   Dark tourism benefits

5.3.1   Awareness-raising of society

Dark tourism may seem quite morbid for most people; nevertheless, it supplies a crucial societal benefit by encouraging the tourists to learn from dark periods in human history (Robinson 2016). Nowadays, the ease of access to social media platforms, such as *Instagram* and *Twitter*, as well as the 24-hour news cycle, led to an

increase in society's fascination and awareness of historical sites of war and conflict (Robinson 2016). Dark tourism also appreciates particular attention in blogs and charged streaming platforms like *Netflix* (Mionel 2020). In 2018 the documentary series called *Dark Tourist*, presented by the journalist David Farrier was released, showing, and exploring dark tourism attractions worldwide (Netflix Homepage 2018).

5.3.2   Benefits for visitors

The most significant perceived benefit of visiting a dark site is its educational function for the visitor. To engage with and internally relive a part of history as shocking as the *Holocaust* can have a high impact on a person's mental health, sense of empathy, and understanding of the dark side of human nature, while also keeping the memory alive (Mionel 2020).

Kang et al. (2012) showed that a benefit-based approach was the most effective way to evaluate visitors' subjective experience of the *Jeju April 3rd Peace Park*. The study's implications showed that most tourists saw the most prominent benefits in learning: family bonding, meaningfulness, and comfort from achieving internal obligation. Whereas learning is a common benefit of many attractions, especially within heritage tourism, family bonding manifests the distinctive characteristics of dark tourism. Families that have not been victims of the incident felt strong feelings of gratitude and fortunateness while raising a better understanding for the victims and their families. It can be said that tourists often use the words *enjoyable* or *amusing* when discussing their last visit or trip. In comparison, tourists of the *Jeju April 3rd Peace Park* described their visit of the dark site overall as *meaningful*. The last benefit mentioned by Kang et al. (2012), namely the comfort from achieving internal obligation, substantiates the therapeutic effect and feelings of psychological healing experienced by dark tourists.

5.4   Motivations for visiting a dark site

Motivation is critical for researchers to understand why people travel and engage in particular activities (Pearce 2005). The motivation of dark tourists is often to have a novice experience or to gain knowledge about something new (Sharpley & Stone 2009). In detail, widespread motivations include finding oneself, the willingness to get to know diverse cultures and a piece of history, and the interest for the psychological undercurrents of specific places. To feed the quest for this special thrill, dark tourists

need to explore, what sometimes includes the pursuit of risky actions. People who feel less stimulation in their lives are more likely to search for that stimulation when traveling. However, Dann (1998, cited in Podoshen 2013: 269), thinks that an essential motivation for engaging in dark tourism is status enhancement affiliated to witnessing death.

Moreover, MacCannell (1976), states that a vital incentive in today's tourism industry is the search for authenticity. Tourists are seeking for a self-transformation, precipitated through the interaction with others and through tangling with authentic cultures (Cohen 2011).

Biran et al. (2014) summarized three primary motivations of tourists engaging in dark tourism. First, morbid fascination for death and tragedy, second, the awareness of one's benefits of life and mortality, and the neutralization of negative emotions that death brings, by participating in educational services supplied on-site.

5.5 Emotions experienced in tourism

Emotions are short-lived, intense, and usually associated with a specific referent that can activate a response behavior (Cohen & Areni 1991). Emotions play a significant role in human experiences in general, especially when determining unforgettable tourist experiences, wherefore emotions have received unequaled attention in the tourism and marketing realm (Tung & Ritchie 2011). Servidio and Ruffolo (2016) found that emotions change during the different phases of the tourist experience. They are coherent to the environmental stimuli, the physical needs of a person, and the motivation for visiting a particular site. Moreover, the emotions a person experiences while visiting an attraction are related to personal and interpersonal factors and the emotional condition of the respective (Servidio & Ruffolo 2016). They play a significant part in a person's quality of life and physical and psychological well-being (Pressman et al. 2013).

5.6 Emotional experiences of dark tourists on-site

The contemporary conceptual construct that measures the tourist experiences includes several variables, such as hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty (Oh et al. 2007).

Researchers have found that even though most tourism industry experiences tend to be positive, tourists who participate in dark tourism are likely to undergo negative emotions, like fear, anger, sadness, or grief (Biran et al. 2011). Visiting this kind of sites may also head to sophisticated experiences with positive outcomes (Biran & Poria 2012).

Dark tourism attractions try to stimulate their visitors by making tours more meaningful and keeping the individual experience (Yoneyama 1999). They often try to convey educational, historical heritage, and political information to the visitors (Cohen 2011).

"Dark tourism offers both an educational and emotional tourism experience, conveying important messages related to gaining knowledge of past events" (Lennon & Foley 2000, cited in Kang et al. 2012: 258). A distinction needs to be made between sites that serve an educational purpose, such as memorials and cemeteries, and sites where entertainment with a whiff of fictional horror is provided, like *dark fun factories* or *horror theme parks*. These fun factories focus on the combination of real and fictional death, while dark sites with a background of disaster or mass death evoke a sense of fear in a completely separate way (Kang et al. 2012).

"Dark tourism is a psychological consumption process that offers tourists desired psychological outcomes and actual psychological outcomes to satisfy tourists' emotional demands" (Yan et al. 2016: 110). Whether the emotional or educational aspect influences a tourist experience depends on a range of factors, such as the authenticity of the dark tourist attraction, the media coverage, and the types of interpretation available (Kang et al. 2012). As the interpretation is the primary means of communication and information about a site, it plays a crucial role in a dark tourist's experience on-site (Kang et al. 2012).

6 Methodology

6.1 Research design and research instrument

For this bachelor thesis, the exploratory research design type seemed appropriate to the researcher. The method, as well as the study design, are always conditional on the

research questions. This study aimed to generate insights and deepen the understanding of tourists' motivations for engaging in dark tourism. The exploratory research design is mainly used for new research topics, the case with dark tourism, or when an existing issue is shown from a new perspective (Mason et al. 2010).

Equally important is the analysis of primary data. Qualitative data acquisition is increasingly recognized, as it emerged as a solidly constituted scientific research method over the last years (Sutton 2007). This method helps understand what already exists in the field of interest and shows where research gaps and theoretical disputes over concepts are in place by gathering all data necessary and subsequently examining the content of data (Flick 2006). Qualitative data acquisition, among others, often consists of individual and focus group interviews or participant observation on describing best how things are and how people see them (Hamilton & Finley 2020). "In general, qualitative results are textual accounts of the individual's lifeworld which reflect the diversity of their lived experiences" (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz 2013: 94).

Subsequently, purposeful criterion sampling was used for this study. It is often applied in qualitative research and helps the researcher understand prior studies that fulfill specific pre-defined criteria (Harsh 2011). The purpose of criterion sampling is to identify and select information-rich cases related to the topic of interest, involving finding individuals with particular knowledge or experience with the matter (Palinkas et al. 2013). The effective use of limited resources is now the center of focus (Patton 2002).

Concerning the *phenomenon of interest*, it was visible in the existing literature that researchers conducted studies using the example of one dark tourism site. The persons of interest for this research were, on the one hand, tourists who have been visiting the *Mauthausen memorial site* in Austria in the last two years and, on the other hand, experts, who are employees that work at this particular dark site.

The social media platform *Instagram* was the source for finding proper participants for in-depth interviews with tourists. Due to the Covid-19 situation worldwide, the researcher decided not to conduct the in-depth interviews on-site. The participants were selected in the following way: The researcher searched for verified Instagram users who have been using the *Hashtag Mauthausen* under one of their pictures. This

way, the researcher was interested in finding participants who have been visiting the *Mauthausen memorial site* in Austria between 2019 and 2020.

Furthermore, for the in-depth interviews with experts, the researcher contacted the *Mauthausen memorial site's* office. Five employees, three working in the visitor center and as a tour guide, and two employees responsible for the educational work on-site, were selected as the right participants to get a comprehensive insight.

As the *Mauthausen memorial site* is located in Austria, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews in German and English. Every interviewee had the choice concerning the interview language. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews using the website *https://www.umfrageonline.com* as a tool (Interview Homepage 1 2007).

6.2   Mauthausen memorial, Austria

"From 1938 to 1945, the Mauthausen concentration camp was at the center of a system of over 40 subcamps and was the main site of political, social, and racist persecution by the National Socialist regime on Austrian territory. Of a total of around 190,000 people imprisoned here, at least 90,000 were murdered" (Mauthausen Homepage 3 2020: 1). The *Mauthausen memorial site*, located in Mauthausen, Austria, is a place of memory, a former crime scene, a cemetery, and a growing place of education. With all of the above, it is a so-called dark tourism attraction.

In 1945, the site's facilities were used by the US Army, to take care of liberated concentration camp prisoners and as a prison for members of the SS. After, the Soviet army used it as barracks before it stood empty (Mauthausen Homepage 1 2020).

The former *Mauthausen concentration camp* was delivered to the Republic of Austria by the Soviet authorities on 20 June 1947 *(Figure 5)*. At this moment, the requirement was to transform the camp into a memorial site.

Figure 5: Ceremony on the Occasion of the Handing Over the Former Mauthausen Concentration Camp to the Republic of Austria (Mauthausen Homepage 1 2020 / Photo: Mauthausen Memorial / Collections, Collection BHÖ 1947)

At that time, many parts of the former concentration camp no longer existed, due to the US army burning down the barracks and the residents taking the camp's structural remains for construction (Mauthausen Homepage 1 2020). In 1949 the memorial site opened as the *Öffentliches Denkmal Mauthausen* – the *Public Mauthausen Memorial*, and changes have taken place on-site. Some areas were kept, a chapel was erected, and the Republic of Austria built a sarcophagus as a central memorial. With France revealing the first national memorial in the same year, and many nations erecting further monuments, a memorial park grew over the years *(Figure 6)*.

Figure 6: The Memorial Park at the Mauthausen Memorial (Mauthausen Homepage 1 2020 / Photo: Mauthausen Memorial / Ralf Lechner 2008)

From 1970, the former hospital building of the camp has been used as a museum. A permanent exhibition, curated by the former Mauthausen prisoner Hans Marsálek showed the history of the *Mauthausen concentration camp*, which led to the memorial sites' growing reputation of being a place for historical and political education (Mauthausen Homepage 1 2020). Moreover, the annual liberation

ceremonies that take place in the *Mauthausen memorial site* since 1946 also generated more considerable attention and awareness towards this specific topic.

The next big redesign step took place in 2003 when a *Visitor Center* was opened. Since 2013 the *Room of Names* and two permanent exhibitions are provided for visitors to remember the death of the *Mauthausen concentration camp* and its subcamps prisoners' (Mauthausen Homepage 1 2020). The *Room of Names* is a project implemented by the *Association for Remembrance and Historical Research* and the *Mauthausen memorial*. They have created a digital memorial book for more than 90.000 humans who died in Mauthausen (Mauthausen Homepage 2 2020).

In 2019, in total, 275.746 tourists visited the *Mauthausen memorial site* in Austria, from which 10.175 people participated in events on-site. The *Mauthausen memorial* offers aside from regular tickets, some educational services, such as guided tours, extended programs with a duration of 3,5 hours, film screening, and tours with a workshop to gain a better understanding of what happened there 75 years ago (Mauthausen Homepage 4 2020).

56.282 pupils as a class from Austrian schools and 15.268 pupils as a class from foreign schools have been attended an educational program/service at the *Mauthausen memorial site* in the year 2019. *Table 1* shows that with 23.951, most pupils came from new secondary schools, followed by classes from academic secondary schools and pupils, who attend a college for higher vocational education.

Type of School (Inland)	Number of Pupils
New Secondary School	23.951
Academic Secondary school	21.152
College for Higher Vocational Education	6.406
School for Children with Special Needs	75
Vocational School	1.187
University	663
Pre-Vocational School	377
School for Intermediate Vocational Education	457
Others	2.014
Total	**56.282**

Table 1: Number of Pupils Mauthausen 2019 (Blohberger, G. 2020)[1]

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[1] Translated by the Author

The nationalities of the visitors are not inquired by the *Mauthausen memorial site* employees, as categorizing a memorial site according to the nationality is problematic. During the Nazi era, belonging to a nation was a reason for imprisonment and persecution. In this respect, they do not pay any attention to the nationalities (Blohberger, G. 2020)[2].

6.3 Data collection

As mentioned in *section 6.1.* primary data was gathered by the researcher in the form of sixteen in-depth interviews for this research topic. In-depth interviews are often used to research diverse topics. The researcher gets useful insights into what participants think about the topic and further understands the interviewee's background, motivations, and opinions (Barrick 2020). It is a one-to-one interview process in which an interviewer asks semi-structured, open-ended questions in a face-to-face setting. The open-ended questions allow participants to share topics that are important to them and may be unexpected by the researcher (Barrick 2020). The interview guide's main aim was to build a set of questions around some selected themes, whereby the goal was to answer the research questions.

6.4 Data analysis

After collecting the relevant data, a qualitative content analysis of data was used for this research paper. "The main idea of the procedure of analysis is thereby, to preserve the advantages of quantitative content analysis as developed within communication science and to transfer and further develop them to qualitative-interpretative steps of analysis" (Mayring 2000: 1).

Qualitative content analysis is a method where texts will be analyzed empirically and methodological controlled within their context, without quantifying too fast (Mayring 2000). A step-by-step analysis of the material (answered interview questions) was accomplished by the researcher, following the procedure rules. The perspective and the motivation for visiting this dark attraction of each interviewee were identified, using the research questions as the center of analysis. Afterward, the study's

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[2] Translated by the Author

implications were drawn, taking some criteria of reliability and validity into account, such as contrasting the results with other studies.

6.5   Ethical issues and limitations

An ethical design and conduct are decisive in any research method. The researcher of this paper was at the same time the interviewer.

Every interviewee's privacy was respected, no personal information, such as names, were shared, and respondents were not judged based on their answers. To keep the anonymity, particularly of the experts as the *Mauthausen memorial site* requested this, the interviewer did not ask the interviewee about the respective job position on-site.

Results have been reported ethically without regard to gender, nationality, and ethnic origin. All participants of the in-depth interviews were offered access to the final research paper.

Challenges, such as giving the interviewer vague answers or an interviewee who deviated from the topic, did not occur during the in-depth interviews.

Some limitations are acknowledged. First, this study is exploratory, and the researcher had to date only a limited number of studies for reference. Second, merely a small number of sites that belong to the dark tourism spectrum have been evaluated by other researchers. Third, the sample size of eleven visitors and five experts from the *Mauthausen memorial site* in Austria is relatively small. The small sample size is not ideal, as with smaller sample sizes, the researcher has less information, and the results will be less sturdy and precious (Littler n.d.). In addition, uncertainty may occur. Besides, the results will be less sturdy and precious.

7   Implications and findings of the in-depth interviews

A total of sixteen people were interviewed about the *Mauthausen memorial* in Austria. The content and the exact questions for the in-depth interview were chosen to bets explain tourists' motivations for visiting or working at the dark site. Moreover, the researcher asked questions to better identify the emotions tourists experienced

on-site and their opinions regarding the importance of the *Mauthausen memorial*. Out of the sixteen respondents, 43.75% were female, and 56.25% male. The highest level of education that each respondent had achieved showed that 50% had a high school degree or equivalent, 37.5% received a bachelor or master diploma, leaving 12.50% with no academic qualification. The eleven dark-site visitors were asked if they were comfortable giving their nationalities. This was solely done by the interviewer, as afore mentioned, visitors are not asked their nationalities when visiting the *Mauthausen memorial.* This question found that visitors from the latter end of 2019 to the beginning of August came from Argentina, Australia, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Romania, and Austria. This goes to show that the *Mauthausen memorial site* is known worldwide and presents important significance to people from all walks of life. The experts selected for the in-depth interviews have a good and independent evaluation, as they can critically reflect the visitors' motivation.

The interviewer has identified three main motivations for participating in dark tourism, for the example of the *Mauthausen memorial site*. First, people were motivated by the general interest in history and the will to learn more about the *Nazi era*, *Second World War,* and the *Holocaust*. Reflecting brutal events, like mass death and keeping the historical memory of the tragedy is not merely essential for European citizens. The interview findings show that most people see the importance of remembering, examining, looking back on, and reappraising the tragic moments that happened there years ago. With dark tourism attractions, horrible events and the story behind those events will not fall into oblivion, as the *Nazi era* continues to affect today's society with the rise of right-wing politics all over the world. The third most common motivation for visitors was the curiosity to personally see the real locations where these tragedies took place and the somber, sobering feeling that this experience brings. This helps to better contextualize things that they have heard so much about. Feeling the authenticity on-site and grasping the reality of the attraction was vital for most of the respondents. There is not much that entrenches in one's mind more than visiting the place where such atrocities were committed.

Moreover, the tourists were asked what the primary emotions they experienced were during their *Mauthausen memorial site* visit. They had the choice between seven emotions, pre-defined by the interviewer. Besides anxiety, nervousness, grief, anger,

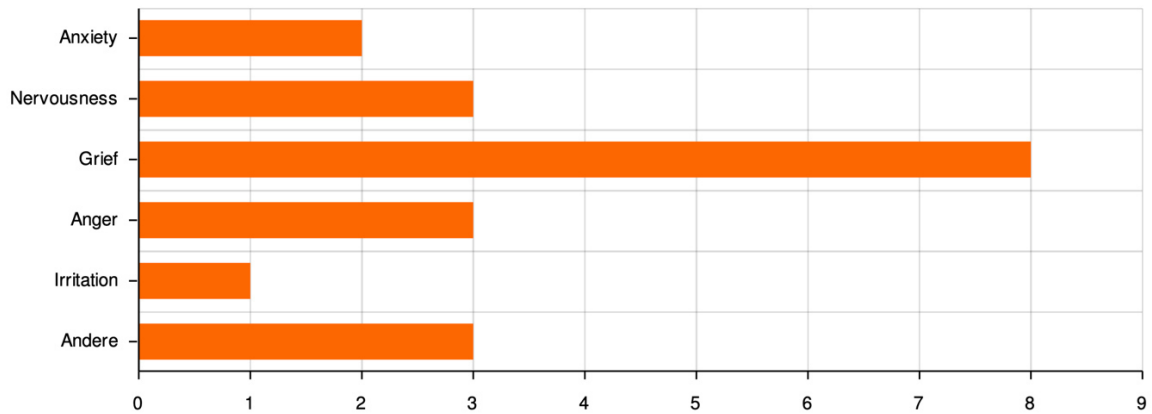irritation, enthusiasm, and satisfaction, the participants had the opportunity to mention other feelings.

Figure 7: Main Emotions Tourists' Experienced On-Site (Interview Homepage 2 2007/ Screenshot: By the Author 2020)

The responses point out that most of the interviewees felt sad, followed by nervous and angry *(Figure 7).* No participant experienced satisfaction or real excitement on-site. Instead, two interviewees mentioned that they felt great respect for the Holocaust victims and the cruel past while visiting the dark tourism attraction. The experts were also asked for their opinions concerning the emotions visitors experienced as they interact day-by-day with them. The findings show that their opinions are very similar to what the tourists answered. The experts believe that most tourists they have met at the Mauthausen memorial site felt sad, angry, and irritated. An outlier was one interviewee, who mentioned that visitors feel guilty while visiting the place of remembrance, as they experience the pain caused to the Holocaust prisoners.

The replies of the question of why people think a visit to this dark site is important were similar to the motivations for the visit of the *Mauthausen memorial*. Understanding, dealing, and learning from our history were the main points mentioned by the interviewees. Furthermore, commemorating the unpleasant tragedies from the past and respecting and paying tribute to those who lost their lives is essential today.

From the sixteen in-depth interviews, it is clear that sites related to mass death and atrocity are an essential part of our history, raising awareness by narrating and educating its visitors. Although the emotions experienced on-site were almost negative by all participants, the learning and ripening process pleased them at the end. Visiting dark tourism attractions like the *Mauthausen memorial site* in Austria can significantly impact one's individual beliefs and perceptions.

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, one can say that nowadays, dark tourism is no longer an unknown term, as there has been an overall increase in the interest in traveling to places where the worst tragedies of humanity occurred. In recent years, researchers are more trying to understand and identify the demand for participating in dark tourism (Yan et al. 2016). Dark tourism attractions are segmented into darkest to lightest aspects, depending on several factors and influences. There is a distinction between *dark fun factories* that provide entertainment and sites, such as former concentration camps, where the educational facet plays a significant role. These dark tourism sites serve as places of memorialization and remembrance, where interested parties (visitors) can interact, exchange, and improve themselves by being educated online or on-site.

A qualitative research method and an exploratory research design was chosen for this paper. The *Mauthausen memorial*, located in Austria, was the ideal dark tourism attraction for answering the research questions. Findings of the in-depth interviews advance the understanding of tourists' motivations for engaging in dark tourism better and helps to explain why such a large number of international and domestic tourists visit dark sites annually. Regarding the *Mauthausen memorial site*, the most significant knowledge gained is that what is important is not where people are from, but that they are able to remember the past and honor the victims of holocaust.

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10 Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview guide for the in-depth interview with tourists who have been visiting the *Mauthausen memorial site* in Austria between 2019 and 2020

**MAUTHAUSEN MEMORIAL SITE: INTERVIEW TOURIST
ENGLISH**

Page 1

Nationality *

Gender *

◯ Male   ◯ Female

Age *

◯ Under 18   ◯ 35-44   ◯ 65+
◯ 18-24   ◯ 45-54
◯ 25-34   ◯ 55-64

What is the highest level of school you have completed? *

◯ Less than high school degree   ◯ Bachelor degree   ◯ Ph.D.
◯ High school degree or equivalent   ◯ Graduate degree

Which of the following categories best describes your employment status? *

◯ Student/Unemployed   ◯ Self-employed   ◯ Disabled, not able to work
◯ Employed   ◯ Retired

What is the first thought that comes to your mind when thinking about the Mauthausen memorial site in Austria? *

How did you come to the idea of visiting the Mauthausen memorial site? Why exactly this dark site? *

Your biggest motivation for the trip

Did someone recommend you to visit the Mauthausen memorial site? *

When was the first time you got in touch with this topic? *

What did your family/friends say after hearing that you are visiting the Mauthausen memorial site? *

Has the reason for your visit been voluntary or mandatory nature (e.g. school, university, work)? *

◯ Voluntary　　　　　　　　　　◯ Mandatory

Have you been visiting the Mauthausen memorial site alone or accompanied by someone? *

Did you participate in any of the educational services provided at the Mauthausen memorial site (e.g. guided tour, workshop)? *

If yes, why did you choose it and how did you perceive "the extra"?

What were the main emotions you experienced during the Mauthausen memorial site visit? *

Multiple selections possible

☐ Anxiety

☐ Nervousness

☐ Grief

☐ Anger

☐ Irritation

☐ Enthusiasm/Excitement

☐ Satisfaction

☐ Other...

Why do you think a visit to the Mauthausen memorial site is important? *

Would you recommend visiting the Mauthausen memorial site to your family/friends? *

If yes, what is the major reason you would recommend it?
If no, what is the major reason you would not recommend it?

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Would you revisit the Mauthausen memorial site in Austria? *

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Have you been visiting any other dark tourism site (e.g. Ground Zero, Chernobyl)? *

If yes, which one?

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» Umleitung auf Schlussseite von Umfrage Online

Appendix 2

Interview guide for the in-depth interview with experts who are employees, working at the *Mauthausen memorial site* in Austria

KZ GEDENKSTÄTTE MAUTHAUSEN: INTERVIEW EXPERTEN

Seite 1

Geschlecht *

◯ Männlich ◯ Weiblich

Alter *

◯ Unter 18 ◯ 35-44 ◯ 65+
◯ 18-24 ◯ 45-54
◯ 25-34 ◯ 55-64

Höchste abgeschlossene Schulausbildung *

◯ Hauptschulabschluss ◯ Bachelor diplom ◯ Ph.D.
◯ Matura/Abitur oder gleichwertiges ◯ Master diplom

Was ist der erste Gedanke der Ihnen in den Sinn kommt wenn Sie an die KZ Gedenkstätte Mauthausen in Österreich denken? *

Wie sind Sie auf die Idee gekommen in der KZ Gedenkstätte Mauthausen zu arbeiten? *

Ihre größte Motivation für den Job

Wann hatten Sie zum ersten Mal Kontakt mit dieser Thematik? *

Wie haben Ihre Familie/Freunde reagiert als sie hörten, dass Sie in der KZ Gedenkstätte Mauthausen arbeiten?
*

Warum finden Sie, dass ein Besuch in der KZ Gedenkstätte Mauthausen wichtig ist? *

Würden Sie einen Besuch der KZ Gedenkstätte Mauthausen Ihrer Familie/Freunden empfehlen? *

Wenn ja, was ist Ihr Hauptgrund dafür?
Wenn nein, was ist Ihr Hauptgrund dagegen?

Haben Sie bereits eine andere "dark tourism site" besucht (z.B. Ground Zero, Tschernobyl)? *

Wenn ja, welche?

Welches Bildungsangebot das in der KZ Gedenkstätte Mauthausen angeboten wird, wird von Touristen am meisten in Anspruch genommen (z.B. geführte Tour, Workshop)? *

Was sind Ihrer Meinung nach die Hauptgründe der Touristen für den Besuch der KZ Gedenkstätte Mauthausen? *

Welche Emotionen empfinden die Touristen Ihrer Meinung nach hauptsächlich während dem Besuch der KZ Gedenkstätte Mauthausen? *

☐ Angst

☐ Nervosität

☐ Trauer

☐ Wut

☐ Irritation

☐ Begeisterung/Aufregung

☐ Zufriedenheit

☐ Andere...

» Umleitung auf Schlussseite von Umfrage Online