

## ТУРЫ В ЧЕРНОБЫЛЬСКУЮ ЗОНУ КАК ФЕНОМЕН РАЗВИТИЯ ТЕМНОГО ТУРИЗМА

А. А. РОМАНОВА<sup>1), 2)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup>Черниговский национальный технологический университет,  
ул. Шевченко, 95, 14035, г. Чернигов, Украина

<sup>2)</sup>Верховная Рада Украины, ул. М. Грушевского, 5, 01008, г. Киев, Украина

Предложено определение темного туризма. Указаны такие составляющие темного туризма, как туризм катастроф, мистический туризм, туры по кладбищам, «туры смерти». Проведено исследование спектра темного туризма. Перечислены определения черномыльского туризма, обосновано отнесение познавательных туров в зону отчуждения именно к темному туризму, а не к экстремальному. Определены и проанализированы просветительская, восстановительная, экономическая, имиджевая функции черномыльского туризма. Исследованы особенности черномыльского туризма, такие как неповторимость, формирование уникального туристического продукта, самоорганизация туристов, доминирование специализированных туроператоров, полулегальный статус туристических поездок, стремительный рост популярности, увеличение количества нелегальных туристов («сталкеров»), преобладание иностранных туристов, отсутствие развитой туристической инфраструктуры и контрольно-пропускной режим, акты вандализма в зоне отчуждения, создание сувениров, карт и компьютерных игр соответствующей тематики, высокий интерес иностранных инвесторов. Констатируется, что появление и развитие новых видов туризма (черномыльский туризм в контексте темного туризма) обязательно должны учитываться для эффективного стратегического планирования, а также более основательного анализа функционирования туристической индустрии. Предложен ряд рекомендаций для безопасного, устойчивого и экономически обоснованного развития туризма в черномыльскую зону.

**Ключевые слова:** черный туризм; черномыльский туризм; экстремальный туризм; туристическая индустрия; черномыльская зона.

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## TOURS TO THE CHERNOBYL ZONE AS A PHENOMENON OF DARK TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

A. A. ROMANOVA<sup>a, b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Chernihiv National University of Technology, 95 Shevchenko Street, Chernihiv 14035, Ukraine

<sup>b</sup>The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 5 M. Grushevskogo Street, Kyiv 01008, Ukraine

The definition of the dark tourism has been proposed in the article. The components of dark tourism are presented, such as: disaster tourism, mystical tourism, tombstone tourism, death tours. The research of the dark tourism spectrum has

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### Автор:

**Анна Анатольевна Романова** – кандидат экономических наук; доцент кафедры маркетинга, PR-технологий и логистики<sup>1)</sup>; народный депутат Украины, глава подкомитета по вопросам развития туризма, курортов и рекреационной деятельности, глава группы по межпарламентским связям с Республикой Беларусь<sup>2)</sup>.

### Author:

**Anna A. Romanova**, PhD (economics); associate professor at the department of marketing, PR-technologies and logistics<sup>a</sup>; member of the parliament, chair of the subcommittee on tourism development, resorts and recreational activities; chair of the group for inter-parliamentary relations with the Republic of Belarus<sup>b</sup>.  
[romanova.anna@rada.gov.ua](mailto:romanova.anna@rada.gov.ua)

been done. The definition of Chernobyl tourism has been given, as well as the classification of study tours to the exclusion zone as dark tourism (and not as extreme tourism) has been proved. The educational, recreational, economic and image functions of the Chernobyl tourism have been determined and analyzed. The peculiarities of Chernobyl tourism have been researched, such as: uniqueness; formation of a unique tourist product; self-organization; dominance of specialized tour operators; semi-legal status of tourist trips; rapid growth of popularity; increase in the number of illegal tourists («stalkers»); the predominance of foreign tourists; lack of developed tourism infrastructure and check-point regime; acts of vandalism in the exclusion zone; creation of souvenirs, cards and computer games on relevant topics; high interest of foreign investors etc. The emergence and development of a new type of tourism, such as Chernobyl tourism in the context of dark tourism, must be taken into account for effective strategic planning as well as a more thorough analysis of the functioning of the tourism industry. Recommendations for the safe, sustainable and economically justified tourism development in the Chernobyl zone have been suggested in the conclusions.

**Key words:** dark tourism; Chernobyl tourism; extreme tourism; tourism industry; Chernobyl zone.

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**Background.** With the processes of global economy transformations and the development of the impressions industry, the new types of tourism have appeared and become popular. In particular, dark tourism has become a new kind of travel with Chernobyl tourism as its unique variation typical only for Ukraine. Currently, tours to the exclusion zone are the most popular types of tourism in Ukraine, which by the ratio of foreign and domestic Ukrainian visitors take the first place. However, despite such rapid growth over the last decade, Chernobyl tourism remains out of the reach of massive, systematic and thorough scientific research. In addition, state institutions do not pay enough attention to thousands of tourists in the exclusion zone, although the time has come to develop a state strategy for handling the territory of the Chernobyl Nature Reserve, where the tourism part should be a significant one.

**Actual scientific researches and publications analysis.** The study of dark tourism from the point of view of motivation to visit the relevant tourist locations was firstly done by J. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley who proposed the definition of dark tourism in the scientific literature. After this, especially in the first decade of the XX century, American destinations were fascinated by the massive study of their own tourist attractions that could be attributed as the dark tourism places.

The first comprehensive and systematic attempt to study the Chernobyl tourism as a Ukrainian phenomenon of dark tourism has been done by S. Mirnyi. As an expert with the most practical experience in organizing tours to the Chernobyl exclusion zone, he has done the qualitative and quantitative analysis of visitors to the Ukrainian part of the Chernobyl zone [1].

With the support of the State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management (SAUEZM) the largest specialized tour operator «Chernobyl Tour» has developed a detailed topographic map of the Chernobyl zone in scale 1:100 000 (1 cm is equal to 1 km) in Ukrainian and English. The map is currently used by the SAUEZM, the state border guard service of Ukraine and the National Police of Ukraine.

The scientific and economic researches are mainly conducted at the level of master's and bachelor research papers by the graduates of European universities (mainly from Switzerland, Poland, Austria and Germany). However, it is necessary to conduct domestic groundbreaking studies of tourism and travel to the exclusion zone considering the enormous numbers and economic, social and image effects for Ukraine from the development of the Chernobyl tours in the context of dark tourism.

**The aim of the article** is to research and determine the concepts of dark tourism and Chernobyl tourism as its component as a phenomenon of the global industry development, as well as to analyze the peculiarities and effects of the Chernobyl tourism development.

**Results and discussion.** Dark tourism is the attending of the places associated with death (mass death/execution of people, man-made or natural disasters, cemeteries, ritual grounds etc.).

This type of tourism is a typical product of the impression industry, which is relevant to the economy of the XXI century. One of the most visited places around the world is the Dracula Castle in Romania, where the Count, who tortured people, lived by legend, and one of the most visited places by foreign tourists in Ukraine is the Chernobyl zone, the place of the largest technological catastrophe in the history of the mankind. In addition, over the past decades hundreds of tours have been done to visit the WWII concentration camps, Pearl Harbor, the Holocaust Museum, diving in the place where the Titanic sank.

The term «dark tourism» was proposed by the Americans J. John Lenon and Malcolm Foley, who published the book of the same name. According to them, dark tourism is a modern phenomenon, and therefore this type of tourism should be limited only to visiting those places where tragic events occurred no more than 100 years

ago. Thus, the visits to the places of medieval battles or ancient burials should be attributed to cognitive tourism, because they are not modern, and therefore they are not considered as dark tourism [2].

Today, dark tourism is gaining in popularity and is already *divided into other subspecies*, such as:

- disaster tourism (visits to places that have suffered natural disasters; «toxic tours» to places of ecological disasters; Chernobyl tourism – as a separate group);
- mystical tourism (trips to places with mystical legends or with paranormal activity);
- tombstone tourism in cemeteries and crematoriums;
- «death tours» (visits to places with a tragic history: concentration camps in Poland, the «Fields of Death» of Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, places of Holodomor in Ukraine, museums of torture, harsh prison, historic battlefields (for example, Gettysburg and Bosworth) and places of mass executions, areas where serial killers committed crimes, such as Andrei Chikatilo (nicknamed the Butcher of Rostov or the Red Ripper) or Jack the Ripper).

The components of dark tourism are depicted in details in fig. 1.

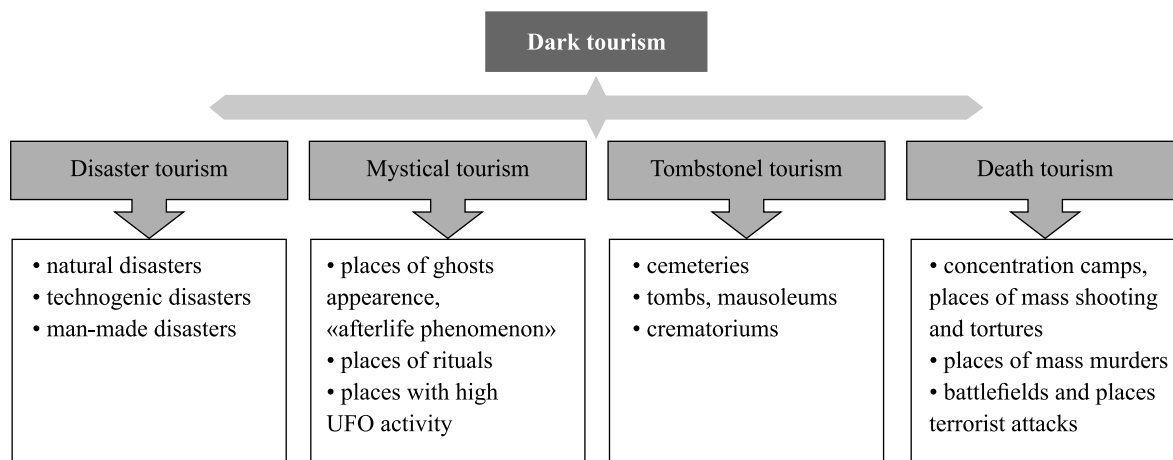


Fig. 1. Components of dark tourism.  
Source: developed by the author based on [3]

An American researcher P. Stone made the classification of dark tourism, depending on the level of «darkness»: from the darkest, which directly includes places of death and destruction (it has the strongest influence on ideology and political system) to the lightest, which is only associated with something mystical and created artificially (various «ghost-houses», fictional legends about the Loch Ness Monster etc.) [4; 5]. As for Chernobyl tourism it refers to the darkest of the variety of dark tourism by all indications (fig. 2).

Chernobyl exclusion zone is one of the most popular dark tourism destinations in the world (belongs to the technogenic disasters), as well as the most popular type of tourism in Ukraine.

Chernobyl tourism is the visiting of the Chernobyl exclusion zone, which arose as a result of an anthropogenic catastrophe – an explosion at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in 1986, with study, recreational or other tourist purposes.

An idea of the creation of a Chernobyl (memorial, cultural and natural) national park with the main component of tourism development in the exclusion zone emerged in 1998 as a result of the applied research [6]. It was the first time when the term «tourism» was used in relation to Chernobyl in the scientific literature, namely in the context of basing of radiation safety («guided tourist routes»), founded in the zone with consideration of the radiation situation at that time.

However, in practical use tourism in the Chernobyl zone in Ukraine is often referred to as type of extreme tourism. The *most common definition of extreme tourism in the scientific literature* says it's a type of tourism that combines all travels associated with active methods of travel and open-air rest with the highest risk to life [7].

Videlicet, we agree to consider Chernobyl tourism as extreme tourism only if the tours to the exclusion zone are connected with active types of outdoor pastime and sports, such as: parachute jumping in the Chernobyl zone, diving in the Pripyat River, rally in the exclusion zone, etc. However, visiting the zone with a study purpose and, at the same time, with a desire to visit a place of mass death and contamination of people relates precisely to dark tourism.

In addition, the classification of Chernobyl tourism as a radiation tourism and post-accident can be often found in the literature [1].

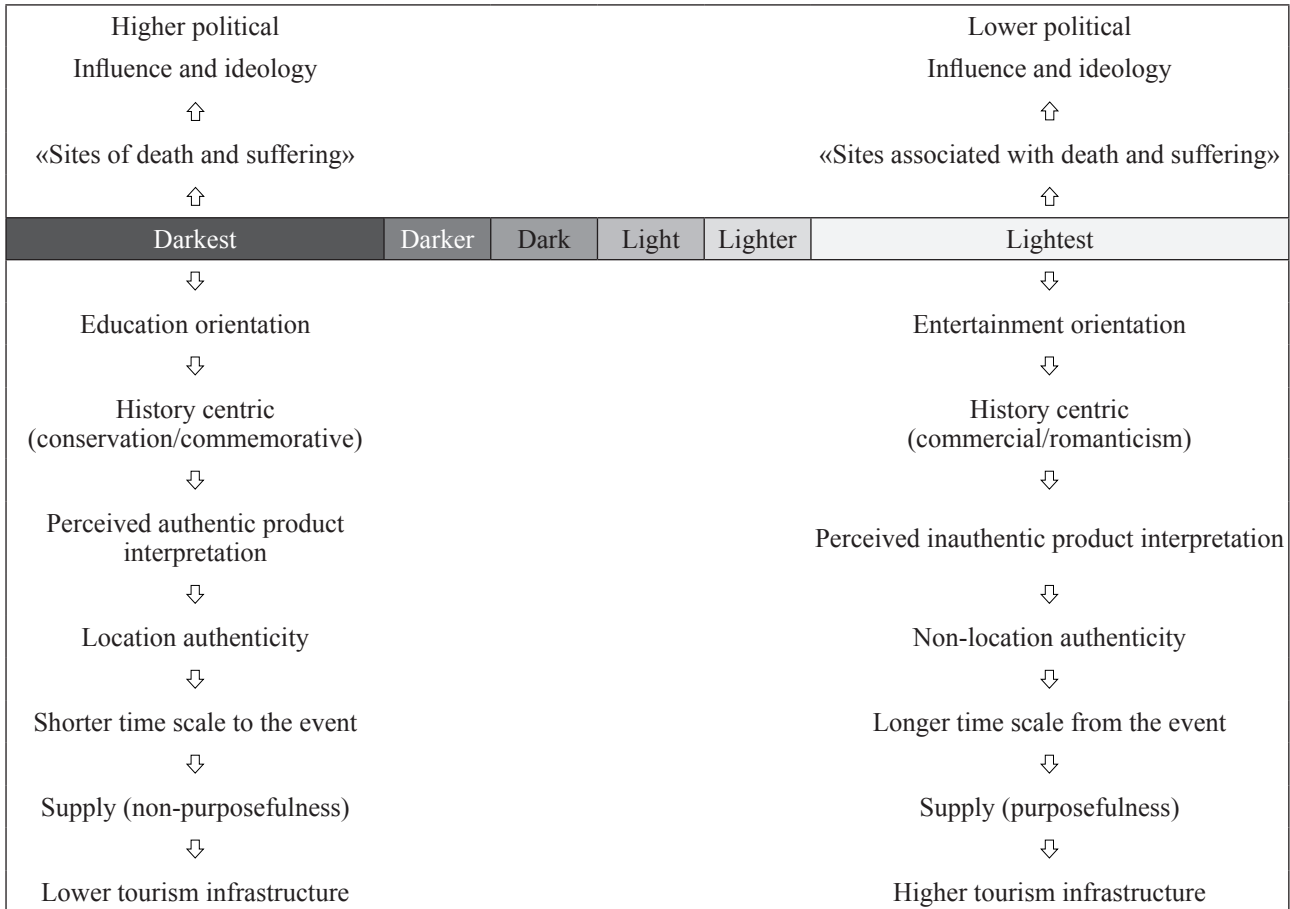


Fig. 2. The spectrum of dark tourism.  
Source: developed by the author based on [5]

The effects of Chernobyl tourism development:

1) *educational* (reducing the negative consequences of radioactive accidents, developing the emergency skills in case of anthropogenic accidents, popularization of truthful information about anthropogenic disasters and mastering of edifying lessons);

2) *regenerative* (psychological rehabilitation of aggrieved population groups and former residents of the disaster site, reduction of post-traumatic stress syndrome associated with the memorization of the Chernobyl zone; number of studies have shown that the greater negative impact on health of the evacuated residents was caused by psychogenic factors rather than radiation [6]; social, economic, humanitarian and ecological revival of both the zone itself and adjacent territories should take place as well);

3) *economic* (development of the state economy through the popularization of dark tourism as a news type of tourism. Development of other types of tourism related to Chernobyl tourism);

4) *image* (considering that more than half of the visitors of the exclusion zone are foreigners, the creation of safe, civilized, comfortable and client-oriented conditions for staying in the exclusion zone is the key to creation of a positive image of Ukraine in general; at the same time, with the disproportion of the development of various types of tourism in the country with the rapid growth of Chernobyl tourism and backlog of other types there is a threat of forming the image of the country the based on the associations with Chernobyl).

**The economic effect of Chernobyl tourism is quite significant.** Simultaneously with the appearance of the first studies of the Chernobyl zone in the late 1990s and the beginning of visiting of the territory by official delegations, Chernobyl tourism spontaneously emerged as unplanned, semi-legal (sometimes illegal) visits to the exclusion zone for study purposes, caused by the efforts to get close to a place of a mass disaster.

Visiting of the Chernobyl zone as a tourist destination has significantly transformed and acquired certain features in the last 20 years:

- formation of the tourist product of the Chernobyl zone;
- three-level self-organization of Chernobyl tourism (level of tour operators, associations of tour operators, industry);

- dominance of specialized tour operators;
- semi-legal status of tourist trips;
- rapid increase of the popularity of Chernobyl tours (fig. 3 and 4);
- increase in the number of illegal tourists («stalkers»);
- imbalance between foreign and domestic tourists in favor of foreign tourists;
- lack of developed tourist infrastructure and the checkpoint access regime;
- acts of vandalism in the exclusion zone, which threaten to reduce the tourist attractiveness of the object;
- the appearance of unique souvenirs, cards, computer games on the Chernobyl theme;
- high interest of foreign investors in the development of the Chernobyl zone as an alternative energy sector and tourist zone;
- lack of a systematic scientific approach to the development of the exclusion zone.

With an increase in the demand for visiting of the exclusion zone the number of Chernobyl tour operators is gradually increasing. But due to the specialization of some tour operators especially on Chernobyl tourism there is a separation between specialized tour operators and small, not specialized and/or «random» operators for this destination. So, in 2016 seven most specialized Chernobyl tour operators brought to the exclusion zone more than 80 % of visitors [8].

A survey conducted in 2013 showed that only tourists of the «Chernobyl Tour» tour operator spent on trips to the exclusion zone approximately one million dollars.

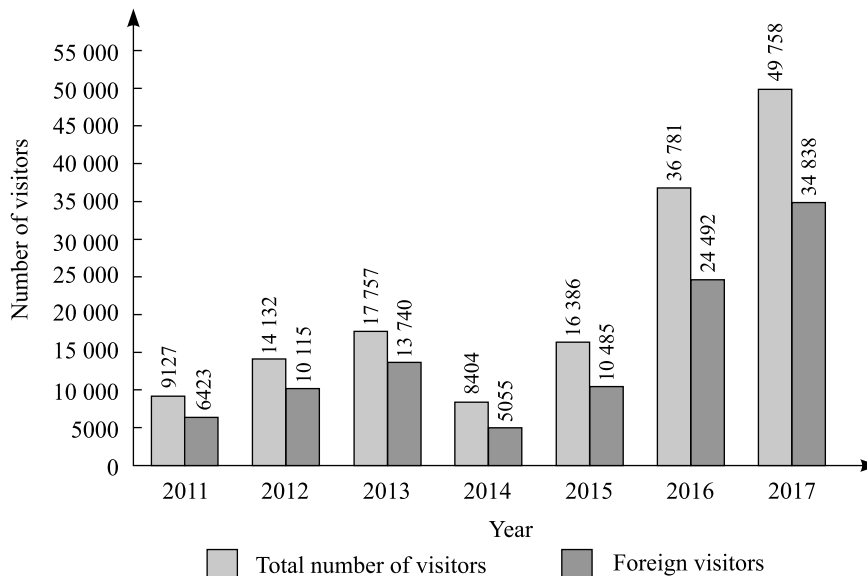


Fig. 3. Dynamics of visits to the Chernobyl exclusion zone in 2011–2017.  
Source: developed by the author based on [8]

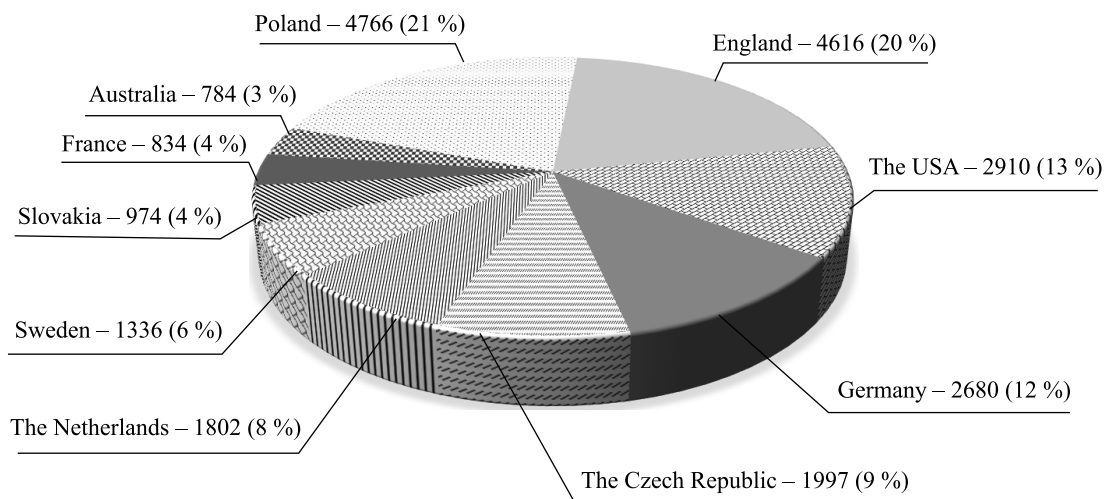


Fig. 4. TOP-10 countries that visited the Chernobyl zone in 2017.  
Source: developed by the author based on [8]



The expenditures include: the Chernobyl zone and tour operator services, food expenses, accommodation, entertainment, transportation, purchase of souvenirs, etc. It is important to note that according to the survey a significant part of the Chernobyl tourists come to Ukraine primarily to visit Chernobyl.

Taking into account the share of tourists of the «Chernobyl Tour» operator in 2013, almost double increase of the total number of Chernobyl foreign tourists in 2013–2016, as well as considering the dollar against the hryvnia currency exchange rate, we can assume that now Chernobyl tourism attracts about 10 million USD investment in the Ukrainian economy annually.

In the recent years there has been an increase in the number and quality of tourist products of Chernobyl tourism. Below is a classification of Chernobyl tours:

- by the purpose of attending: general study tours; thematic tours; quest tours; professional (for environmentalists, nuclear scientists, students); trainings on radiation, radiation pollution and radiation survival, etc.;
- by the duration of stay (the classification is determined by the specification of the tours): one-day visits; weekend tours (1–3 nights); several day tours (from 4 nights);
- by the types of vehicles: by own cars, by buses, military (on special Armored Reconnaissance Patrol Vehicles / ARPV-2 / BRDM-2); river tours (using the «Polesye» hydrofoil high-speed vessel on the route Kyiv – the Dnipro River – the Kyiv Reservoir – the Pripjat River – Chernobyl NPP – Pripjat); air tours (small aircraft and helicopters).

In addition, there is an increase in the number of tourist routes, the inclusion of new objects, in particular the Cold War era unique complex of a Soviet over-the-horizon radar station «Duga-1» in an ex-military secret town Chernobyl-2.

Self-organization of Chernobyl tourism has taken place at three levels:

1) *self-organization at the level of the tour operator*: The emergence of a new generation of specialized Chernobyl tour operators: «Chernobyl Tour», «SoloEast Travel», «CHERNOBYLwel.come», «Go2Chernobyl», «Radioactive Team» and others. The main difference and the reason for dominance on the market of these tour operators is that they consider Chernobyl tourism as one of the ways to eliminate of the negative consequences of the accident and generate positive results. For instance, they create routes and scenarios of based on radioactive and environmentally interesting objects and locations; guarantee the safe visiting of the exclusion zone, provide tourists with dosimeters; base on the principles of scientific and reliable content of the tours; use marketing technologies and «scenario» approach to the tours as a work of narrative genre;

2) *self-organization at the level of the community tour operators*. Creation of public organizations (NGOs) such as «Association of Chernobyl Tour Operators» and «Association of Chernobyl Tourism» for: improving the safety of tourists; increasing the competitiveness and standards of service for Chernobyl tourism; ensuring fair competition conditions; protection of common interests; providing favorable conditions for the development of both Chernobyl tourism and the Chernobyl zone as a tourist destination (more effective dialogue and cooperation with state authorities, implementation of the European Union standards, etc.);

3) *self-organization at the level of industry*. Integration into the global hospitality industry of Ukraine and outside the country. Today, Chernobyl tour operators together with the responsible for tourism state and local authorities and other non-specialized tour operators take part in the world leading tourist exhibitions like International Tourism Fair in Spain, ITB Berlin, The *New York Times Travel Show* and promote Chernobyl as a tourist destination of dark tourism [9–11]. There is a transition from passive processing of spontaneous tourists to the Chernobyl zone to active formulation and increase of this tourist flow.

**Conclusions and suggestions.** Based on the research of the peculiarities of the formation and development of Chernobyl tourism in Ukraine as a phenomenon of dark tourism, it is possible to draw conclusions about the measures to stimulate the formation and development of the industry, and concerning specific proposals for the increase of tourist flow to the exclusion zone:

- 1) to give legal status to Chernobyl tourism;
- 2) to develop a state strategy (program) for safe, sustainable tourism development of the Chernobyl zone (at the level of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and the Ministry of Ecology of Ukraine);
- 3) to include the Chernobyl zone and/or some of its objects in the UNESCO World Heritage List;
- 4) to create competitive tourist products of Chernobyl tourism for a certain target audience of dark tourism consumers;
- 5) to promote tourist products with maximum involvement of social networks and global portals of dark tourism;
- 6) to improve the tourist infrastructure in the Chernobyl zone, equip special checkpoints for tourist groups, build hotels, restaurants, improve the connection;
- 7) to conduct certification of the Chernobyl zone tour guides taking into account the necessity of increased security organization of the tours;

- 8) to combine tourism in the exclusion zone with the visits of the adjoining territories, both for the development of the Chernobyl zone and for the revival of the surrounding destinations;
- 9) to revive the river connection on the Pripyat River for more comfortable and faster access from Kyiv to the destination;
- 10) to develop dark tourism in Ukraine as a separate modern popular type of tourism.

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