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## **NOTE FROM THE GUEST EDITOR(S)**

Dear Readers and Contributors,

Trekking Tourism as a modern, nature-based tourism experience has gained importance in recent years and has diversified into different sub-categories not being confined to specific climatic regions or certain heights and alpine conditions. It has established itself among the traditional hiking and mountaineering products that have marked the origins of this field, especially in the European context. It now encompasses all types of outdoor journeys that can be conducted with a minimum of infrastructure and can also include various means of transportation such as bikes, boats or skis (Zollondz, 2008). Especially in developing countries trekking has become a driver for tourism development in remote areas and service chains have been set up around the core product trekking. In many cases it has been combined with different adventure and outdoor products like river rafting and wildlife watching.

New approaches can be found that use technical innovations like GPS-mapping or social media services to enhance the trekking experience for the customers. Because of its closeness to the nature theme and since it is supposed to rely on very basic infrastructures while creating jobs for the local population and using the natural resources in a sustainable way, it has also become a major aspect of sustainable travelling. But there are still many issues for the supply, as well as the demand side that need to be addressed. The following special issue deals with questions like: What competencies are needed to create a functioning trekking tourism value chain? What types of networks have to be set up to enable innovative product development? What is the sustainability impact of the trekking product? What kind of regulation is needed to ensure quality and safety standards? What are interesting target groups and what can be done to satisfy the needs of these customers?

The objective of this special issue has been to discuss in an international context the prospects of trekking tourism and its related products (especially hiking and mountaineering). Because of the interdisciplinary character of tourism, studies from different backgrounds have been included, ranging from management to geographical studies.

The first paper is concerned with product development in tourism with a focus on “soft trekking”. Christopher Reuter and Harald Pechlaner include aspects of quality assessment in order to create a model for sustainable product development processes. The second paper focuses on the differentiation of hiking and trekking which is especially important in

German-speaking markets. Anne Menzel, Axel Dreyer and Juliane Ratz put special emphasis on factors and frameworks that help to define those terms. In the third article the international perspective is again a topic since Kundri Böhmer-Bauer presents examples from Nepal while pursuing the question whether or not trekking tourism can be sustainable. Sabine Dümmler on the other hand presents a concrete trekking product from the European Alps that she has studied during her master thesis. The final article is then again concerned with general product development and quality assessment with a focus on the European Alps and in the end asks the question whether or not trekking, which always involves a certain amount of risk taking, can be a tourism product in the European context.

The overall intention of this issue is to shed light on the field of trekking tourism from a theoretical as well as empirical perspective, thereby creating the basis for understanding the needed practices, networks and competencies in order to establish sustainable trekking operations which in turn can lead to an improvement of local and regional development processes.

The Call for papers and List of upcoming conferences and seminars are also included in this issue of JoT. I would like to gratefully acknowledge time and support of the Referees and Editorial Board members in all the endeavours, which inspired to bring out this issue of JoT.

With best regards,

Harald Pechlaner  
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# **Sustainable Trekking Tourism Development with a Focus on Product Quality Assessment – Two Cases from the Indian Himalayas**

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to explore the dimensions of sustainable trekking tourism development in conjunction with product quality assessment processes. Based on a current definition of trekking tourism and “soft trekking” products a empirical analysis has been conducted that uses quantitative as well as qualitative elements in order to present two case studies from the Indian Himalayas. Findings of the paper include core strategies that have been identified through the empirical research leading to a concept for sustainable product development while practical implications focus on aspects of quality (basic, product, relational) which need to be improved in order to improve the competitiveness on international markets. The study is an initial attempt with an explorative character to shed light on this promising segment in the tourism sector, especially for developing countries. Future research would have to include representative studies, especially among today’s guests as well as potential international customers, thereby creating the foundation for professional market research in the tourism industry of Uttarakhand, India.*

**Keywords:** Trekking tourism, sustainable product development, India, case study design, quality assessment.

## **Introduction**

Trekking tourism as part of outdoor tourism has a long tradition, is a very popular product and gaining importance, especially since overcoming problems in countries like Nepal where political unrest lead to declining markets in the first decade of the new century (DN, 2004). International markets, mainly from western countries, are the main source of this demand. Germany is one of the most attractive trekking markets with a share of 10.38% of all trekkers in Nepal in 2001 (calculated on the basis of the numbers provided by Discover Nepal, DN 2004). Trekking and hiking do have a long tradition in Germany and have been very successful tourism products with numerous associations and clubs that organize outdoor activities on the local level. The national association for hiking (Deutscher Wanderverband e.V. - DWV) which is the umbrella association for all hiking and mountaineering clubs has a history that goes back to the

year 1883 and claims to have 600,000 members today. Of those 20,000 volunteers take care of about 200,000 km of hiking treks which in turn count for about half of the entire German network of hiking treks (DWV, 2012a). There are also close cooperations with trekking and hiking tour operators like Wikinger Reisen in the field of product development that have led to new and innovative products like the recent introduction of “Gesundheitswandern” which can be translated literally as “health hiking” (DWV, 2012b). In that case the partners have come up with hiking offers in destinations like the Spanish island of Mallorca where trained and certified “health hiking” guides are using hiking routes that have been developed by the DWV in cooperation with the University of Applied Sciences of Osnabrück and are designed to incorporate aspects of physical, mental and spiritual well-being. This high importance of hiking and trekking is also reflected in numerous recent publications by German tourism researchers that concentrate solely on that subject (e.g. Lessmeister, 2008; Vogt, 2009; Dreyer/Menzel/Endreß, 2010; Böhmer-Bauer, 2012).

In India on the other hand the tourism industry is just starting to put a focus on outdoor activities and develop according products. But the industry as a whole already plays a vital role for the economy. Today tourism alone employs 25 million people, which equates to around 5% of the entire Indian workforce (WTTC, 2011). The industry is estimated to generate 3.8% of export income and has been expected to achieve the highest growth rates of all sectors of the economy within the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2007-2012). This in turn leads to considerable capacity constraints in the accommodation sector (Kaul and Gupta, 2009). In general, the Himalayas (which make up a big portion of the state of Uttarakhand in which the case studies have been conducted) have been considered one of the emerging markets in Asia with the highest potential for growth, alongside Sri Lanka, Laos and Vietnam (Shackley, 2006: 66).

The following paper presents results from a study that has been conducted as part of the so-called RED (Regional Economic Development) project of GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) in Uttarakhand (India). Before discussing the results of the case studies in section three, the theoretical framework will be presented. The complexity of the term trekking will be discussed in detail as well as the challenge of sustainable tourism product development. In chapter four core strategies and practical implications that have been deduced from the results will be discussed before closing the paper with identified limitations and an outlook on possible future research in that field.



## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Sustainable Tourism Product Development

#### Sustainability

Starting a few years ago sustainable product development has become a hot topic in the fields of manufacturing, engineering and design where tangible products are getting developed (e.g. Choi/Nies/Ramani, 2008; Gagnon/Leduc/Savard, 2010 or Francis, 2012). Apart from approaches like the cradle-to-cradle concept (Braungart/McDonough, 2002), manufacturing and engineering have been rather reluctant to incorporate the ideas and principles of sustainability so far. A good example is the cited International Journal of Sustainable Engineering that has been a very recent development in that field by coming into existence with its first published issue in 2008. On the other hand the service sector and especially tourism have a long tradition in making use of those concepts and discuss sustainability issues within the industry (e.g. ecotourism) as well as academia. In the latest edition of Hall's standard work on tourism planning an entire chapter at the beginning of the book is dedicated to the "sustainable imperative" (2008:19ff) and sustainability is also seen as the underlying fundamental principle that should guide planners and developers throughout the entire process of tourism planning and therefore acts as the recurrent theme throughout the entire book. The basis for the high importance of the sustainability concept in that context can be found in the "international milestones in sustainable development" listed below

**Table-1:** International milestones in sustainable development

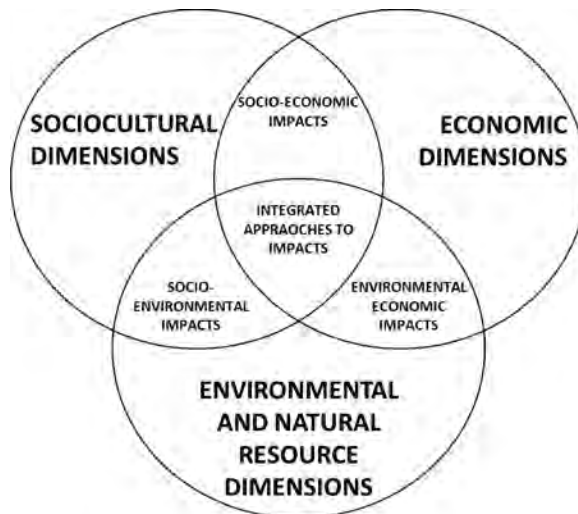
Date	Milestone
1972	United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm
1987	Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Report)
1992	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro (Earth Summit)
2000	United Nations Millennium Assessment
2002	World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg
2005	Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

Source: Hall (2008:21).

From today's perspective other milestones could be added, e.g. the recent conferences on climate change in Copenhagen or Doha<sup>1</sup>. The list also does reflect to a certain degree the focus and filter of English-speaking authors by neglecting the fact that the term and the concept of sustainability have a much older history and can be at least traced back to the beginning of modern forestry in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe (von Carlowitz, 2000; Grober,

<sup>1</sup> All in all 18 conferences have been organized since the original "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1994.

2012). At that time the fundamental issue of intergenerational justice, selfishness and investment behavior were already discussed that are still intensively debated amongst scientist and especially philosophers today (e.g. Mittelstrass/Gethmann, 2008). While people in the 18<sup>th</sup> century asked themselves whether or not it makes sense to plant trees that they won't be able to harvest during their own lifetime, the question has reappeared in new contexts like climate change: Shall we change our lifestyle, thereby minimizing climate gas emissions, in order to prevent the highly likely hazardous consequences of climate change that might harm future generations, but might not affect ourselves directly? The same categories of thinking also apply to the problem of nuclear waste management (Streffer et al., 2012). But while those issues continue to be worked on and greatly depend on ones point of view regarding the question whether responsibility can be claimed collectively or only individually (see e.g. Sandel, 2010:170), a standard model of sustainability that emphasizes the balancing of economic, environmental and social needs in order to protect the resources for future generations, has been established following the famous Brundtland Report of 1987. While researchers continue to argue whether or not other aspects of society (e.g. politics) should be incorporated into the traditional three column model of sustainability there has been a consensus in the field of tourism after intensive discussions (amongst others: Mathieson/Wall, 1982; Krippendorf, 1987; Hall/Butler, 1995; Lindberg/McKercher, 1997; Gössling, 2002; Hall/Boyd, 2005) on these three basic dimensions and the need to balance them in order to be successful in the long-term (see figure 1 below) as well as their adaptation to the field of tourism development.



**Fig. 1:** Dimensions of sustainable tourism development.

*Source: Adapted from Hall (2008:28).*

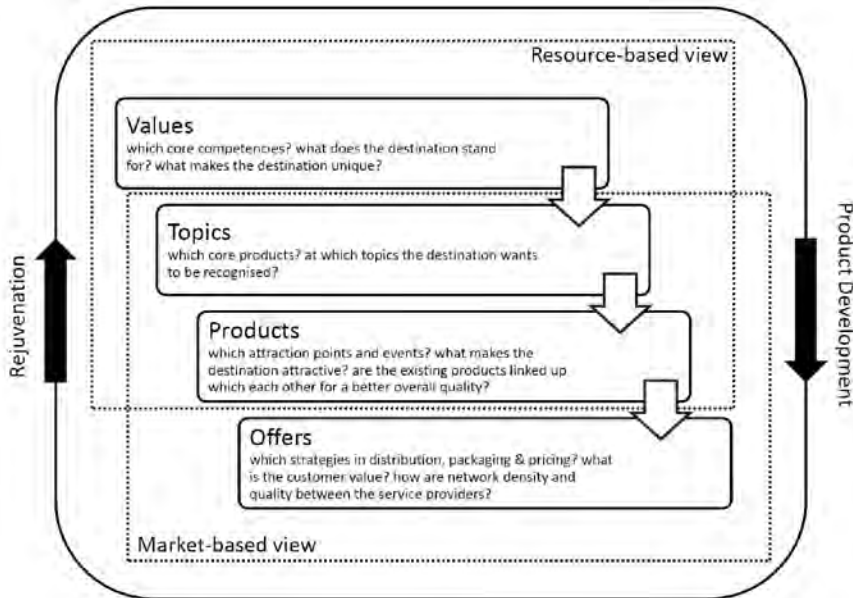
While in Germany a discussion has erupted on the very possibility of sustainable tourism development (see e.g. Mundt, 2011), because of the high emissions for transport services (especially by airplanes) that threaten the climate, the argument that a tourism product cannot be sustainable after a multi-hour flight has to be recognized as formally correct, but that does not imply that all tourism activities in the host country should not be organized in a more sustainable way and thereby concentrating on the efficiency rather on the effectiveness of tourism as a whole. It would then be necessary to distinguish between macro and micro level effects (that take place within a certain accepted system), while at this point it also has to be taken into consideration that there is no immediate solution for the macro level challenges concerning international tourism, because of its heavy dependence on flights for long distance mobility.

When looking at the presented model in detail, there is a long list of examples for the according impacts (see Hall, 2008:29f) that can be combined with other recent findings (e.g. Kastenholz/&Rodrigues, 2007:9) to create a framework of benefits and outcomes that can enhance sustainable destination development. The concrete aspects will be discussed in section three, since these theoretical discussions have been the basis for the design process of the methods used to conduct the case studies. Aspects like “increasing income to locals” or “exceeding physical carrying capacity” have been applied to the task of defining and evaluating a sustainable trekking product in the context of the Indian Himalaya. But before concentrating on the product development process it shall again be noted that not only the concept of carrying capacity has a long tradition in the field of tourism (Butler, 1980), but the sustainability concept itself as well. The establishment of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism as early as 1993 just adds evidence to that statement.

### **Sustainable Product Development**

Returning to product development processes a second model shall be introduced that has been used as a framework for the empirical study: The strategic product development cycle that has been elaborated by Pechlaner/Herntrei/Kofink (2009). Figure 2 depicts the process and its major steps. While the concept is concerned with development processes that can start from scrap and therefore need to define the basic values and core competencies of a destination, before being able to derive certain themes and products from them, the study conducted in Uttarakhand relied on preliminary work that had already discussed those basic principles and defined (soft-)trekking as one possible theme for further tourism development in the region (for the importance of hiking and trekking as possible “core themes” see also Kastenholz/Rodrigues, 2007:7, while

trekking related values will be discussed in section 3.3). The focus was then laid on product and quality evaluation as part of the process of strategic product development depicted below.



**Fig. 2:** Strategic Product Development in Tourism.

*Source: Pechlaner/Herntrei/Kofink (2009:290), based on Pechlaner/Fischer/Hamman (2006:45).*

Therefore the purely resource-based discussions of values and core competencies have been taken aside and will only be discussed in the contest of trekking. The market-based aspects of designing and pricing offers have not been part of the study either, but concrete examples will be discussed briefly in the final section. On the other hand meta-questions like product interconnectedness and cooperation amongst tourism actors derived from this model have been integrated into the methodological considerations and have also been combined with the underlying principles of sustainable tourism development presented above as well as applications in the field of sustainability assessment and evaluation (UNWTO, 2001; UNWTO, 2004).

## 2.2 Trekking Tourism

### Trekking Definition

Defining the term trekking is a complex issue, because trekking tourism can be seen as a vital aspect of numerous types of tourism, e.g. outdoor tourism, spiritual tourism, cultural tourism and so on. And it is very challenging to define the threshold to other related activities like hiking and

mountaineering. In table 2 below the different aspects have been briefly summarized into classifications derived from current literature on the subject and neighboring fields of interest.

**Table-2:** Trekking Tourism Classification – an Overview

Types of Tourism	Related Categories and Sub-Categories	Motivation	General Differentiators	Target Group differentiators
Outdoor tourism	Mountaineering	Nature	Motivation	Age
Nature-based tourism	Hiking	Landscape	Trails	Sport affinity
Spiritual tourism	Expeditions	Being outdoors	Landscape (De)Briefing	Group/individual guests
Adventure tourism	Pilgrimage	Culture	Infrastructure	Income
Ecotourism	Climbing	Physical	Velocity	Educational background
Rural tourism	Alpine Touring	Activity	Gear	Sinus milieus
Sports tourism	Jogging	Recreation	Special abilities	
Cultural tourism	Passive Trekking	Exoticism	Height	
	Speed-hiking	Spirituality	Duration	
	Nordic Walking		Route	
	Soft Trekking		Accommodation types	
	Walking		Themes	
	Eco Trekking			
	Long-distance hiking			
	Bushwalking			

Source: Own elaboration, based on Buckley (2000), Swarbrooke et al. (2003), Lessmeister (2008), Dreyer/Menzel/Endreß (2009) and Vogt (2009).

In 1978 Welsch could simply state: “The trekker is a tourist in the mountains”. Nowadays the picture has changed a lot as table 2 is indicating and trekking tourism has become an established product in the tourism market. While trekking can be defined as a sub-category of mountaineering and a neighboring category to hiking and climbing, it is often not possible to make those separations accurately when analyzing concrete products and offers. Elements of one category might have been combined with others to create a product that consists of different types of activities. Therefore a more general definition from the German Tourism Encyclopedia (Zollondz) has been used as a working definition for the study, which allows a broader perspective on the subject:

*“The trekker consciously goes on a journey (on foot, by bike, with a boat or on skis) without using the typical tourism infrastructure. He follows natural paths in difficult terrain in order to experience nature intensively. Today trekking tours are also organized by tour operators e.g. as an expedition. Trekking is not only conducted in faraway countries, but is possible all over the world.”*

Though several aspects and activities of outdoor tourism can be subsumed under this definition there is still no clear-cut differentiation to expeditions, long-distance hiking and so on. But at this point it is not

necessary to get deeper into the theoretical discussion, since the study was working on the concrete product level and the actual customers are not aware of those theoretical discussions. More importantly it is possible to deduce a working definition of soft-trekking from the findings above.

### **Soft-Trekking**

Utilizing the discussions about the very nature of trekking and how it is possible to differentiate it from similar activities like hiking, climbing and the like, it was possible to come up with a working definition for the term soft-trekking as this was part of the project assignment and vital to the issue of sustainability assessment for the concrete trekking products in Uttarakhand. Starting from the approach of Kastenholz/Rodrigues (2007:6, based on Loverseed, 1997) that "... *hard* adventure tourism comprises relatively more challenging outdoor activities that imply a certain amount of risk and specific physical capacities, whereas the *soft* version is less risky and demanding ...", five elements of great importance have been identified that can help to define a soft-trekking product in the Himalayas:

- (1) The trekking experience should take place in low and medium altitudes (< 3000m) to prevent excessive strain on participants.
- (2) Adequate support services (e.g. porters, cooks) should be available.
- (3) There should be a potential to combine the trekking experience with other adventure activities (e.g. river rafting, wildlife safari).
- (4) The used infrastructure should be convenient enough to – again – prevent excessive strain on participants.
- (5) If possible, cultural elements (homestays, temple visits, and so on) should be part of the experience.

These five elements had been deduced prior to taking part in the trekking activities in the Himalayas and therefore have to be critically reflected after the empirical analysis presented below.

## **3. Product Case Studies from the Indian Himalayas**

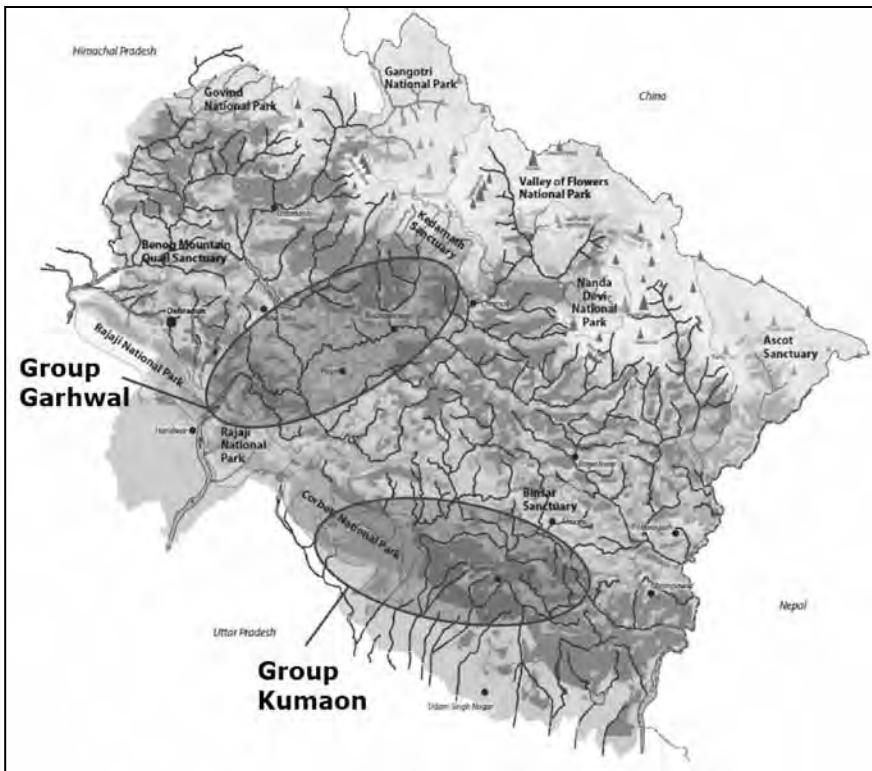
### **3.1 Case Study Design and Methods used**

The design for the two product case studies has been identical, since both cases are based on a study that has been conducted in September 2011 by the Chair of Tourism of the Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt in cooperation with GIZ and therefore rely on the same methodologies. This allows comparisons and cross-case analysis as it will be presented in the combined chapter 3.3 for both cases. The case for the Garhwal region as well as the one concerned with Kumaon draw their results from an approach that combines quantitative as well as qualitative methods. These are the

main sources for the data analysis (following Eisenhardt, 1989 and Yin, 2003), but since there are quantitative as well as qualitative data elements (documentation of participatory elements as well as of the stakeholder interaction) included in both cases, the approaches can also be understood in the context of applied mixed methods tourism research (Jennings, 2010). The data has been evaluated and analyzed in order to answer the following questions: How is trekking tourism organized in those two regions? How is the quality of the provided services perceived? And how can trekking tourism be a part of sustainable tourism development in those two regions? The cases are evaluative and explorative in the sense that the status quo in trekking tourism on the product level will be presented as well as the results from the conducted study that had a focus on soft-trekking tourism product development in those regional contexts. The quantitative product quality and sustainability evaluation comprises the results from 19 evaluation matrices filled out by the participating students (see the appendix for a sample matrix from the material that was prepared during a seminar prior to the excursion to India). The matrix comprises five topics (e.g. guide quality, product and service sustainability, etc.) each of them handling nine to eleven concrete items like waste disposal, food quality and group size that have been deduced from Hall (2008:54 and Kastenholz/Rodrigues, 2007:8f). A final evaluation matrix has been used to calculate the weighted score from the items as well as taking into consideration the price levels at that time.

The qualitative interviews were conducted before, during and after taking part in short soft trekking experiences (3-4 days) in the regions depicted in figure 3 below and included 12 local stakeholders and experts from the corresponding trekking regions and consisted mainly of tour operators, trekking guides, accommodation and other service providers.

A semi-structured interview guideline had been prepared that focused on the themes quality, cooperation and networks, benchmarking, positioning, sustainability and future developments and consisted of 20 questions, ranging from open questions like “What terms come into your mind when you think of trekking in Uttarakhand?” to rather concrete ones like “How important is trekking for the tourism industry of Uttarakhand today?”. Those questions have been formulated on the basis of the theoretical framework presented above that has also been used to design the evaluation matrices. The compiled information was then used to analyze the (dis-)advantages of the products as well as product requirements from an international point of view and to discuss aspects of sustainability. These results will be presented after a short introduction into the local tourism industry.



**Fig. 3:** Map of Uttarakhand with Trekking Areas.

*Source: Based on UNWTO (2008:33).*

## 3.2 Tourism in Uttarakhand

### The Tourism Industry

For the state of Uttarakhand, that has been carved out of Uttar Pradesh in 2000 and was formerly known as Uttaranchal, tourism is estimated by the UNWTO to make up about 4.4% of GDP (2008). The newly created state in the Himalayas is densely populated (for a hill state) with around 10 million inhabitants that live – theoretically - on almost 54,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land, but one has to take into consideration that about two-thirds of the state are covered by forest. Therefore most parts of this vast area are under control of the Forest Department which is also responsible for the management of the national parks. Even though there is a growing demand for nature-based activities and the Corbett national park for instance attracts more than 25,000 visitors per month during high-season (Hilz-Ward, 2010), the core of tourism activities still lies on traditional segments like pilgrimage and spiritual tourism. The state of Uttarakhand, in which the two case studies were conducted, is trying to expand its already existing strength in the tourism sector and policy makers have identified tourism as one



key to sustainable development and poverty alleviation, especially in rural areas. Therefore more emphasis is put on products like medical tourism (including herb and spice production), Ecotourism and niche products like the Buddhist Circuit and Golf Tourism while spiritual, heritage and wildlife tourism still make up the biggest portion of the traditional market (Reuter/Pechlaner/Roy, 2011).

### **Trekking Tourism**

In Uttarakhand the mountains themselves are an attraction, providing the backdrop not only for pilgrimage (e.g. Haridwar and Chard Dham or the four holy shrines) and Yoga (including famous Rishikesh), but also for adventure tourism (mainly trekking and rafting) which is gaining importance on the national level as well (Singh/Singh, 2000).

The UNWTO (2008:42) even has stated in her tourism development report:

*“The natural environment can offer nature tourists equally diverse opportunities for active outdoor pursuits including trekking, mountaineering, rafting, orienteering, mountain biking, cross country skiing and para-sailing. Finally the spectacular views and landscapes, although often influenced by human activities can also appeal to more general forms of tourists, including general sightseers, nature tourists combining ecotourism with passive trekking, and health and wellness seekers.”*

Therefore the potential seems to be clear and there are also signs of a growing demand as well. Not only wildlife tourism attracts customers, but trekking and rafting have become important businesses, especially around Rishikesh and along the holy river Ganga. In this area alone there are around 130 providers of rafting experiences and the Hindustan Times (2011:3) even claimed that there are “10,000 local youths operating adventurous activities in the eco-tourism zone”. Of those 130 companies involved in adventure tourism only about 10 focus on trekking according to the conducted interviews, but this segment is especially attractive since 20-30% of the customers are international customers which leads to high revenues and yields. The situation of the businesses appears to be very positive and there are no financial issues that could hamper economic growth, according to the experts. Another indicator for this success has been the on-going discussions about the entertainment tax in Uttarakhand and possible exemptions for the adventure tourism providers (Hindustan Times, 2011). But despite all those positive signals in terms of economic development, the tourism industry of Uttarakhand as a whole still struggles with the issues identified by Singh (2007, cited in Reuter/Pechlaner/Roy, 2011). While there have been recent developments in terms of destination

branding and infrastructure development (e.g. road construction), the tax issues are still not settled and especially from international perspective aspects of product quality and sustainability still need to be addressed. The empirical results presented below give some insight into these issues and can act as a starting point for further analysis and improved product development processes.

### **3.3 Trekking Product evaluation**

The results from the empirical studies have been combined to allow cross-case analysis and e.g. by contrasting the results from the two regions. The first product case study was conducted in the Gharwal region and started from Rishikesh while the actual soft trekking experience began after a one day transfer to Deorital Lake in the Middle Himalayas and comprised a four-night trek to Chopta (2,680m above sea level) including a short expedition to Chandrashila (approx. 4000m) that opened views on the Himalaya range including Nanda Devi (7,816m) and other famous peaks. The second product case study was conducted in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand and started from the hill station Nainital (2,084m) while the actual trekking experience began in nearby Pangot and included four nights until the Corbett National Park was reached where a wildlife safari was included into the program. Both teams were trekking by foot and had brought their own equipment, but relied on support from cooks and porters that had been organized by local tour operators.

For both cases generalized results can be summarized in the form of a SWOT-Analysis before discussing the actual trekking product parameters in detail. The strengths of the product include the high density of spiritual places, their remoteness, the alternation of landscapes, the variety of wildlife and treks and the long (ten month) trekking season. Spirituality in fact can play an important role in product development and one interview partner expressed his view that “spiritual tourism is also a form of trekking.” The lack of managed campgrounds and tea houses on the other hand could be interpreted as an advantage (remoteness), but also as a tourism infrastructure issue that should be improved in order to strengthen the tourism value chains and thereby creating more income for the local population. Among the weaknesses the lacking brand development and especially the fact that Uttarakhand is almost unknown in the trekking sector on an international level have been confirmed. Besides issues involving the low quality of the infrastructure in general and the tourism infrastructure in specific other problems have been identified, especially that there is no established rescue system in place and that it is not possible for Indian trekkers to take out an emergency insurance which makes the experience very risky. While there is a state wide, but loosely organized, association of adventure

tourism providers there is no target-oriented networking or even lobbying taking place. The interview partners have also been very critical of the influence of government stakeholders which in some parts are even active players in the field of tourism (e.g. Forest Department). One interview partner summarized this by stating that “tourism products in the hand of the government never succeeded, because tourism comes from the heart”. There are also a variety of very practical issues like the non-functioning waste management. While waste is collected and stashed away close to the few managed campgrounds there is no recycling or proper waste disposal system. Most of the material eventually gets burned with all the negative results for the environment and the local population. The stakeholders were also aware of a lack of trained guides and proper information and marketing material. In terms of opportunities the growing demand from the Indian middle class was identified along with the new development of eco-tourism products to ensure sustainable development, the involvement of local people via homestays for example and the foundation of public-private-partnerships as a basis of destination development. But most importantly the competition in the tourism sector was seen as a key driver for quality improvement in the long-term, while accessibility could be strengthened through improved public transport, especially to the Nainital region and into the mountain ranges (e.g. improved Shatabdi train connections). The experts also spotted an increasing professionalization among the tourism actors which in turn could foster the development of new products and improve their quality. But there were also threats identified by the experts, especially the slowness of the development process, the threat of major accidents (man-made but also following landslides or earthquakes) that could not be handled because of the lacking emergency management systems, a possible loss of identity through changing lifestyles (because of the exposure to western tourists) and possible damages to the natural resources in case of their depletion. To this list of general product aspects the low quality and often confusing structure of homepages and the non-existence of web 2.0 marketing and social media tools has to be added.

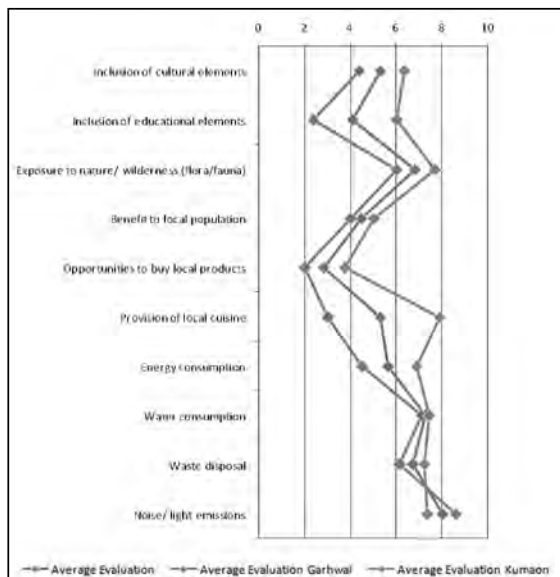
### **Sustainability Assessment**

Before concentrating on the sustainability assessment of the product cases a few starting remarks shall be made on other aspects that were also vital parts of the study. In terms of organization there was hardly any structured information provided in advance and the promises given were only kept partially while activities were announced very lately. When looking at the product quality the participants remarked the beautiful landscape and the suitable length and duration of the treks while time management and safety issues were criticized, since the safety precautions are not standardized and seem to rely heavily on the tour guide and the

appropriateness of this training. The alternation of cultivated and virgin landscapes, the possible inclusion of adventure elements (e.g. river crossings) and the diversity of the landscapes, ranging from jungle to the mountains, were seen as a huge potential for further trekking development. Especially the attractiveness of the landscape scored an average of more than 8 (out of 10) points for both product cases. The quality of the guides was also evaluated heterogeneously since the language skills and the friendliness and hospitality of the tour guides scored more than nine points on average while the lack of information material was harshly criticized as well as the quantity of explanations by the tour guides. The importance of the leadership of the tour guides was emphasized as well as their function as role models for the other guides, porters and trekking tourists. The evaluation of the service quality again showed mixed results with food almost scoring ten points on average in one case while the quality and cleanliness of washroom facilities and hygiene issues were seen rather critical (average rating below four). Again the friendliness of the support staff was recognized, but also the lacking language skills since they should have an appropriate command of the English language as well. So while a high consideration for the guests' needs has been found and hospitality seems to have the potential for a core competence, there is only a sufficient cleanliness of tents and washroom facilities today.

Turning to the sustainability assessment of the two trekking products and the included services the evaluation shows with very mixed results as can be seen in figure four below.

The exposure to nature and the few noise and light emissions have been evaluated as positive by the participants. Also waste disposal and water consumption are seen as positive even when considering the statements mentioned above. But on the other



**Fig. 4:** Product and Service Sustainability Assessment  
Source: Own elaboration.

hand benefits and opportunities to the local people in terms of economic development have been noticed as a weak point of the product design

as it is today, clearly threatening its potential for sustainable tourism development. There are hardly any contacts with the local population and the only chance to create income opportunities seems to be as porters and in very few cases as the keepers of state-owned (Forest Department) camping grounds. The lacking inclusion of cultural and especially educational elements into the soft trekking experience is also seen very critically by the participants though there have been obvious differences among the two groups. The same applies to the provision of local cuisine where the evaluation difference is five points. So while the handling of garbage seems to be problematic from a sustainability point of view as well as the missing opportunities to visit local communities and buy local products, there are still major opportunities to improve the products in terms of a soft trekking experience. But it also has to be noted that, as one interview partner expressed it: “Trekking is a good way to protect nature”, since awareness is heightened among guests and stakeholders for issues like poaching, waste management, uncontrolled construction development and the possibility to upgrade eco-friendly infrastructure (e.g. by using solar power, water filters and so on). But the main issue remains the inclusion of local stakeholders, because “trekking gives more opportunities to local people to earn and to learn”, as one interview partner put it.

Overall the soft trekking experiences reached a satisfying evaluation level as can be seen below:

**Table-3:** Trekking Experience Evaluation

<b>Trekking Experience Component</b>	<b>Weighting</b>	<b>Evaluation (0-10)</b>	<b>Weighted Score</b>
Route/ Product Quality	0.24	7.1	1.7
Service Quality	0.28	6.5	1.8
Guide Quality	0.28	7.2	2.0
Product and Service Sustainability	0.2	5.6	1.1
<b>Overall trekking experience</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>6.7</b>

*Source: Own elaboration.*

It has to be further noted that especially the concrete section on product and service sustainability shows rather negative results while guide and route quality have reached above average evaluations. These results shall be further discussed and put into context in the final section.

#### **4. Core Strategies and Practical Implications**

Aside from the quantitative results presented above there have been practical implications that could be deduced from the interviews and participatory elements of the study. Essentially nine important issues have been identified that would need to be addressed in order to allow the implementation of soft-trekking products in the context of the Himalayas

in Uttarakhand. First of all it would be needed to improve the general accessibility of the area (minimizing stress for the tourists on their way to the trekking destination), as well as geographically map the trails and infrastructure by producing high quality maps and sign systems that would allow the trekkers to individually use of the treks. Another important point would be the definition of contracts between public and private actors in order to make use of the available resources and accommodation infrastructure. In terms of marketing it would be of utmost importance to foster market research in order to allow market segmentation as a basis for further product development and especially to include eco and cultural elements according to popular demand. Market research would also be a precondition for the establishment of a brand with international attraction. The local population on the other hand could be integrated into the value chain through activities like camp site and accommodation facility management, as well as the restoration and maintenance of treks and trails. Last but not least it seems necessary to define education and training standards for different professions involved in providing trekking services and establish a mountain rescue system in order to maximize safety for the customers, which is a prerequisite for a less-risky soft-trekking experience as it has been defined in the theoretical framework discussion above.

Returning to the model of strategic product development (Pechlaner/Herntrei/Kofink, 2009) that has been discussed in the beginning, the following basic values and competences have been used as a basis for the development of sustainable soft-trekking products in Uttarakhand: Human values, natural values, cultural values and infrastructural values. Discussing the human values especially hospitality, gratefulness and flexibility have been of great importance, but also alertness, openness towards foreigners and a growing eco-orientation of the stakeholders in combination with a strong emotional connection to nature. In terms of natural values the remoteness and the unexplored areas appear to have the greatest importance for the experts, while religion and spirituality as well as family and social cohesion form the backbone of the cultural values throughout both areas. In terms of infrastructural values safety and accessibility seem to be the greatest challenges while improvements can already be seen, e.g. when repairing roads after landslides.

But the findings also show that basic qualities and standards in accessibility and accommodation which have been criticized earlier (e.g. Jauhari, 2009), are still not met. Especially basic infrastructure continues to slow down progress in that field. When turning to international markets, expectations are even greater regarding transportation hospitality and hygiene (see Chaudhary, 2000). These findings are also still valuable today. What is needed is to combine those statements, findings and concepts into

a model of quality evaluation as part of sustainable product evaluation (see figure five below).



**Fig. 5:** Integrated Quality Evaluation as part of Sustainable Product Development.

*Source: Own elaboration.*

The model integrates the three dimensions of sustainable tourism development that are placed at the center of the depiction and have been combined with considerations on the importance of quality aspects where meeting basic quality needs that lead to customer satisfaction while elating guests would then lead to customer loyalty. Basic quality in that context encompasses issues like accessibility, provision of information, adequate rescue systems and general infrastructure while a product quality focus is demonstrated in the combination of adequate services and the needed diversity of the product. The quality of relationships in turn can be evaluated in terms of hospitality and networking capacities. For developing new products respectively testing new products it is therefore not enough to analyze the fulfillment of standards and the quality or relationships, but also to take into consideration the management of natural resources (as well as the importance of carrying capacities) and the application of social and business competencies, since only the combination of all of these aspects can lead to a product that is successful in the double meaning of the term sustainable that has been discussed above.

## 5. Limitations and Outlook

The presented research is limited in the way that the study shows an explorative character by highlighting potentials and issues of the product case studies that have been analyzed. The quantitative aspects of the study are limited by the number of participants respectively the low number of filled out matrices. For future research it could be interesting to conduct representative studies among trekking groups in order to generate data that could be the foundation for a professional marketing strategy. In that context it could be especially interesting to concentrate on questions defining the customer value which in turn could improve the development

of more sustainable trekking products and help to analyze the satisfaction of the customers.

When it comes to the more scientific question of defining trekking and especially sustainable and soft-trekking products it could be interesting to conduct qualitative research among international trekking tourism providers in order to gain a deeper understanding of the differentiations and necessary prerequisites.

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## Appendix

**Table-1:** Assessment-Matrix Sample

PRODUCT AND SERVICE SUSTAINABILITY	WEIGHTING	EVALUATION (0-10)	WEIGHTED SCORE	COMMENTS
Inclusion of cultural elements				
Inclusion of educational elements				
Exposure to nature/ wilderness (flora/fauna)				
Benefit to local population				
Opportunities to buy local products				
Provision of local cuisine				
Energy consumption				
Water consumption				
Waste disposal				
Noise/ light emissions				
General product and service quality				

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# **Trekking Tourism as a Special Form of Hiking**

## **Tourism-Classification and Product Design of Tour Operators in the German-speaking market**

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**Abstract:** *The paper is concerned with the term trekking (tourism) and its classification into hiking tourism. In order to make the term trekking more transparent and comprehensible, various literature sources on the topic of trekking have been examined for the evaluated characteristics and the definition criteria, e.g. means of transportation and baggage, amount of time, landscape and infrastructure or motives. There are often overlaps to related terms when searching for a suitable definition of the word trekking. For this reason the paper discusses the qualitative differentiation between trekking and hiking, long-distance hiking, mountain hiking, and expeditions. The distinction is made on the basis of characteristic features such as amount of time, landscape, motives or equipment. In another step, the authors examine different types of trekking tourism forms, such as individual trekking tourism, semi-organized trekking tourism and organized trekking tourism. In the practical part of the article the authors examine four specialty tour operators of trekking trips for German-speaking guests in relation to their range of offers and illustrate common factors or dissimilarities with regard to the theoretical differentiations made at the beginning.*

**Keywords:** trekking tourism, hiking tourism, tour operators, package tour.

### **Introduction**

Leisure-time behavior in the industrial societies has been changing for decades due to the development of the working world and the quality of life in society. There are definitely reasons why people speak of post-industrial forms of society based on these massive changes. Even though the previous focus was solely on rest and recuperation during leisure time and vacation, there are now very different forms of more or less adventuresome or exciting activities that range from visiting a cultural event to engaging in a sport. In keeping with technical development, the number of different forms of sports has clearly increased. Although there were about 30 types of sports in post-war Europe, more than 140 had already been counted in 2002

(Stumm, 2004). We can assume that the current number is even higher since the differentiation between the types of sports has increased. One example of this is cycle tourism. In earlier times we only had the bicycle. Now we have racing bikes, mountain bikes, sand bikes, electric bikes, city bikes, or trekking bikes (Dreyer, Mühlnickel & Miglbauer, 2012). When naming the individual forms of the modern bicycle, marketing considerations play an important role in addition to differences in construction. So the term “trekking bike“ has little in common with the predominant understanding of trekking as a form of more adventurous movement on foot in the mountains.

Trekking was initially characterized by mountain tourism in the Himalayas (especially Nepal). The first excursions in the former Himalayan kingdom were offered more than 40 years ago (see Schatzl, 2008). In the Sixties trekking tours were already organized by the Deutschen Alpenverein but exclusive for DAV-members. A constantly rising demand for expeditions and trekking trips has been recorded in the meantime. Trekking trips throughout the world are now mostly offered in high mountain landscapes. Due to major technical progress (lighter cookers, tents, etc.), trekking has become possible for broader segments of the population.

The term trekking has various origins. On the one hand, it arose from the Afrikaans of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in which the word *trek* characterized the pulling of an oxcart (see for instance Lexikon der Geographie, 2002; Das große Fremdwörterbuch, 2000). On the other hand, it comes from the Low German term of *Treck* or *Trecken* that describes the procession of people in search of a new settlement area and therefore a walking tour in remote regions that lasts a number of days (Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon, 1981).

There is no universally valid definition of trekking. For example, the understanding and use of the word “trekking” is still very diverse today. The German-language region is increasingly using the word “trekking” as a synonym for “hiking” in order to get rid of the dusty walking image associated with the English word and connect hiking with positive associations such as adventure and fun experiences in the touristic marketing. But from the perspective of the demand, trekking is frequently associated with hiking (DWV, 2010). Due to this reason, the first section of this article (chapter 2 and 3) examines the differentiation problems and determines the essential distinguishing characteristics between trekking and hiking, long-distance hiking, mountain hiking, and expeditions. In the second section (chapter 5), these characteristics are broken down to the German-speaking tour operator market and common factors and/or differences between the practice and the science are examined. In this connection, it should be emphasized that there

exist different needs concerning the term trekking used by researchers or by tour operators. The most definitions of trekking, hiking, and similar terms are defined by researchers for researchers. Classifications and definitions represent the basic module of tourism science. For tour operators it is more important **to** sell the products than making differentiations between trekking, hiking, and similar terms.

## 2. Literature Review

For a more comprehensive definition of the term, various literature sources on the topic of trekking have been examined for the evaluated characteristics and the definition criteria in the following (see also table 1).

### Means of Transportation and Baggage

As mentioned at the beginning, there are various viewpoints in relation to the use of aids and means of transportation in trekking. In their definition of the term, some experts have established that in trekking – just as in classic hiking – the route must be completed on foot and without any extra support (see for instance Travel & Tour Nepal, n.d.; Vogt, 2010). Bremer (2001) and Riedel (2007) make another distinction that allows further latitude for interpretation. Their description says that trekking can “*usually*” or “*mostly*” *just be accomplished on foot* and therefore requires a high level of fitness and stamina (see also Vorlaufer, 1996; Hauck, 1996). That the use of further means of transportation is not so unusual in trekking is shown in the term definitions by the following authors: Happe (n.d.) sees trekking as a journey extending over a number of days *on foot or with simple muscle-powered means of transport* such as a canoe or bicycle. In another example, Greggo (2008) excludes any motorized help but describes trekking as a “step-by-step pace on foot or by hoof.” On the other end of the spectrum, Gyimóthy and Mykletun (2004) also allow help from tools such as Telemark skies, snow scooters, rifles, and polar bear fences in their description of winter trekking.

However, it is not unusual to take along porters and pack animals such as donkeys, lamas, or camels as support for carrying the baggage, which is sometimes very heavy – especially when the routes require people to take along their provisions and camping equipment due to a low level of infrastructural development. This accommodates the trend that trekkers are also increasingly feeling the need to hike with “more comfort” or lighter baggage. In a study by Brämer (2007) in 2006, 30% of the trekking devotees and 30% of the backpackers among them have reservations against taking heavy baggage. The outdoor industry has accommodated them with ultralight accessories.

## Amount of Time

In terms of the amount of time for a trekking trip, the tourism scientists and experts seem to agree. The trade literature and tour operators generally speak of longer trips lasting more than one day with at least one overnight stay (see for instance Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Bremer, 2001; Riedel, 2007; Strakelbeck, 2001). Hennemann (n.d.), Riedel (2007), and Schmitgen (2011) write about several days or weeks. Due to this characteristic, trekking is frequently also classified with long-distance hiking (see for instance Stückl & Sojer, 2002, in Zander & Zinke, 2011; Vogt, 2010). However, in contrast to trekking, the existing infrastructure of trails is usually used in long-distance hiking (Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß, 2010). There are also different demands on the landscape.

## Landscape and Infrastructure

As already mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is difficult to differentiate between trekking and long-distance hiking. The term trekking is sometimes used synonymously with long-distance hiking. The applied differentiation criterion is usually found in the topographical characteristics of the regional landscape. Since Germans primarily associate the word trekking with mountain tourism in the Himalayas (especially Nepal), Peru and the Andes, trekking is especially seen as a tour in the high mountains (Bremer, 2001). Hauck (1996), Riedel (2007), Strakelbeck (2010), and Vogt (2010) represent the opinion that trekking always occurs in the (high) mountains; on the other hand, long-distance hiking usually involves overcoming lesser differences in altitude. In the German-language literature, trekking is frequently understood *as high-altitude hiking in the non-European mountains* (see for instance Schmitgen, 2011; Sacareau, 2009; Stückl & Sojer, 2002, in Zander & Zinke, 2011). Hauck (1996) presumes that the term trekking is not used in reference to the Alps due to the touristic development that already occurred at an early point in time; instead, the term “mountain hiking” has been assigned to it in the German-language region.

Trekking is repeatedly associated with the character of the landscape in the literature. In the opinion of many tourism researchers and experts, trekking occurs in the most virgin landscape possible (Hessenauer, n.d.), far away from civilization in remote (Schmitgen, 2011), barely developed areas with a natural world that is quite untouched and has traditional culture (Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß, 2010; Happe, n.d.). Other scientists pose the condition of a certain infrastructure with trails and lodges (see for instance Bundesamt für Naturschutz, o.J.; Hauck, 1996). However, the scientists still disagree on some factors at this point. In the opinion of the authors, a differentiated view with regard to the destination areas is necessary within this context.



## Motives

The enjoyment of nature and landscapes is especially important to hikers (see for instance DWV, 2010; Trendscape, 2009). Additional motives are included in the focus of the trekking such as adventure (see for instance Happe, n.d.; Hauck, 1996), experience in the free wilderness as the antithesis to civilization, self-awareness, and the conscious search for borderline situations in the physical performance capability (Riedel, 2007). A special wish of trekking travelers is to become immersed in foreign cultures and get to know new peoples (see for instance Hauck, 1996; Hessenauer, n.d.). As a result, trekkers are usually also underway for a longer period of time and travel far away from the classic heavily frequented tourism routes. Enjoying a region with all of the senses and fully getting to know it – this is the intention when trekking, even if it means dispensing with every type of comfort and coming up against personal boundaries.

Brämer (2009) critically questions whether trekkers are the “self-tormenting mountain climbers of the plains” or tour collectors who must constantly prove themselves. Apart from the desire for adventure – which he believes may also be somewhat related to flight – this would be the main difference to classic hiking.

**Table-1:** Summary of the Literature Review

Criterion	Description	Source(s)
<b>Transport aids</b>	None; feet as the only means of transportation	Travel & Tour Nepal, n.d.; Sacareau, 2009; Vogt, 2010
	Can generally/usually only be accomplished on foot	Bremer, 2001); Riedel, 2007
	Step-by-step pace on foot or hoof	Greggo, 2008
	On foot or with simple muscle-operated vehicles such as a canoe or bicycle	Happe, n.d.
<b>Baggage</b>	Yes, but not a MUST criterion “Generally” with baggage “Most carry their baggage on their own”	Bremer, 2001; Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß, 2010; Happe, n.d.
	“Accompanied by guides and porters”	Sacareau, 2009
<b>Amount of time</b>	More than one day/ a number of days	Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Bremer, 2001; Hessenauer, n.d.; Riedel, 2007; Strakelbeck, 2010; Vogt, 2009, 2010
	Several number of days or weeks	Hennemann, o.J.; Riedel, 2007; Schmitgen, 2011
<b>Length</b>	From very short stretches up to hundreds of kilometers	Hauck, 1996; Strakelbeck, 2010;
	Longer, more demanding stretches	Dreyer, Menzel, & Endreß, 2010

<b>Landscape type</b>	Mountains or high mountains	Bremer, 2001; Hauck, 1996; Riedel, 2007; Schmitgen, 2011; Strakelbeck, 2010; Vogt, 2010
	Non-alpine mountains; usually at high altitudes	Schmitgen, 2011; Sacareau, 2009; Stückl & Sojer, 2002, in Zander & Zinke 2011
<b>Landscape and infrastructure</b>	Remote, minimally developed regions with natural world that is quite untouched and traditional culture	Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß, 2010; Happe, n.d.
	The most virgin landscape possible	Hessenauer, n.d.
	Far from civilization	Schmitgen, 2011
<b>Trail infrastructure</b>	Away from the marked trails	Stückl & Sojer, 2002, in Zander & Zinke, 2011
	Usually away from the touristic routes; infrastructure is hardly maintained	Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß, 2010; Sacareau, 2009
	Independent of infrastructure development (trails, marking, etc.; in locations like the Himalayas, guides frequently assume the orientation function in place of the marked trails that are customary in the Alps)	Vogt, 2010
	Usually use existing trails	Hauck, 1996
	A certain basic infrastructure may exist along the trekking trail such as bridges over rivers	Bundesamt für Naturschutz, n.d.
	Hardly any developed trails	Schmitgen, 2011
<b>Infrastructure of lodges</b>	Usually with less comfort than in the Alps [...], meaning overnight stays in tent, carrying own supplies or having supplies provided by an accompanying team	Stückl, Sojer, 2002, in Zander & Zinke, 2011
	Dispense with infrastructure; overnight stay occurs under the open sky, in a tent, or in a bivouac such as a tarpaulin, snow, or stone bivouac	Bundesamt für Naturschutz, n.d.
<b>Motives</b>	“Mastering difficulties” and “adventure”	Happe, n.d.
	Landscape experience and becoming acquainted with new and different types of cultures are essential characteristics in differentiating from hiking and expeditions	Hessenauer, n.d.
	Getting to know foreign cultures and peoples and “experiencing adventure”	Hauck, 1996
	Elemental experience of nature	Hennemann, n.d.
	Experiences of open nature and wilderness as antithesis of civilization; self-awareness; sporty character: reaching personal boundaries	Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß, 2010
	Adventurous variations of vacation or long-distance hikes with the elements of nature experience, adventure, and personal physical challenge	Thiel & Drücker, 1999/2000
	Conscious search for borderline situations of the physical performance capacity in nature	Riedel, 2007

<b>Physical and psychological requirements</b>	Good basic condition, orientation skills, and enjoyment of open nature	Bundesamt für Naturschutz, n.d.
	High level physical strain	Bremer, 2001; Riedel, 2007

Source: own research

### 3. Differentiation of the Term Trekking

There are often overlaps to related terms such as long-distance hiking, expeditions, alpine hiking, or mountain hiking when searching for a suitable definition of the word trekking. Furthermore, the term trekking is hardly used in New Zealand; instead, people frequently talk about “tramping” and this should be understood as a synonym for long-distance hiking. Due to its topography, landscapes, and population density, New Zealand has many long-distance hiking trails that make hikes for one day or a number of days possible.

The initial differentiation problems occur when comparing trekking with hiking. Even though trekking is associated with hiking as a type of movement, trekking is frequently also seen as a risk-taking and adventure sport (Riedel, 2007; Trümper, 1995) while hiking is a lifetime sport that can also be performed up into old age. In contrast to hiking tourism, trekking tourism – which is more closely associated with nature and sport tourism due to its characteristics – is usually found in the area of adventure tourism (see for instance Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004; Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß, 2010; Trümper, 1995; Beedie, 2003; Standeven and De Knop, 1999; Swarbrooke et al., 2003) or expedition tourism (Dreyer, 1995) from the perspective of tourism science.

In general, **hiking can be seen as the umbrella term** for trekking. Trekking can also be classified under both mountain hiking and cross-country/long-distance hiking. In addition, the transition to expeditions is very hazy. The differences will be briefly explained in the following section. Table 2 also gives a brief overview of the most important differentiation characteristics.

**Table-2:** Qualitative Differentiation between Trekking and Hiking, Long-Distance Hiking, Mountain Hiking, and Expeditions

	<b>Classic Hiking</b>	<b>Long-Distance Hiking</b>	<b>Mountain Hiking</b>	<b>Trekking</b>	<b>Expedition</b>
<b>Amount of Time</b>	One or more days	More than one day	One or more days	More than one day	More than one day
<b>Landscape</b>	Minor differences in altitude	Minor differences in altitude	(High) mountains	(High) mountains	Little or no infrastructure, undeveloped areas, different types of landscape
<b>Planning</b>	Usually simple, brief preparations <sup>2</sup>	Days or weeks in advance	Tend to be on short notice	Weeks in advance	Weeks to months in advance with preparation meeting

<sup>2</sup> Bremer, 2001; Fränkischer Albverein, 1986; Riedel, 2007.

<b>Motive</b>	Nature experience, seeing something new, relaxation, relief for stress	Nature experience, seeing something new, feeling the forces of nature, testing personal boundaries <sup>3</sup>	Nature experience, sports challenge, testing physical boundaries	Nature experience, getting to know new cultures, adventure, freedom <sup>4</sup> , testing physical boundaries, self-awareness	Adventure, explorer spirit, discovering new terrains, self-awareness, reaching a mountain peak
<b>Trails</b>	Marked, in a natural state, narrow, with incline	Marked <sup>5</sup> , sometimes on long-distance hiking paths with signs <sup>6</sup>	Mountain trails or pathless terrain <sup>7</sup>	Usually away from marked trails <sup>8</sup>	Away from marked trails, hardly developed, difficult terrain
<b>Equipment</b>	Weatherproof clothing, sturdy shoes, provisions, backpack, orientation aids	Weatherproof clothing, sturdy shoes, provisions, backpack, orientation aids	Weatherproof clothing, sturdy shoes, provisions, backpack, climbing equipment/irons, if necessary, orientation aids, first-aid kit	Backpack, trekking clothing, hiking boots, provisions, tent equipment, if necessary, orientation aids, first-aid kit	Weatherproof clothing, transportation aids, climbing equipment/irons, bivouac equipment, provisions, orientation aids, safety equipment, radio equipment, emergency medicine
<b>Type of vacation</b>	Nature vacation, sport vacation	Nature vacation, sport vacation, adventure vacation	Nature vacation, sport vacation, adventure vacation	Adventure vacation, sport vacation	Adventure vacation <sup>9</sup>

Source: Advisory Council (modified and expanded version based on a suggestion by Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß, 2010)

Stückl and Sojer (2002, in: Zander & Zinke, 2011, p. 74) distinguish trekking from **long-distance hiking** in relation to the infrastructural requirements and define trekking as long-distance hiking away from marked trails, as well as "...in non-alpine mountains that usually have less comfort than in the Alps and at high altitudes with an overnight stay in a tent, own supplies, or supply by an accompanying team, for example..." Trekking is distinguished from long-distance hiking to the effect that the former activity always takes place in the (high) mountains, according to the

<sup>3</sup> Zander & Zinke, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Riedel, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Heidemann, n.d.

<sup>6</sup> Schmitgen, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Muhar et al., 2006; Schmitgen, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Dreyer; Menzel & Endreß, 2010; Stückl & Sojer, 2002, in Zander & Zinke, 2011.

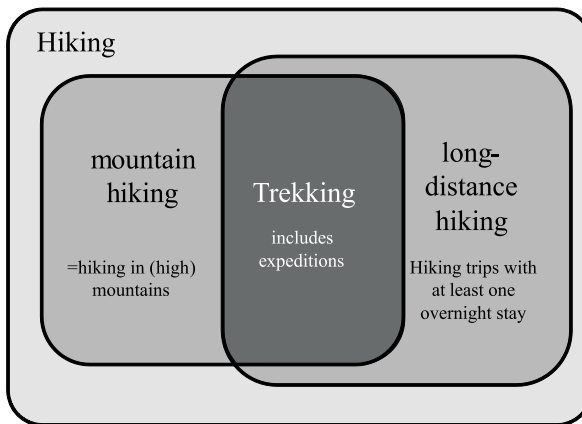
<sup>9</sup> Trümper, 1995; Beedie, 2003.

opinion of tourism scientists (see also chapter 2; table 1 “landscape”). On the other hand, long-distance hiking is defined as independent of the type of landscape. Figure 1 depicts the classification of trekking tourism as part of long-distance tourism.

**Mountain hiking** takes place in low and high mountains on marked and pathless inclines. Since trekking also takes place in the mountains, it can be classified under mountain hiking – the only differentiation to mountain hiking is in the amount of time involved: From the scientific perspective, trekking includes at least one overnight stay; in the practice, people usually consider proper trekking trips to start at 5 to 7 days for long-distance hikes. The German-language literature often uses the term trekking when talking about long-distance hiking in non-European or non-alpine mountains. It is also frequently distinguished from **alpine hiking**, which is often understood as hikes in the Alpine region (see chapter 2, Literature Review). Although this may be correct from the geographical perspective, it is frequently viewed differently in the sport (tourism) and the practice (see chapter 5). In both the German and the international language region, the term “alpine” is no longer understood as just relating to the Alps but connected with the character of high mountains (Meyers Neues Lexikon, 1993). So alpine forms of sports can also be practiced in the Rocky Mountains (e. g. alpine skiing).

**Expeditions** can be seen as a heightened form of trekking. They are mostly conducted in groups and go through demanding, pathless terrain without any type of infrastructure. Expeditions were originally conducted primarily in relation to exploration and research trips in search of new countries, rare types of plants or animals, or legendary places. Comparatively few research trips are conducted today. Expeditions frequently have a sporty-adventuresome character in which physical peak performances are required (such as on expeditions by Reinhold Messner or Arved Fuchs). They demand excellent preparation, as well as the appropriate and functioning equipment: This includes medical aids, provisions, and tools for navigation and communication. The transport of the equipment usually requires resorting to further means of transportation such as off-road vehicles or pack animals or people are hired as porters (such as the Sherpas in the Himalayas). In comparison to expeditions, the path is usually the goal in trekking and the destination of a certain peak or station.

In summary, we can say that trekking is classified with **long-distance and mountain hiking** and represents an overlap between the two distinctive forms of hiking. Its distinguishing characteristics are the amount of time and type of landscape involved.



**Fig. 1:** Overlapping of trekking with long-distance and mountain hiking

Source: Own presentation

#### 4. Different Types of Trekking

Trekking can be differentiated according to several criteria. According to the demands of the routes, Baumgartner (1980) divides them into *high mountain trekkers* (“hard trekkers”) and *hiking trekkers* (“soft trekkers”). In their publication on Nepal, Rogers and Aitichison (1998) differentiate even further between trekking with or without the climbing of peaks: “*General trekking*” leads through (high) valleys and passes but excludes the peak while “*trekking peak tourism*” focuses on the climbing of one (or more) trekking peaks as the climax of the tour.

Especially in the well-known trekking areas of Nepal, an essential distinction is now being made between tent trekking and lodge trekking. People spend the night in tents for *tent trekking* and are more or less responsible for their own supplies. All objects of equipment (tents, cooking utensils) and food are taken along for the entire tour. *Lodge trekking* has experienced a definite upswing in recent years and statistically overtaken traditional tent trekking (number of trip offers, ratio of tent trekkers to lodge trekkers). These tourists spend the nights in lodges, which can vary greatly in their quality standards and characteristics of their facilities.

Depending on the type of trip and/or the main interest of the participants, other forms of differentiation can be undertaken. For example, we can distinguish between *cultural trekking* (such as Hill Tribe Trekking), *nature trekking* (such as Wildlife Watching), and trekking oriented toward crossing difficult passes and climbing peaks. This diversification is continually progressing. For example, there are already treks for specific target groups, thematic treks (such as those following the tracks of famous mountain-climbers, yoga, weight loss, and seminar trekking) and clean-up treks and tours that collect funds for charity purposes.

The literature of trekking frequently distinguishes between the *degrees of organization*. Dietl (1999) differentiates between private and commercial trekking and Strauss divides trekking trips into *independent trekking* (in the sense of Dietl's [1999] "private trekking"), *assisted trekking*, and *organized trekking*. Hauck (1996) and Baumgartner (1980) distinguish between *individual* and *organized trekkers*. In his publication on trekking tourism in Nepal, Hauck (1996) includes *semi-organized* trekking tourism as a mixed form between organized and individual trekking tourism.

### **Individual Trekking Tourism**

An individual trekker organizes both his trip and trekking tour completely on his own (see for instance Hauck, 1996; Baumgartner, 1980). He makes all of the preparations for his tour by himself, and these range from the application for a trekking permit to the choice of the accommodations. Dispensing with extensive equipment is characteristic of a self-organized trekking tourist. The majority of trekkers who travel individually do not take along a tent of their own and are more dependent upon the local infrastructure when it comes to overnight stays and food (Hauck, 1996). They frequently choose trekking lodges as places to buy provisions and spend the night.

In some cases, individual trekkers also utilize the help of a carrier, a team of porters, or a guide. These are hired individually. Recourse to this type of help is dependent upon the route; for example, when a section of the route is difficult (crossing a pass).

### **Semiorganized Trekking Tourism**

A mixture of organized and individual trekking is represented by semiorganized trekking tourism. These tourists arrive at the destination as individual travelers in order to participate on site in an organized trekking tour.

The semiorganized trekking tourist is generally subject to a less rigorous time planning than the organized trekker. While the organized trekker books the complete trip arrangement from home in order to ensure a smooth organization of his stay that is limited in terms of time, the semiorganized trekking tourist can decide on an appropriate tour on site once he has reached the destination area. This gives him the possibility of personally designing his trek through the last-minute selection of the route, amount of time, and size of the accompanying team. In contrast to the all-inclusive arrangements, this also gives the semiorganized trek a distinctly individual element (Hauck, 1996).

### **Organized Trekking Tourism**

In organized trekking, the entire organizational effort is assumed by the professional tour operators in the country of origin or destination.

Commercial operators in the country of origin often also use the help of domestic agencies and/or local tour operators (Dietl, 1999). Organized trekking tourists hike in a group that is supervised by tour operators and/or a trekking agency. This group is usually accompanied by a certain number of guides and porters, sometimes even by cooks/cooking assistants. Similar to expeditions, some of these groups take along a complete tent camp with a kitchen and team tent, as well as two-person tents for the trekkers. For the most part, meals are provided from the food that they take with them (Hauck, 1996; Baumgartner, 1980).

Since organized trekking trips mostly occur with the help of porters or pack animals, this makes it possible for the trekkers to walk with light baggage. Due to the complete provision of supplies at the start of the trip, trekking is also becoming increasingly more accessible for target groups that avoid an individually organized trekking tour for a variety of reasons (such as physical requirements, safety concerns, and comfort).

In order to give “a face” to the diverse forms of trekking trips, the following section uses examples that illuminate the offer components from the tour operators in the German-speaking market.

## **5. Trekking in the Product Design of Tour Operators in the German-speaking market**

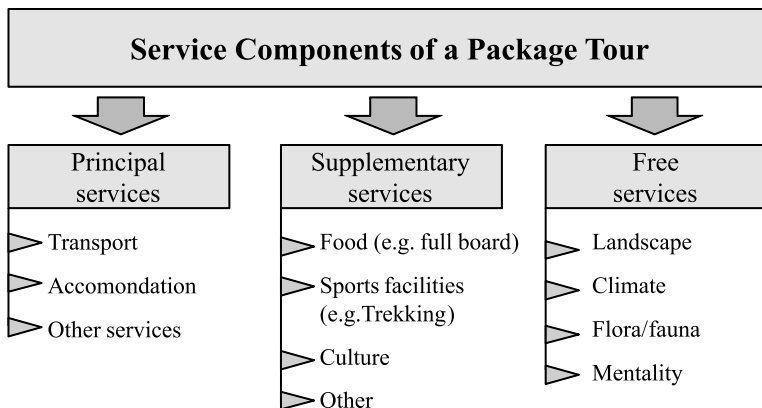
The success of a trip is dependent upon the collaboration of many companies. As their main business, tour operators combine various subservices of the service providers into a new product (usually the package tour) and offer this under their own name and at their own risk (Freyer, 2011). For the vacation trips in general, the package and modular trips have developed into important forms of organization or booking terminal; for example, they assume a good 43% of the market volume in Germany (Lohmann, Schrader & Sonntag, 2012). Why? Clearly defined bundles of services are transparent and therefore facilitate the decision to buy. Another factor is the decrease in the purchasing risk: The fact of just having one contractual partner creates legal certainty and the costs are simply easier to understand for the consumer. This applies especially to the increasing popularity of the all-inclusive trips in which the fixed trip price includes many services, as well as the provisions, so that it is easier to calculate the additional expenses of the vacation. Especially for long-distance journeys (to unknown countries with foreign languages and cultures) that require increased organizational effort, people are increasingly taking advantage of the organized trips. This applies especially to tours and trekking trips since many additional trip modules can be added such as the organization of the daily legs of the trip, domestic flights and transfers, booking of various accommodations providers in a foreign language, permits, etc.



## Product Design by Tour Operators

Product development as a component of marketing can be observed on the level of each individual service provider (Rail&Fly tickets as a product of the Deutsche Bahn; first class flight as a product of Lufthansa, etc.) or with the focus on an entire trip (a package tour by Thomas Cook as the “product”). This depends on the level of viewing, and the possibilities of the product design are correspondingly diverse – but the principles of action do not change.<sup>10</sup> Related to the trip portfolio of a tour operator, a product usually involves an overall trip (e.g. trekking trip). According to Freyer (2011), the product of a tour operator is “a service package consisting of at least two coordinated trip services that are prepared in advance for a customer who is still unknown; these are marketed as a package for a total price so that the prices of the individual services can no longer be identified.” (Freyer, 2011, p. 211)<sup>11</sup>

This service package can include the following components:



**Fig. 2: Service Components of a Package Tour**

Source: Advisory Council (modified and expanded version based on a suggestion by: Freyer, 2011)

Two essential aspects run through all of the content-related considerations on product design in tourism:

- Orientation toward the special needs of diverse customer groups
- Orientation toward topics that can embody these special needs in turn.

The focus of this marketing is the specialization in **target groups and themes**, such as hiking and trekking tours with the goal of more precisely adapting to the customer needs and simultaneously standing out from the competitors. It is decisive to know these needs especially well and identify

<sup>10</sup> The classic of German-language literature on touristic product design is Pompl, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> See also Page, 2007; Evans, Campbell & Stonehouse, 2006; Gale, 2006.

them (e.g. through market research) in order to develop product advantages on this basis. Observations show an increasing target-group and theme orientation in all of the companies in the tourism industry.

The above arguments contributed to the emergence of different special tour operators and the resulting division of the tour operators based on the program specialization into *generalists* (e.g. TUI, Thomas Cook and REWE Touristik in Germany), *retailers*, and *specialists*. Distinctions are also made with regard to size, region of offers, and economic status (Freyer, 2011).

### German Tour Operator Market for Trekking Trips

Examples of *special tour operators* in the segment of hiking and trekking trips in the German-language region are Wikinger Reisen, Hauser Exkursionen, Alpenschule Innsbruck, and Frosch Sportreisen. The tour operator market in Germany is generally characterized by a few “*big generalists*” (the market share of the “Big Three” – TUI Deutschland, Rewe-Group, and Thomas Cook – was 44.26% in 2011; see DRV, 2011), in addition to many specialists and small and occasional operators (Freyer, 2011). It is difficult to compile the absolute numbers of the tour operators due to the many problems in differentiation. The companies are not obligated to furnish information for market studies and are often not willing to do so as a result. Freyer (2011) sees a continuous increase during the post-war years in Germany; since the turn of the millennium, the number appears to have stagnated at about 1,500 companies. On the other hand, Kirstges (2010) assumes much higher figures and estimates the share of organizing companies to be 1,700 main tour operators with an additional 1,800 bus companies or even travel agencies that occasionally organize their own events. The period after 1970 was distinguished by the market entry of many specialty operators. The current trekking specialists of Hauser Expeditionen (1973), Wikinger Reisen (1969<sup>12</sup>), and Frosch Sportreisen (1984) were also founded during this time.<sup>13</sup>

An initial analysis of the tour operator market that is oriented toward trekking tours shows that trekking trips are very popular. For example, the equivalent keyword combination of “trekking vacation” has more than 2.7 million results and “trekking trip” has 4.6 million results in the leading search engine of Google.<sup>14</sup> Due to the lacking uniform definition of trekking,

<sup>12</sup> Start-up of Renta Gruppenreisen-Service GmbH, as an extension for a non-profit association for youth travel (later name change to Wikinger Reisen GmbH; <http://www.wikinger-reisen.de/ueberuns/chronik.php>)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.hauser-exkursionen.de/allgemein/historie.php>, <http://www.wikinger-reisen.de/ueberuns/chronik.php>, <http://www.frosch-sportreisen.de/info/ueber-froschreisen.asp>

<sup>14</sup> Date of the site visit: 23.08.2012

these are presumably not just the “actual” trekking offers according to the above differentiation of the term trekking. In comparison, there are more than 38.9 million hits for the equivalent search term of “hiking trip.”<sup>15</sup>

Above all, Wikinger Reisen – which claims that it is the market leader in the area of hiking trips – is listed near the top. The tour operators of Frosch Sportreisen and the Alpin Schule Innsbruck (ASI) as Austrian special operators are also present here. Due to the major increase in demand for active vacations that started in the 1980s, some of the generalists such as Neckermann (now Thomas Cook), TUI, or Airtours also entered the trekking business – but with a lesser degree of success. The high degree of risk for large operators quickly became apparent in cases when they sent travellers with less experience in hiking and trekking to the Everest region without being able to expertly advise the customers at the German agencies, provide qualified tour guides, and constantly supervise the trekking organization on site. The smaller specialty tour operators were better able to resolve these difficulties with their expert and dedicated personnel.

### **Study of German Special Tour Operators for Trekking Trips**

The following section examines four<sup>16</sup> specialty tour operators of trekking trips for German-speaking guests (Wikinger-Reisen, Hauser-Exkursionen, Frosch-Reisen, and Alpenschule Innsbruck) in relation to their range of offers and illustrates common factors or dissimilarities with regard to the theoretical differentiations made at the beginning.

#### ***The Term Trekking in the Practice***

Although chapters 2 and 3 explained that scientists tend to agree on the differentiation between the terms trekking and long-distance hiking, it is conspicuous that the boundaries are sometimes fluid in the practice (even though it is highly likely that the German specialty tour operators are aware of the differences between trekking and long-distance hiking). For example, a specialty catalog for trekking trips (Wikinger Reisen, 2012) offers the package “Across England from East to West” along the Hadrian’s Wall Path in England that only requires overcoming a few differences in altitude (the highest elevation is 345 meters). In keeping with the definition by the experts (trekking = long-distance hiking in [high] mountains), this tour should actually be classified under long-distance hiking. One reason for including the “trek” in this catalog may possibly be that the route represents an exception because of its attractiveness (since treks are hardly possible in England due to the lack of higher altitudes). But other operators also

<sup>15</sup> Date of the site visit: 23.08.2012

<sup>16</sup> Selection was made on the basis of the search engine listing at [www.google.de](http://www.google.de) and information of the b2b magazine “fww” of the German travel industry.

frequently have fluid transitions between trekking and hiking. Especially the offers by Frosch-Reisen are closer in part to long-distance hiking than trekking since these tours primarily occur on European cross-country trails (E-paths) or GR footpaths in Europe. So the question remains open as to how much some of the tours offered under the category of “trekking” actually have in common with the term “trekking”. This could be countered with the fact that all of the trekking package tours offered by the specialists are described in detail and divided into the degrees of difficulty that they determined for this purpose. As a result, the end consumers are offered a clear, distinct, and transparent overview off the individual tours.

### ***Trip Time and Destination Areas***

The examined trekking trips usually last up to three weeks, depending on how far removed the trekking destination is from the source region. For example, trip offers in the Alps (as ***nearby destinations*** for German vacationers) are predominately limited to one week and also usually offered without the component of the flight (own transportation; special offers by the Deutsche Bahn). ***Medium-distance destinations*** such as La Gomera, Crete, or Corsica are usually for 10 to 14 days, but the trekking tour is often not the only component of the overall trip here. The days after the beginning and/or before the end of the trip can be used for sightseeing and relaxation. On the other hand, ***long-distance travel*** starts at 14 days of trip time in the most cases – so people do not hike for the overall time of the stay but usually just for an average of 6 to 12 days. Trekking trips to distant destination regions are frequently combined with additional components such as excursions, city sightseeing, and other domestic flights. For demanding longer hikes at high altitudes, such as those in Nepal, acclimatization days are even included in the planning (see Hauser Exkursionen and Wikinger Reisen). Furthermore, tour operators offer individually bookable components and alternatives for extending the vacation trip in addition to the trekking flat rate.

It is conspicuous that the Alpine region is increasingly represented in the short-distance destinations while Nepal with the Annapurna region and tours around Mount Everest are strongly present in long-distance travel (33 tours for Hauser Exkursionen, 11 tours for Wikinger, and 10 tours bookable through Alpenschule Innsbruck). One reason for the increased offer of trekking trips to Nepal may be that it trekking tourism has been able to develop in an unprecedented way due to the many existing traditional lodging facilities, the unusually attractive natural region, and a relatively liberal tourism policy in Nepal. Consequently, the emergence of organizational structures in Nepalese trekking tourism can be called unique in comparison to other non-European high mountain areas (Hauck, 1996).

### ***Trip Descriptions***

The trip descriptions by the special operators show clear overlaps. In addition to the division of the trails into degrees of difficulty, the operators indicate the demands for the individual trekking trips such as ascents and descents, maximum meters (collected) of altitude, and walking time in hours; demands on the physical condition, surefootedness, head for heights, or hiking experience in the mountains. The routes are designed with daily legs of 5 to (in less common cases) 10 hours of hiking (depending on degree of difficulty), whereby several hundred or even thousands of meters in altitude are covered.

One conspicuous characteristic of the trip descriptions is that the encounter with foreign cultures and peoples is especially emphasized for long-distance travel and that they mention overnight stays and hiking through native villages. This corresponds with the motives and wishes of trekking travelers that were explained in Chapter 3. Wikinger Reisen describes its concept with the catchwords of experiencing nature and culture, the country and the people, genuine and unique. The concept of Hauser Expeditionen promises lasting recuperation for the body, mind, and soul due to the effect of the landscape's silence and calmness.

### ***Contents of Offers***

Overlapping also exists in the offer packages of the specialty operators that were examined. The German guests are offered completely organized all-round packages that contain every important component of a trekking package tour such as overnight stays, flight, transfer, baggage transport, tour manager, mountain hiking guide, any required domestic flights, permits, and admission fees in accordance with the course of the trip, as well as any necessary camping and cooking equipment, accompanying teams (e.g. Morocco), or bottled oxygen (e.g. Nepal). Hauser Exkursionen even provides additional Certec® bags and satellite telephones for especially difficult trekking routes.

Baggage transport is included in most of the packaged trekking tours. The daily legs are usually hiked with daypacks and sometimes with lunch packages. Depending on the trip area, the baggage transport takes place in special cases via camel, mule (e.g. Morocco; Wikinger Reisen), lama, jeep, canoe, boot, or additional porters.

### ***Overnight Stays***

The offered accommodations and provisions tend to be simple and not oriented toward a target group with demands of luxury. The overnight stays depend upon the natural and infrastructural circumstances of the trek.

Simple hotels, guesthouses, apartments, or inns serve as accommodations, but huts (some even with multi-bed rooms), lodges, or tents may also be used. For example, overnight stays often occur in lodges and mountain hotels in the Alps, while the Great Walks in New Zealand offer a good system of huts and tent possibilities; in Nepal, guests spend the night in hotels, guesthouses, lodges/huts, or tents that include breakfast or half board. For travelers to Nepal, companies like Hauser-Exkursionen also offer their guests “comfort tours” that sometimes include overnight stays in 5-star hotels and high-quality lodges with full board and all of the additional fees (e.g. permits, rail & fly) – in addition to the “simple tours” described above.

But even the “simple trip” is now less arduous than 20 years ago. Trekking trips with an *overnight stay in a tent* now just require travelers to bring along their own sleeping bag (if at all); cooking and camping equipment is mostly provided by the operators, and the members of the group cook together. In some special cases, a cook is even included on the trip (e.g. Armenia; Wikinger-Reisen). As a result, travelers are not required to bring along and carry much equipment on their own.

**Table-3:** Overview of Trekking Offers by Special Tour Operators in the German-speaking market

	Frosch-Sportreisen	Hauser Exkursionen	Wikinger Reisen	Alpinschule Innsbruck (ASI)
<b>Number of tour offers</b>	11	661 <sup>17</sup>	88 <sup>18</sup>	47
<b>Number of countries</b>	7 (Europe + Cuba)	94 <sup>19</sup> (throughout the world)	32 <sup>20</sup> (throughout the world)	23 <sup>21</sup> (throughout the world)
<b>Length of trip</b>	1 week	1-4 weeks	1-3 weeks	1-3 weeks
<b>Division into degrees of difficulty</b>	No	I Very easy II Easy III Difficult IV Very difficult V Extremely difficult X Expeditions <i>Additional ratings for alpine, MTB and ski tours</i>	From 1 to 4 depending on walking time, differences in altitude, incline, type of path	1 Very easy 2 Easy 3 Medium difficulty 4 Difficult 5 Very difficult
<b>Trails</b>	Usually European long-distance paths (E-paths/ GR footpaths)	All types*	All types*	All types*

<sup>17</sup> 227 tour offers in Europe, 180 in Asia, 124 in the Americas, 114 in Africa, 9 in Oceania, 7 in the Orient.

<sup>18</sup> 52 tour offers in Europe, 7 in the Americas, 13 in Africa, 15 in Asia, 1 in New Zealand.

<sup>19</sup> Tour offers in 27 African countries, 25 European countries, 22 Asian countries, 10 American countries, 7 countries in Oceania and 3 countries in the Orient.

<sup>20</sup> Tour offers in 17 European countries, 5 American countries, 4 African countries, 5 countries in Asia and New Zealand.

<sup>21</sup> Tour offers in 13 European countries, 2 Asian countries, 6 American countries and 2 African countries.

<b>Profile or trail descriptions and requirements</b>	Yes, brief profile description	Yes, brief profile description	Yes, brief profile description	Yes, brief profile description
<b>Accommodations</b>	All types**	All types**	All types**	All types**
<b>Group size</b>	Average of 6-14 persons (min. 4 persons; max. 22 persons)	Usually 10-16 persons (min. 4 persons; max. 18 persons).	Usually 10-16 persons (min. 4 persons; max. 18 persons).	Average of 12-14 persons (min. 4 persons, max. 20 persons)
<b>Inclusive services</b>				
<b>Flights</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes, except Alps	Yes, except Alps
<b>Transfers</b>	Yes	Yes, almost always	Yes, almost always	Yes
<b>Overnight stays</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Provisions</b>	Yes, depending on type of trip, B/D, HB or FB	Yes, depending on type of trip, B/D, HB or FB	Yes, depending on type of trip, B/D, HB or FB	Yes, depending on type of trip, B/D, HB or FB
<b>Tour guides</b>	Yes, sometimes	Yes, usually	Yes, usually	n/a
<b>Hiking guides</b>	Yes, sometimes	Yes, frequently	Yes, frequently	Yes
<b>Baggage transport</b>	Yes, usually	Yes, usually	Yes, usually	Yes, usually porters
<b>Other</b>	Entrance fees, tent equipment, lightweight backpack, drinking bottle	Entrance fees, Trekking permits, camping and cooking equipment, accompanying team, oxygen bottles, Certec bag, satellite telephone	Entrance fees, permits, camping and cooking equipment, accompanying team, oxygen bottles, lunch packages	Entrance fees, permits, camping and cooking equipment, accompanying team, Certec bag, oxygen bottles, ASI badge, tour book
<b>Additional</b>	n/a	Additional services and other components are bookable, extensions are possible; simple and comfort offers	Additional services, components, and extensions are possible; simple and comfort offers; individual trekking tours are possible (2 or more persons)	Individual extensions are possible; simple and comfort offers
<b>Other/specials</b>	Long-distance active travel offers with additional sport components	Family tours Tour guides for special tours	n/a	Provide contact partners and mountain guides for every tour
<b>*International long-distance hiking paths, pilgrimage paths, trails, pathless terrain, scree routes, steep roads, etc.</b> <b>**Hotels of all categories, guesthouses, lodges, huts, hostels, apartments, tents, bivouacs, etc.</b>				

Sources: Own research, database: ASI, 2012; Frosch Sportreisen, 2012; Hauser Exkursionen, 2012a; 2012b; Wikinger-Reisen, 2012a; 2012b.

## 6. Summary

As this article demonstrates, trekking can be clearly classified as hiking or long-distance hiking despite the individual forays of the term (trekking bike, canoe trekking, etc.). However, inferences can also be drawn on how theory and practice sometimes also deviate from each other. For example, the trekking offers by tour operators in the German-speaking market are not differentiated from alpine hiking.

Due to professional work by the special tour operators for the German-speaking market, trekking trips have become increasingly *convenient* and *comfortable* in recent years.<sup>22</sup> Less experienced or even professional hikers can now book a complete all-round carefree package including round trip flights, domestic flights, all transfers, organization of the complete tour with accommodation planning and provisions, baggage transport, trekking permits, tour managers, hiking guides, and much more. All of the studied operators offer additional comfort tours in which the selected accommodation establishments and provided provisions are higher quality.

The hikers' increasing need for more *safety and quality* during trips is also taken into consideration in the offers. All of the organizers work with reliable on-site operators, incoming agencies, and hiking guides. For example, Hauser has a strong local partner in Nepal with Lama Exkursions. Alpenschule Innsbruck is increasingly working with their own trained ASI mountain and hiking guides, all of whom are even personally introduced on the Internet. Contact partners for each individual trekking trip are listed by name with a photo, email address, and telephone number – which fosters a sense of trust and security. But even the topic of sustainability is anchored in the operators' company philosophy. For example, Hauser Exkursionen is CSR certified<sup>23</sup> and received a sustainability award in 2011. The quality in the offer is also reflected in the *flexibility* and *individuality* in the planning of the trips. In addition to the classic package tour, the operators offer the possibility of extending the stay, book additional components, etc.

However, there is also another side of the coin – as is so often the case. The increasing comfort and the widespread feeling of safety have contributed to the fact that many travelers undertake a trekking vacation that is actually beyond their physical abilities. The result is a rising number of mountain accidents. It may not be enough to “just” appeal to the personal responsibility of the travelers over the long term. Instead, the operators – despite their understandable desire to sell – should make a greater effort

<sup>22</sup> See for instance „Trends in hiking tourism“ in: Dreyer, A.; Menzel, A. (2009), pp. 82 and Menzel, A.; Dreyer, A. (2009), pp. 276. Further literature about trends and tourism: e.g. Kirig, A.; Gatterer, H. (2011); Conrady, R.; Buck, M. (2012).

<sup>23</sup> CSR = Corporate social responsibility (a form of corporate self-regulation integrated into a business model).



to promote realism in the travelers when they make the decision to book a trip. In any case, it is apparent that preventing crisis situations is in the operators' own interest.

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# Is Trekking tourism sustainable? Examples from Nepal

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**Abstract:** *German tour operators specialized in trekking often call their products sustainable. This article examines in how far trekking tours are sustainable and whether the tour operators know, understand, and keep what they promise in their brochures. The investigation is regionally limited to Nepal, country of origin of modern trekking tourism. Analyzing feedback forms from customers and self-assessment forms of a Nepalese agency, and looking at the economic, social, and ecological effects of trekking tourism shows that the tour operators mainly work economically for the benefit of their own company. Ecological, social, cultural and health aspects presently come second. This is not due to a lack of motivation to act in a sustainable way, but because they do not know or do not understand the various aspects of sustainability and the numerous groups defining sustainability in different ways. In future the payment of decent wages to the local crew will be a main indicator of how much sustainability is valued by those involved in trekking business whether German tour operator, local agency or customer. In order to solve problems resulting from trekking tourism – such as the littering of trekking areas – cooperation with the government, local institutions, and entrepreneurs is necessary.*

**Keywords:** Nepal, trekking, German tour operator, sustainable tourism, sustainable development.

## Introduction

German tour operators specialised in trekking tours claim to offer sustainable products. In their yearly catalogues they refer to jobs created at the destinations, fair business conditions, negotiations on a par, local traditions and customs being respected, intercultural contacts, protection and preservation of nature by taking back non-degradable waste from the mountains and the use of local infrastructure. They promise their customers quality and safety as well as trained tour guides (DAV Summit Club, 2012; Diamir, 2012; Hauser Exkursionen, 2012). McMinn (1997), however considers the term *sustainable tourism* to be a mere buzzword coined by the experts on tourism to give themselves a positive image by propagating economic advantages, social benefits for the local society and environmental protection. Aim of the present article is not only to examine in how far trekking tours are sustainable but also whether the tour operators know, understand, and keep what they promise. Only with a clear insight, what sustainability means it is possible to improve the quality of trekking tours and to satisfy the needs of every person involved. The investigation is limited regionally to Nepal, considering it the country of origin of modern trekking tourism.

## Collection of Data and Methodology

The paper is based on catalogues of travel businesses specialized in trekking tours, research of secondary literature and a questionnaire filled in by the Nepalese partner agency of a German trekking tour operator in the context of the CSR certification (corporate social responsibility certification) as well as customer feedback forms of the same tour operator. As this is internal information, the tour operator remains anonymous. Additionally, information collected in about 20 years of personal experience in the area of trekking tourism is incorporated. It was gained in numerous informal conversations and narrative interviews with tourists, tour guides, product managers and general managers, as well as participatory observation in trekking business in Germany and in Nepal.

## Sustainable Development

The term *sustainability* can be traced back to statements of Hannß Carl von Carlowitz made in relation to forestry in his book “*Sylvicultura Oeconomica*” (1713). Von Carlowitz demands that only as many trees should be felled as can regrow (Mundt, 2011). In the 1960s, when the Green Movement was born, for the first time sustainable development was discussed in a broad public. The term was officially defined 1987 in the report “Our Common Future” published by the World Commission on Environment and Development: “Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1987, p. 24). The commission chaired by the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland was expected to come up with long-term perspectives for environmentally friendly development politics. The definition given in the report, also known as Brundtland-Report, has been justifiably criticised: How can people living in the present judge what future generations want and need (Mundt, 2011) without knowing about their future technological capabilities (McMinn, 1997), and who should represent future generations and their needs (McCool & Moisey, 2001)? It is also mentioned that each culture defines “need” differently; for this reason those affected should decide themselves what sustainable development means to them (Redclift, 1992). The question remains as to what will be sustained and how (Moisey & McCool, 2001). Sustainable development not only depends on regional circumstances but also on the opinions of those involved in the process. Indicators of sustainability are always subjective and never can fulfil the expectations of everybody (Baumgartner, 2008). Meanwhile there are a number of definitions for *sustainable development* put forward by different areas of research (see compilation e.g. in Losang, 2000). The Brundtland-Report is considered the break-through in terms of debate on the term *sustainability* or *sustainable development* (Losang, 2000) and was further specified at the

conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, when environmental protection as well as social and economic development were termed the basis for sustainable development. From this the three-pillar-model evolved, although its origin is disputed (Wikipedia, Drei Säulen Modell, 2012). While Losang (2007) pleads for a fourth pillar or dimension for politics and demands democratic structures to be guaranteed as consideration for individual and collective interests in the region, Mundt (2011), who also considers social and political stability prerequisites for sustainable development and for sustainable tourism, would like to eliminate the pillar of social development from the definition. In his opinion, social development is not measurable. However, the measurability of sustainability is altogether questioned (McCool & Moisey, 2001); nevertheless, suggestions and criteria for measuring can be found for example with Baumgartner (2008). Criticism is also voiced concerning the ecological aspects of sustainability. Who has the right to determine how and to what degree the environment has to be protected? The opinions on this aspect are dependent on the groups involved and by their demands regarding their environment (McMinn, 1997), a fact that may lead to conflicts of interest among these groups (Redclift, 1992).

### **Sustainable Tourism**

Sustainable tourism is considered an aspect of sustainable development (McMinn, 1997; Garrod & Fyall, 1998; Baumgartner, 2008). For this term, too, there are numerous definitions (Losang, 2000; Schrand, 1998; Baumgartner, 2010), most of which share the demand for preservation of economic, socio-cultural, and ecological resources, which form the basis of tourism. As a tool of social and economic development, sustainable tourism is to protect cultural and natural assets (Moisey & McCool, 2001). A great number of synonyms are used: ecotourism, alternative tourism, green tourism, responsible tourism, low impact tourism, environment based tourism, soft tourism, small-scale tourism, community-based tourism, non-destructive tourism, socially responsible tourism (McMinn, 1997; Schrand, 1998; Dolnicar et al., 2008). Quite often, the three-pillar-model is also applied to sustainable tourism. Mundt (2011) strongly criticizes the socio-cultural component, i.e. the wish for conservation of cultural heritage and traditional values. Striving for social and cultural sustainability in the sense of conservation considers societies not only to be static, but also to be similar to endangered species in a museum or zoo. In his eyes, tourism is a part of culture: So there is contradiction between enhancing sustainable tourism on the one hand, and trying to conserve cultures on the other hand. Furthermore, cultures are not homogeneous as they differ on the inside between social groups or generations. That means opinions towards tourism can vary within the same society (McMinn, 1997).

Schatzl (2008) understands sustainability in the field of tourism, especially in the field of trekking tourism, as integration of ecological,

socio-cultural, economic and – in conjunction with travel sickness and altitude acclimatization – health dimensions. He demands that any of the actors – from the tour operator to the local agency and the trekking staff down to the customer – should contribute a maximum share depending on the specific economic and social background of the person. According to Schatzl (2008), sustainability is a long-term learning process for everybody being involved in a specific journey. For Baumgartner (2008) sustainability is dynamic and seen in the interaction of developing societies with the preservation of nature. The goals of a tourism sustaining ecology and society could be for example the following: taking into consideration the needs of the local population as much as possible, demand for an intact environment, economic productivity, taking into account the wishes of the tourists and trying to build the best communication possible (Inmann & Luger, 1998). Further suggestions for criteria and indicators regarding sustainable tourism are listed in Schrand (1998), Losang (2000), Baumgartner (2008), and Schatzl (2008).

### **Trekking as a type of travel**

The term *trekking* means to travel a distance over a number of days or weeks mostly in sparsely populated areas while carrying the own luggage on the back (Böhmer-Bauer, 2012). This type of travel contains elements of adventure, eco and cultural tourism (Bhatt, 2008). There are easy trekking tours, often named cultural trekking, and physically more demanding trekking tours, which can include optional ascents to summits (DAV Summit Club, 2012; Diamir, 2012; Hauser Exkursionen, 2012). Schatzl (2008) distinguishes trekking tours from expeditions: The latter includes ascent to higher levels, being more difficult, demanding certain health requirements, and contains higher risks. According to Banskota and Sharma (1998), mountaineering in contrast to trekking starts at a height of 6,000 meters. Trekking tours to Nepal are offered by German tour operators as packages mostly encompassing flights, accommodation, food, transport, tour guide, local guide, porters and insurance (Diamir, 2012; Hauser Exkursionen, 2012; DAV Summit Club, 2012). The German companies cooperate with local agencies, which are in charge of the programme in their country and provide the Nepalese tour guide as well as the sirdar. The sirdar is responsible for organizing the trekking: He hires the trekking crew consisting of porters and kitchen staff (in the case of accommodation in tents), selects the lodges or camping sites, and buys the necessary food for the tourists (Bechtel, 1997; Schatzl, 2008).

### **Nepal – Country of Origin of modern Trekking**

In 1951, Nepal opened its borders to foreign visitors. The first members of expeditions were followed in the 1960s by British and German organized trekking groups and by individual travellers (Schatzl, 2008; Zurick, 1992; Bechtel, 1997), before the trekking boom started in the 1980s.



The mountaineers and trekkers found an astonishingly good network of accommodation, especially along the trading and travelling routes to Tibet (Odell & Lama, 1998; Schatzl, 2008). Well-maintained paths, some consisting of stone stairs others paved have been linking the mountain villages for centuries and now form the backbone of many trekking routes (Zurick, 1992). Along the linking passage, there were benches and travellers would find shelter in the villages and at the farmsteads, where the woman of the house also would offer *chai* (tea), *chang* (rice beer) and *daal bhaat* (rice with lentils). Even simple accommodation was available, the so-called *bhattis*. Accommodation and food was paid for in goods, by helping in the fields, collecting firewood or in money (Schatzl, 2008). Even today, the porters can earn a plate of *daal bhaat* or potatoes and a place to sleep if they provide a measure of firewood or help in the fields (Odell & Lama, 1998; Schatzl, 2008). The *bhattis* form the basis for teahouse trekking which later developed into lodge trekking (Schatzl, 2008), as the women who took care of the Tibetan merchants quickly adapted to the needs of the newly arrived type of travellers (Odell & Lama, 1998). In the region of Annapurna, the Gurkhas were the first to invest the money they had earned in the Indian and British Gurkha-regiments in accommodation for tourists in the 1960s (Nepal, 2007). In Khumbu, the region around Mt. Everest, the Sherpas who had obtained the financial resources through their services as traders and porters seized the opportunity. Although most of the Sherpas now are owners of lodges, traders and mountain guides, many tourists use this name of an ethnic group as a synonym for porters, irrespective of which ethnic group they might belong to (Malville, 2005; Adams, 1992). To be considered a Sherpa is lucrative in tourism, for which reason some non-Sherpas claim to be Sherpas (Spoon, 2011). Teahouse trekking was a cheap, but also very simple form of trekking and for a long time only done by individual travellers (Schatzl, 2008; Nyaupane et al., 2006). Trekking tours organized by travel businesses provided accommodation in tents. The whole equipment as well as most of the food was brought along from Kathmandu or Pokhara (Schatzl, 2008; Bechtel, 1997). There were enough porters available since many regions could only be reached on foot or with pack animals and for the rural population transporting loads was quite naturally (Malville, 2005). As the teahouses developed into lodges, the tour operators discovered the fixed accommodation for their customers. Meanwhile the three most popular trekking regions in Nepal – the Annapurna Conservation Area, the Sagarmatha National Park (Khumbu or Everest region) and the Langtang National Park (Zurick, 1992; Schatzl, 2008) are dotted with lodges of different standards including eco and comfort lodges. For that reason, most of the organized trekking tours nowadays are designed as lodge trekking. Trekking with tent accommodation is only offered into regions where no sufficient lodge-structure is provided (yet), for example into the regions of Makalu, Manaslu or Rolwaling (DAV Summit Club, 2012; Diamir, 2012; Hauser Exkursionen, 2012).

## **Trekking Tourists – Profile, Demands and Behaviour**

People who book a trekking trip via a German tour operator are mostly financially well situated graduates, white-collar employees, civil servants in higher and higher intermediate service, as well as self-employed people, in search of physic activities and experiences in nature and culture. They belong to the group of best agers and are on average around fifty years old. Women make up for a little over 50 per cent (Böhmer-Bauer, 2012; Schatzl, 2008). Trekking tourists expect a certain value for money, such as hospitality, an impressive and ecologically intact environment, and a certain standard of hygiene and modestly comfortable accommodation and safety (Inmann & Luger, 1998). Holden and Sparrowhawk (2002) count trekking tourists among the eco-tourists. However, spending holidays in nature does not necessarily mean to contribute to its protection (Budeanu, 2007) or to change the own behaviour with respect to environmental protection – for example, with regard to transport, waste, water and landscape (Miller et al., 2010). Mundt (2011) doubts that eco-tourists compared to mass-tourists differ in habits and behaviour in any way. Schatzl (2008) observed exactly the same while on tour with trekking tourists in the Sagarmatha area. Even though they had been informed about ecologically questionable products in written form by the organizers prior to the journey as well as verbally by the tour guide during the tour, many of them still bought water in plastic bottles, soft drinks, beer and other alcoholic beverages, power snacks, chocolates, crisps and more packaging-intensive imported goods. A survey (Holden, 2003) among younger trekking tourists travelling on their own to Kathmandu, demonstrates that the interviewees believe to contribute positively to the regional economy. Although two thirds of them are convinced that trekking is harmful to nature, 20 per cent would not give up trekking, even if they knew that they personally caused environmental damage.

## **Sustainability and Trekking Tourists**

To gain an insight on the importance of sustainability to trekking tourists, 31 customer feedback sheets of one German tour operator were analysed. The customers receive this feedback-form used for quality management together with their travel documents from the tour operator and are requested to fill it in and send it back after the journey. According to the company, the return rate is 22 per cent. The author chose feedback-forms pertaining to a classical three-week trekking tour around the Annapurna. The 31 forms date from eleven group tours conducted between February and November 2011. Each of these tours required a minimum of ten participants. Of course, the informative value of only 31 forms is limited. Nevertheless, combined with secondary literature and supplemented by many informal discussions between author and German and Nepalese tour guides clear tendencies become apparent.

Eleven of the forms were supplied by men, eleven forms by women, three were filled in by couples, and the senders of the remaining six forms stayed anonymous so it is not clear if they are filled in by one person or by couples. Therefore, the following numbers refer to the number of forms and not to the number of people. Most of the 17 partly open and partly closed questions on the form relate to customers satisfaction with respect to product and service. Only two questions explicitly touch the issue of sustainability. In case of the closed questions, more than one answer could be checked. Two opening questions are “What did you like best” and “What should be improved”. What impressed the participants most, was the care and the expertise of the local tour guides (19), followed by the accompanying staff (11), landscape, and nature (11). Kindness and calmness of the Nepali was mentioned (7), however, it is not clear whether these descriptions refer to the accompanying staff or to the people living and working along the trekking path. Organisation (5), weather (5), accommodation (4), and cultural highlights such as monasteries and temple complexes (3) are also touched upon as well as the farewell party with the porters (3), the group harmony (3), route and stages (2). Food, physic challenge, the farewell party in Kathmandu, a stay in Manang, the final days in Kathmandu were only mentioned once each. One person remarked, “There was a good feeling about the way the porters were treated”, but it is not clear whether this refers to the way, the trekking tourists treated the porters or the way the supervising Nepalis treated them. The heated guestrooms in the lodges are also mentioned in a positive way, although it is clear, that they are only heated for trekking groups and not for individual travellers. The fact, that in this way more energy is consumed, is obviously no issue for this customer. Only the own well-being seems to be important to the tourists, an observation Schatzl (2008) made in the Khumbu region, too.

The most important improvements suggested by the respondents concern the route and stages, as well as timing in general (17). Next, there were proposals to optimize the choice of lodges that were described as simple and dirty (5) and the selection, quality and amount of food (4) as well as the flight path and the long waiting period for connecting flights (4). Other customers complained about not provided single rooms even though they had been booked (2) and about a too great number of participants (2). The following points of criticism were only named once each: fitness of the participants was not sufficient; wrong information on tipping in the travel documents (the accompanying staff wanted more money at the end of the trekking); too many people on the bus; condition of the bus; missing information; tour guide not competent; framework programme (a dance show was considered as too touristy). It was also criticised that the guide did not inform the participants clearly about not giving balloons and sweets to the children. The customer who wrote this felt hurt to see “... how much this unspoiled country was marred because children started to beg”.

Obviously not social sustainability or the well-being of the children lies in the interest of the writer, but the conservation of own clichés regarding Nepal. Additionally, the customer shifted the responsibility for adherence to sustainable behaviour to the tour guide.

On the one hand, it is the Nepali agency that was criticized by the tourists about the route, choice of lodges, food, bad condition of bus, and missing single rooms; on the other hand, critique is directed at the German tour operator (flights, number of participants, selection of participants, missing information). Especially the critique referring to the agency is surprising as the German company has been working together with this agency since almost forty years and this particular route, being in the programme for years, should be optimized for long. With many trekking tours, the periods for single stages are too tight. It is alarming that almost 80 per cent of the trekkers and mountaineers who die in Nepal had confidence in a tour operator (Schatzl, 2008). One of the reasons behind could be the general trend towards shorter trips. Choosing the tour at home in the cosy living room, the customers often compare the number of events and activities in the programmes of the various tour operators to get as many program items as possible for their money. They want to experience many highlights in a short time and do not expect or even are unable to imagine possible illness, exhaustion, culture shock etc. while being on trekking.

The use of badly managed lodges, too, is surprising, but can be explained considering the traditional behaviour of the sirdars. They are involved in the traditional system of economic reciprocity widespread in Nepal. That means that cooperation occurs firstly with relatives, next with friends of the same village and only after that with external partners of whom no loyalty can be expected (Adams, 1992). This type of patronage is being criticized by the German tour operators, the customers and the tour guides (Schatzl, 2008), as they are not aware that it is nearly impossible for the sirdars to step out of the social structures they are born in. The critique about the fitness of the group members is aimed at the German tour operator, as out of economic reasons (e.g. when the minimum number of participants has to be reached) customers are taken along, who do not in every case meet the physical demands of the specific trekking tour. It is part of the duty of the tour operator to select the participants carefully as not everybody who can afford a trekking tour also meets the necessary conditions (Schatzl, 2008).

Most of the customers were *very content* with the level of sustainability or the sensitivity of the tour guide for environmental and social issues (18), many were *content* (9), only once, *not so content* was checked. Nobody was *not content at all*, however, one form was marked with a question mark, which could be a sign, that this person did not know how to interpret sustainability. Surely, these positive results are due to the training regularly initiated by the German company. The tour guides are obliged to attend,

because as a guide they play an important role for the success of the tour. They plan the daily routine, organize, guide, pass on information, entertain, can instruct the tourists to sustainable behaviour, and mediate between the local population and the tourists (Gurung, Simmons & Devlin, 1996). For this reason, the company offers seminars for tour guides on a regular basis, which benefits the tour guides as well as the customers and contributes to the sustainable image of the tour operator. Here is to add, that a Nepali tour guide only earns 75 per cent of the average worker's salary, but additional receives tips and presents from the tourists. The employment as a tour guide is popular, especially, because of the expectation to travel abroad and to be in contact with tourists (Böhmer-Bauer, 2009; Gurung, Simmons & Devlin, 1996).

Another question on the feedback-form reads, *Are there in your opinion points or details during the tour, which could be changed to become more environmentally or socially friendly? If yes, what are they?* On three questionnaires avoiding of plastic water bottles or stops at drinking water stations are suggested. One person wants waste to be taken with the group and not left in the trekking area, which should not happen anyway with this tour operator, as it is part of the company's philosophy to dispose waste properly. On two forms, fair possibilities for earning a living are demanded for the accompanying staff in order not to depend on tips. In one case, there was the wish stated that smaller hotels and lodges should be chosen. Furthermore, it was asked to change the internal flight to a bus-ride.

The answers show definitely some awareness concerning ecology or environmental pollution, and about social responsibility, e.g. reflecting the earnings of the accompanying trekking crew. It has to be mentioned, that tips at the end of a trekking tour in Nepal are not voluntary, but mandatory. The trekking tourists are more or less forced to part with used trekking equipment like fleece, t-shirt or torch to give it to the trekking crew (Böhmer-Bauer, 2009), which leaves the impression that the porters' meagre salary is compensated at the expense of the customers.

In case of the question "What caused you to book this trip" far the most customers chose the option *trekking, hiking* (24) and *route of the tour* (23), followed by *date* (17), *the company's philosophy* (10), *recommendation by acquaintances* (7), *price* (6), *tour guide* (1) and *good statements about social and environmental responsibility* (1). As the company uses statements on sustainability with regard to economic, social and ecological fairness in advertising there can be subsumed that sustainability of the tour operator influences about a third of the people in their booking behaviour. Altogether, the whole questionnaire seems not well designed towards the topic of sustainability as nowhere a definition can be found what is to be understood by the term. The forms analysed show the customers focus on the holiday experiences and the best offers possible for their money.

These results cannot be applied to those forms not returned. According to some product managers, involved customers especially send in the feedback forms, when they want to change things, because something went wrong on tour. The percentage of regular customers of this company lies around 60 per cent. That demonstrates the high quality of the offered trekking tours in the eyes of the participants despite the critique expressed in the feedback forms.

### **Self-assessment of the Nepalese Agency**

During the process of CSR certification in 2011, the local agencies of the German tour operator were asked to fill in a “partner agency check” form. Each agency should evaluate itself with regard to sustainability in management, as well as in ecological and socio-cultural aspects. For management the Nepalese agencies’ general managers gave themselves for each question the highest possible amount of ten points. Questions asked were for example: “The partner agency is familiar with the criteria and principles of sustainable tourism”, “... actively prevents exploitative child labour within its immediate infrastructure”, “... pays fair and appropriate wages to its employees” or “... systematically evaluates and improves the customer satisfaction (possibly together with tour operator)”. With regard to ecology, the agency gave itself always nine points. Questions on this aspect included: “The partner agency acts ecologically within own infrastructure” or “... considers environmentally friendly behaviour when subcontracting further suppliers”. Concerning socio-economic aspects, the Nepali partner awarded themselves nine of ten points, for example for questions like “The partner agency is socio-culturally sensitive” (9) or “... maintains an open and fair relationship with its business partners” (10).

That shows the dubiousness of certification based on self-assessment. To prove the credibility of the Nepalese managing directors, at least the Nepalese tour guides, lodge owners and members of the porter crew should have been involved. The chapter above has shown that there is room for improvement regarding the agency in organization (improvement of routes), ecology (avoidance of waste), and social responsibility (payment of porters). Another point is the varying interpretation of questions due to different cultural backgrounds, which becomes obvious in the question about child labour. In Nepal people are considered as adults from the age of 15 (Malville, 2005) and young men will then work as porters and carry loads which are limited to 30 kilograms each porter in the case of German tour operators.

Any noted deficits do not concern the local agency alone; due to the pressure on price because of tough competitive conditions, the German tour operator is also responsible. Commercial interests clearly overlay the other dimensions of sustainability, which is a growing tendency in the past years due to economic pressure and strong competition among the tour operators globally and notably within Nepal (Schatzl, 2008).

There are several reasons for this unrealistic self-assessment of the agency: Possibly, the managers compare their standards with those of other local agencies and consider themselves to be ranked top. Given the situation in the hierarchically structured society of Nepal, it is also possible that the boxes checked in the form, are the ones thought to be favoured by the German partner. Alternatively, as it is the custom in Nepal, the general managers of the agency simply wanted to support the German partner with whom they have a good relationship.

### **The Effects of Trekking Tourism in Nepal**

As in any other country too, in Nepal a lot has changed during the past 60 years through various influences, such as population mobility, TV, and internet. One of the main forces for economic, social, cultural, and ecological changes – not restricted to mountainous regions – is of course trekking tourism. Although 70 per cent of the population is engaged in agriculture, the tourism sector with about 300,000 direct jobs is of central economic importance. The number of visitors for 2010 of about 600,000 has been topped again in 2011. Metz (2011/12) subsumes that through rising demand especially among western tourists, the area of business called “sustainable tourism” in Nepal will further increase.

### **The Economic Effects of Trekking Tourism**

By mountain tourism, capital flows into the country since decades (Spoon, 2011/12; Gurung, Simmons & Devlin, 1996; Odell & Lama, 1998). In 2008 more than 25,000 trekkers and mountaineers visited the Khumbu region (Spoon, 2011/12) and in the Annapurna Conservation Area more than 50.000 people are employed as guides, porters, cooks or in the accommodation business (Nepal, 2008). Early in the 1970s, the first Sherpa agencies arose in Kathmandu and Pokhara (Adams, 1992). The capital of the agency owners originated from savings gained through tourism services or from foreign partners (Spoon, 2011). Before the development into a trekking destination money was not only generated by services in military or as porters (Malville, 2005), but also through the sale of wool, animals or agricultural products (Adams, 1992). From the very beginning, the inhabitants of the mountain areas such as the Thakalis, Sherpas, Gurungs, and Tamangs profited from trekking tourism. Without tourism, they would have been marginalized in socio-economical and geo-political terms. As working in the tourism sector is considered more profitable than farming (Adams, 1992), nowadays other ethnic groups are integrated, too (Odell & Lama, 1998; Bechtel, 1997). Additional income has always been important to the population in many of the mountain regions along the trekking routes because of potentially poor harvest and chronic lack of food (Odell & Lama, 1998; Malville, 2005). The greater portion of the income from trekking tourism receives the Nepalese government, particularly the entrance fees for the Conservation Areas and National Parks, part of which also runs to

the local communities (Bhatt, 2006). Altogether, an important portion of the income through tourism directly benefits the rural population (Odell & Lama, 1998): In more than 1,000 lodges and teashops in the Annapurna region, over two thirds of the employees are family members. A quarter of the employees comes from outside the area and takes on low-wage and unqualified tasks such as cleaning and gathering firewood (Nyaupane et al., 2006). It is certain that the mountain population controls a big part of the tourist business in the region, e.g. the Gurungs in the southern Annapurna region, the Thakalis the Kali Gandaki Corridor, the Manangis the upper Marsyangdi Valley (Nepal, 2007) and the Sherpas the Khumbu region (Spoon, 2011/12). However, the distribution of profits varies considerably: Tourism benefits mostly the people living close to the tourist centres or along the trekking routes (Karanth & Nepal, 2012) and even here not all of the local residents, but especially members of certain influential families. For that reason, the gaps in social and economic status are growing (Nepal, 2007). Households far from the tourist routes are only slightly integrated in trekking business. Some of the men do seasonal work as porters or guides, otherwise agriculture is the basis of subsistence (Spoon, 2011/12), but the sale of local vegetables is only marginally profitable (Odell & Lama, 1998).

### **Social Impacts of Trekking Tourism**

In the mountainous regions of Nepal, status is no longer defined by the number of yaks but rather by prestigious ascents of mountains and acquisition of material achievements (Zurick, 1992). Economic and social changes are linked very intimately. Through the various possibilities of earning opportunities in tourism, existing social disparities are intensified and new inequalities created. The Sherpas in the Khumbu region who at the beginning of tourism attained wealth as porters, for example, now regard the same work as inferior (Spoon, 2011/12). Conflicts arose between lodge owners and peasants (Nyaupane et al., 2006; Nepal, 2008), followed by more conflicts between the park employees and the local population due to limited possibilities of using the woods in the National Parks, because parts of the population living in the protected zone was relocated in other areas (Bhatt, 2006; Karanth & Nepal, 2012).

Nevertheless, trekking tourism had a positive impact on income, education, sensibility for health and environmental issues, which have reached a higher level in villages involved in tourism than in those remote from the tourist routes (Nyaupane et al., 2006; Nepal, 2008). It is mainly the women, who invest their money gained as lodge operators in development projects such as schools, drinking water supply, electricity, and road construction. Their social status has not only risen through their economic possibilities gained through tourism, but partially also through contact with well educated, female western tourists, who have indirectly strengthened their courage to demand more rights (Nyaupane et al., 2006).



In some of the societies, such as the Sherpas, it had been custom already before the advent of tourism, that men spent more time away from home as porters. In addition, it had always been and still is usual for families living in the mountainous regions of Nepal, to send one of their offspring to Kathmandu or even to India to earn money (Odell & Lama, 1998; Bechtel, 1997). Nonetheless, there is evidence that the absence of the men, who work for tourists, leads to an increase of workload for their wives, sisters, and daughters (Gurung, Simmons & Devlin, 1996). Over all tourism led to a revitalization of culture elements, for instance music and dances, and strengthened of ethnic identities of various groups (Nyaupane et al., 2006; Bhatt, 2006). The tourists' interest in the population of the mountain regions made the politicians take serious the issues of those groups (Nyaupane et al., 2006). However, in the Annapurna region the weakening ties between relatives is being bemoaned. The influence of tourism on children nowadays is not considered negative, unlike in the 1990s when begging and skipping school were seen as problems. To cope with this, programmes were devised to educate tourists as well as the local population. The tourists were informed about the connection between gifts and begging, and at school, the children were taught about the impacts of tourism on nature and society (Nyaupane et al., 2006). This does not hold for the region of Khumbu, where older people lament about the lack of interest of young Sherpas for education and monastery life; the children prefer begging and accompanying trekking groups (Nyaupane et al., 2006). For the rise in delinquency, the population not only blames tourism, but also lack of education, training, and population growth (Zurick, 1992; Banskota & Sharma, 1998). In the past years, there was an increase of cases of theft and assault, as well as murder of individual trekkers. Therefore, since September 2012 trekking without local guide in the Langtang area is forbidden by the Nepalese government (Stern, 2012).

### **Ecological Impacts of Trekking Tourism**

Decades ago, mountaineers encouraged Sherpas and members of other ethnic groups to climb mountains for money and fame. Traditionally many of the peaks were taboo as they were considered the seats or embodiments of goddesses and gods and therefore in traditional belief were holy (Spoon, 2011/12). The Tibetan or Sherpa name of Mt. Everest is Jomolongma what means *Mother of the Universe*. The mountain is seen as the embodiment of the goddess Jomo Miyo Lang Sangma – for short Jomolangma or Jomolongma – and the top is considered as her seat. In Nepalese language, the highest mountain of the world is called Sagarmatha, meaning *Forehead of the Sky*, which later was chosen as name for the National Park. The people revere Jomolongma because according to tradition she provides wealth. In the meantime, she is also implored for booming tourism and success in mountaineering. To ensure climbing success the members of expeditions pray to her and pay money to monks for sacrifices before climbing up (Spoon, 2011/12; Wikipedia, Heiliger Berg, 2012). Similar

rituals are usual before climbing the Annapurna, the *Food granting Goddess*, which is one of the names of the Hindu goddess Parvati (Zurick, 1992; Wikipedia, Heiliger Berg, 2012). The rituals must be performed prior to enter the holy regions (Zurick, 1992). The length of the rituals is determined by the amount of donations of the tourists (Schatzl, 2008). Just as with the Gurungs in the Annapurna area (Zurick, 1992) also in Sherpa culture trees and water sources were protected by taboos. As people were convinced that spirits live under trees and at water sources, it was custom to collect only dead wood and dead branches for firewood (Spoon, 2011/12). However, the local population did not follow strictly these rules. At all times Sherpas cut down woods for pragmatic reasons despite the taboos, for example, when they needed farmland (Obadia, 2008). Pollution of water was forbidden in order not to displease the spirits; it was the responsibility of women, who played a major role in environmental management, to ensure the favour of the spirits (Spoon, 2011/12; Allendorf & Allendorf, 2012). Was on the one hand spiritual knowledge partly lost due to tourism, on the other hand knowledge was preserved through tourism even if the interpretation of customs changed. For example, elder Sherpas saw the traditional Buddhist taboo as the source for the prohibition to injure or kill wild animals, whereas younger people now explain it in terms of wildlife conservation and keeping the tourists interested in the region (Spoon, 2011; Spoon, 2011/12; Bhatt, 2006; Obadia, 2008).

The construction of lodges for tourists led to deforestation of vast areas, as building material and firewood was needed (Banskota & Sharma, 1998; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Nyaupane et al., 2006). Due to this, all three main trekking areas now suffer of soil erosion (Bhatt, 2006). In the lodges, wood is used to heat water for showers, to heat the rooms and for cooking because many lodge owners choose their energy source according to costs. Wood is the cheapest and costs on average five times less than kerosene or gas. It can be collected free of charge and is still available in many places. If no kerosene is used, the daily quantum of firewood per tourist amounts to 5.6 kilograms. Use of hydroelectricity and solar power is increasing, however, they are no substitute for wood and kerosene, but only used as a supplement for electric light and sometimes for the hearth (Nepal, 2008). It is true that due to deforestation, tour operators replaced wood by kerosene for cooking for trekking tourists since the 1980s; also no more camp-fires are lit. However, this applies only to the tourists. The porters, keeping apart from the group for meals and sleeping use firewood almost exclusively for cooking and warmth at high altitudes (Schatzl 2008; Nepal, 2008), as the local agencies do not pay for them a lodge stay. Their low earnings force the porters to use the cheap wood instead of other fuel (Spoon, 2011). Hardly known is that many porters come from the Middle Hills around Kathmandu and are not only badly prepared for the cold in the Khumbu or Annapurna regions (Malville, 2005), but are as unaccustomed to the high altitudes as the trekking tourists, albeit often less well-equipped (Schatzl, 2008).

With 3,600 tons of firewood and nearly 475,000 l of kerosene per year the tourist accommodation contribute to global warming (Nepal, 2008). However, the greatest impacts on environment, i.e. the biggest contribution to global warming are the flights, which are necessary to reach the destination Nepal (Bhatt, 2006). That is why the trekking tour operators ask their customers to pay a voluntary compensation for the flight via the climate protection organization Atmosfair (DAV Summit Club, 2012; Diamir, 2012; Hauser Exkursionen starting in 2013). Yet, it is unknown, how many customers take action upon this suggestion. In this way, the tour operators pass on the responsibility for climate friendly voyages to the customers. Strasdas (2009) therefore suggests to include the money for the compensation in the tour price and pleads to offer direct flights, which is often not done in order to save costs. The analysis of the feedback forms showed that some of the customers are not satisfied with the flights, especially with long waiting times when changing flights; however, this does not mean that they would be ready to pay a higher price for direct flights. At least Losang (2000) states that there is no significant willingness to pay higher prices for sustainable tourism. As they act in an environmentally friendly way in their daily life, many customers feel they have earned the right to fly in a plane. In addition, a journey to a sparsely populated rural area is generally considered more sustainable than visiting a city. It is the prevailing opinion that a visit to Paris causes more damage to the environment than trekking in Nepal (Miller et al., 2010) although tourists in natural environments – even if they minimize their impact – cause more damage than tourists in a city (Dolnicar et. al., 2008). Furthermore it is believed that experiences made during overseas holidays are not to be substituted by those made during domestic holidays, and there is a growing tendency instead of going on a long holiday once a year to go more often on shorter trips trying to escape the drudgery of work. There seems to be very little disposition to change this (Miller et al., 2010).

The amount of waste produced during trekking tours also constitutes a problem. The main routes in the regions of Sagarmatha, Langtang, and Annapurna are littered with beer bottles, noodle packages, toilet paper and human faeces (Bhatt, 2006). A group of fifteen trekkers produce in ten days 15 kilograms of non-degradable waste (Banskota & Sharma, 1998). Schatzl has calculated that a group of trekkers of ten to fourteen people consumes on the average seven bottles of water and three cans of beer every day. Therefore, in the case of a two-week trekking tour, every group leaves behind about 100 plastic bottles and 40 cans of beer. Only very few of the participants actually brought along the bag to be used to collect the personal non-degradable waste they had received prior to the journey from one of the tour operators studied by Schatzl. The participants, who had brought along the bag, used it only to collect empty batteries or as bag for their clothes. When asked about that, some of them said, in their opinion the bag should only induce reflection on sustainability (Schatzl, 2008). It seems

obvious that information alone does not lead to a rising consciousness, and rising consciousness not necessarily leads to action (Miller et al., 2010).

The contamination of water sources by trekking tourists, too, is a problem, especially if the toilets are built too close to them and if the soap used for washing is not degradable (Banskota & Sharma, 1998; Bhatt, 2006). Waste pits and public toilets have not really mitigated the impacts on the trekking regions (Bhatt, 2006), as the accompanying staff does not use the toilets, which is the reason why certain places are very much soiled with faeces (Schatzl, 2008).

Another development initiated by tourism is the uncontrolled construction of a great number of new settlements, which show characteristics of towns as they are home to travel agencies, information centres, banks, internet cafés, and laundry services. The architecture of modern lodges with rooftop terraces and panorama windows, with showers and toilets reflect the wishes of the tourists. Often the new lodges stand on former rice terraces. The remaining rice terraces are no longer cultivated as the lodge owners have no time for that work and employees are not willing to do that job since working in the trekking business not only is more prestigious but also better paid as already mentioned. Agriculture and forestry are more and more replaced by tourism, which is why great amounts of vegetables, milk, and eggs need to be imported from outside to the mountainous regions (Nepal, 2007).

## Conclusion

Nowadays tourism is deeply embedded in Nepalese culture and Nepal is part of the global economic cycle not only due to but also because of trekking tourism. Tourism offers jobs and many people in Nepal have actively decided to use trekking tourism as source of income and (additional) economic activity. As the world's biggest tourism fair the *Internationale Tourismus Börse* in Berlin (ITB) shows, the Nepalis build and expand their businesses themselves. According to the exhibitor list in 2012, 29 companies from Kathmandu were represented, mostly local trekking agencies, but also hotels, one airline, and the Nepal Tourism Board (ITB Ausstellerverzeichnis, 2012). It seems strange, when the DAV Summit Club (2012, p. 10) promises to “negotiate on a par” because this should be self-evident among business partners. Even respect for customs and traditions of the local population (Hauser Exkursionen, 2012, p. 9) should not need to be mentioned, especially, when it is not clear what the phrase is supposed to mean. Whose and which customs and traditions are respected? Child labour? Nepotism practiced by the sirdars? Deforestation? Revived customs such as the presentation of dances for tourists? Rituals for tourists in exchange for money? Maoists demanding payment along the trekking routes as it has happened a few years ago? Or respecting holy mountains and refraining from ascent? Accepting traditional concepts of

environmental protection? Customs and traditions are never static, but change because the people want to change their living conditions like in the case of breaking the taboo on climbing holy peaks for fame and money.

The intercultural contacts promised in the catalogues of the German tour operators mostly refer to the accompanying staff, a fact that should not be taken as negative. Many trekking tourists are tense, challenged and in the worst case stressed, so they do not have the desire for further contacts.

The tour operators mention the use of local food as sustainable, not explaining if they understand by the term *local* Nepal, Kathmandu, Pokhara, or the trekking region itself. Considering the scarcity of food in the trekking areas, trekking tourists possibly further reduce the amount of food available for the population.

The so-called fair business conditions mentioned in German business philosophies or codes of conduct seem to apply mainly to the local partner agencies. How the employees of the agencies, especially the members of the trekking crew, are paid is up to the Nepalese managers. There is no intervention by the German tour operator even if customers complain about unfair payment of the crew. Furthermore, it is unjust to pay the tour guide or the trekking crew indirectly via “tips” or “presents”. No German mountain guide would like to receive a sweat-soaked shirt or an old fleece jacket from Japanese, Chinese, or Nepalese tourists instead of appropriate wage. Demanding tips is also unfair to the tourists as that indirectly raise the price of the tour, not to mention that if the trekking staff is not satisfied due to too small tips, there remains a bad feeling on both sides. The supposed economic, social, and ecological sustainability is completely implausible concerning the porters. Due to their low wages, they have no choice to use other fuel than the cheap wood for cooking. The tour operators and the local agencies act inconsistently when they use kerosene for the tourists but ignore the use of wood by the crew.

The claim to take non-degradable waste back from the mountains dates back to the times of tent trekking. Nowadays at least a part of the waste is left at the lodges, where it is hidden by the lodge owners in waste pits or between shrubs, until the next rains washes it towards the valley (Schatzl, 2008). The occasional Clean up Treks organized by a tour operator or spontaneous activities to collect waste of individual tour guides (Schatzl, 2008), are merely a drop in the ocean. The waste problem can no longer be solved by the tour operators or lodge owners alone, but calls for action by local and international entrepreneurs and national institutions.

Protection and preservation of nature is noted in the codes of conduct of the tour operators and culminates in the statement by Diamir (2012, p. 13) that through tourism the local population often learns to appreciate the value of nature and to protect it. This shows ignorance, naiveté, and western arrogance, not to say educational imperialism. As outlined above,

there existed traditional rules and taboos for resource management and environmental protection, which were partially lost because of tourism or are ignored in exchange for financial gains.

The tour operators' assertion to use local infrastructure exclusively is not the whole truth. Not only the intercontinental flights but also the infrastructure created for the tourists in Kathmandu and the connections by bus or airplane into the hinterland are ignored (Zurick, 1992). Indeed, in the mountain regions old paths are the basis for trekking, but at the same time lodges and new settlements explicitly erected for trekking tourists are used. Even if the trekking tour operators have given an incentive for economic development in Nepal, they are by no means altruistic development workers and should not describe themselves as such. They are companies that want to and need to act in an economically sustainable way to gain short-term and long-term profits. Ecological, social, cultural and health aspects presently come second. This is not due to a lack of motivation to act in a sustainable way, but because they do not know or do not understand the various aspects of sustainability and the numerous groups defining sustainability in different ways.

The most important aspect of sustainable tourism is the payment of decent wages to the local crew. This includes primarily the abolition of degrading presents, alms, or tips and secondly wages that not only ensures survival but allow building up reserves in order to improve the standard of living in the long term. The third point would be to pay the lodge owners a reasonable amount of money to enable them to afford the more expensive alternative sources of energy. Adequate payment, what means securing the material basis, is a prerequisite for socially and ecologically sustainable actions. This also includes the customers' willingness to pay sustainable prices for sustainable tours. In future only that will be an indicator of how much sustainability is valued by those involved in trekking business whether German tour operator, local agency or customer.

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# Trekking Tourism in the Alps: Example of the Glockner Tour

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this study was to carry out an evaluation of the existing offers and to develop recommendations for the creation of new sustainable, long lasting offers for travellers. The main focus of this investigation was the consideration of the supply side as well as the demand side. In order to analyse the supply side, semi structured expert interviews were conducted. Hut wardens, innkeepers and tourism experts of the region were interviewed. The demand side was quantitatively investigated by means of standardised questionnaires. Besides, three groups were distinguished for closer analysis: Travellers who had hiked the Glockner Tour individually, travellers who had booked the package offer, and travellers who were interested in the Glockner Tour. The investigation of the Glockner Tour revealed that in order to sustainably design these offers, more cooperation and coordination between the involved tourism service providers is necessary. Nonetheless, overall everyone was satisfied with the Glockner Tour and a majority of the people claimed that they would book a similar offer again. Furthermore the study revealed that new target groups can be attracted by an all-inclusive trekking package. Future research will have to include surveys surveys conducted on a regular basis after the tourists have returned home in order to gain more representative results.*

**Keywords:** Trekking and hiking tourism, destination Alps, product development, destination marketing.

## 1. Introduction

For a few years now, the word “trekking” has appeared increasingly more often in brochures for various tourist destinations and tour operators in the Alps. Indeed, tourist destinations advertise trekking paths such as “Lugano Trekking” (Lugano tourism, n.d.), and tour operators have advertised such trekking tours in the Alps as the “Berlin Ridgeway” (AlpinSchule Innsbruck GmbH, 2012).

In its original meaning, trekking refers to covering long distances with a backpack over the course of numerous days, but largely without using existing infrastructures such as paths or fixed overnight accommodations (Vogt, 2008). Thus, this term was primarily used to refer to covering long distances in places removed from civilization, usually in high alpine regions of the earth and as part of professionally organized expeditions (Hauck, 1996; Vogt, 2008).

However, in the course of developing many remote mountainous regions for mass tourism, the term trekking has expanded in everyday tourism language to include a range of offers. Thus, it can be used today as

a synonym for hiking long distances. Due to its “exotic overtones” trekking is increasingly being used to market Alpine tourist destinations (Gerbert, 2005).

This very expansion of word usage is symbolic of the expansion of offers available in many destinations in the Alps. These destinations want to distance themselves from the “outmoded hiking image” and yet still profit from what academic research and popular science articles have labeled the “hiking boom” (Brämer, 2008; Gerbert, 2005). In so doing, such destinations are making an attempt to counteract the dwindling number of guests during the summer season, caused by putting emphasis on fad sports that often require more investments in infrastructure and cause extensive damage to the landscape, by returning to their natural advantages. This explains why new long and short trekking routes have been created in the last ten years and why diverse tourism offers have been created which vary according to their primary objectives. Yet it is these very objectives and their sustainable structures that can determine whether an offer can be developed long-term and not be completely dependent on the economic interests of active tourism marketing campaigns.

It is important to create such offers based on sustainability and to anchor them to the regions on a long-term basis, especially in light of increasing environmental pollution and destruction and the demands of the Alpine Convention – establishing competitive, nature-oriented tourism in the Alps (Dreyer, Menzel & Endress, 2010; Vogt, 2008).

This paper focuses on the Glockner Tour, which was re-launched and marketed in 2004 and is located in the Hohe Tauern National Park, and explores the sustainability of this tourism offer. The Glockner Tour contrasts with other trekking offers in the Alps in that it is organized differently. Indeed, while trekkers in the Alps normally create their own routes based on individual preferences, the Glockner Tour was created in the likes of all-inclusive trekking packages in the Himalayas and can be booked as such.

The goal of the study presented herein was to deduce important points that can determine the sustainability and long-term establishment of trekking tourism offers in the Alps by analyzing the structure of the Glockner Tour and factoring in additional trekking offers in the Alps. As a starting point, the author of the text posed the question of what the necessary prerequisites and conditions are to develop a long-lasting, sustainable tourism offer.

This article recapitulates the study and its fundamental results. While point 2 presents the case study of the Glockner Tour and justifies why this particular case was selected, the methodology of the study is described in point 3. In point 4 the analysis and results are presented, whereas point 5 summarizes the intrinsic conclusions for sustainable trekking tourism. Finally, point 6 provides an outlook for the future and includes further research questions that need to be addressed in the future.

## **2. Introduction to the Glockner Tour and justification for selecting it for a case study**

### ***2.1 How the Glockner Tour was created***

The Glockner Tour already existed as a term prior to its being officially marketed and was a popular trekking tour, particularly for locals (Expert 6, personal communication, September 20, 2009). The idea to professionally plan and market the Glockner Tour is originally linked to Professor Dr. Gerald Gruber, an economic and social geographer. After returning from a trekking tour in South America, he saw the same potential to experience nature and the mountains in the Alps by utilizing organized trekking offers. The following motto was created for the new Glockner Tour in collaboration with the Austrian Alpine Club, Department of Development – Nature Conservation:

*“Why travel so far away, when the sublime is so close to home.”*

In Gruber’s view, the Glockner Tour had the potential to stimulate traditional alpine tourism in the Hohe Tauern National Park. At the same time, the Glockner Tour could bolster the regional economy in the communities within the national park. The prerequisites for developing such an offer were ideal in the region surrounding the Grossglockner. The Glockner Tour was to be a trekking route in likeness of other trekking routes around big and holy mountains in the world, like the path around Mount Kailash in Tibet or the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal (Essl, 2006). Thus, the Austrian Alpine Club and the Hohe Tauern National Park initiated such a project of their own.

### ***2.2 Infrastructure and route***

Although the Hohe Tauern National Park region can be considered a rural alpine region, it has not shown evidence of a dwindling population (Bätzing, 2005). The area surrounding the Grossglockner, especially, is characterized by strong, traditional alpine tourism development. Thus, the infrastructural prerequisites for establishing a trekking tourism offer including the Grossglockner, Austria’s highest mountain, were already fulfilled. The Grossglockner is considered a holy mountain and has fascinated people since time immemorial, thereby lending itself to becoming a natural attraction in the region, especially for branding purposes (Essl, 2006; Expert 1, personal communication, September 29, 2009).

As far as the route itself is concerned, it was determined from the start that only existing infrastructures would be used. Nevertheless, it was decided that the paths should “not be reserved for some few mountaineers (...), but should offer a wide range of hikers and mountain climbers, with appropriate equipment, physical condition, endurance, and surefootedness, the chance (...)” to complete the Glockner Tour and should thus appeal to a broad target group (Essl, 2006, p. 20). Using this idea as a basis, the circuit tour was created in collaboration between the Austrian Alpine Club,



The Glockner Tour runs almost without exception through the nature preserve of the Hohe Tauern National Park. Thus, it has the potential to be a decisive junction between national parks and alpinism (Essl, 2006). In addition, the route runs through all three states (Salzburg, Carinthia, and East Tyrol) that are part of the Hohe Tauern National Park (Figure 2), thereby making it a “unifying future-oriented project in the Hohe Tauern National Park that transcends regional national park boundaries in Carinthia, Salzburg, and Tyrol” (Essl, 2006, p. 19). Furthermore, it corresponds to the motto of the 2002 International Year of Mountains – “mountains unite” – for which the Glockner Tour is to serve as a collective tourism offer (Hasslacher, 2003).



**Fig. 2:** Route in the border triangle, adapted from [http://www.fg-traunstein.de/downloads/nph\\_t\\_zonierung.pdf](http://www.fg-traunstein.de/downloads/nph_t_zonierung.pdf).

### 2.3 The all-inclusive Glockner Tour package

The Glockner Tour package is an all-inclusive tour package of the Glockner circular route, which can be booked with Hohe Tauern National Park Vacation Region or with Hohe Tauern National Park Region (Carinthia) for a fixed package price. Included in this package are

- all overnight accommodations on the route, including board,
- the ascent to the high-mountain reservoirs of Kaprun right up to the Mooserboden reservoir, and
- an informational brochure about “The Glockner Tour” with all important contact information.

The costs for getting to the destination are not included in the package price, and there are no predetermined dates for when the tour can begin.

**Table-1:** Reasons for selecting the Glockner Tour

**Summary of reasons for selecting this particular trekking tourism destination for a case study:**

- The Glockner Tour represents an example of how to combine tourism and nature conservation in the Hohe Tauern National Park.
- This tour aims to implement the regulations of the Alpine Convention.
- This tour is the first one that could be booked as an all-inclusive trekking package in the Austrian Alps and has been in existence since 2004, long enough to warrant making a first assessment.
- Because of its cross-border nature, this project requires various political and non-political entities to work together, as all bodies are dependent on receiving all information.

Note (Own summary)

### **3. Approach used to study the Glockner Tour**

A variety of methods were used to research the Glockner Tour. Initially, 14 narrative interviews were conducted with people directly connected with running the tour from September 19-30, 2009. With the exception of the Sudetendeutsche Hütte, which had already closed when the interviews were conducted, all huts, lodges, guesthouses, and hotels included in the all-inclusive Glockner Tour package were sought out in order to interview the respective lodging managers, employees, or owners. These interviews were not scheduled in advance and thus elicited spontaneous responses from the interviewees. In order to make it easier for respondents to answer freely, relatively few questions were posed during the interview to give them room to talk. As for the length of these discussions, it entirely depended on the willingness of the person interviewed, so interviews lasted somewhere between 15 and 45 minutes each. Furthermore, other lodgings along or near the route were sought out to conduct similar interviews with those representatives. In addition to the interviews conducted with representatives of the accommodations included in the Glockner Tour package and along or near the Glockner Tour route, narrative interviews were also conducted in some tourism information offices integrated in the Glockner Tour. Likewise, first on-site interviews were conducted with tour operators and marketing agents for the Hohe Tauern National Park and the Glockner Tour, the Hohe Tauern National Park Vacation Region, and the Hohe Tauern National Park Region (Carinthia). Hand-written notes covering the seminal points and information covered were taken during each of these interviews.

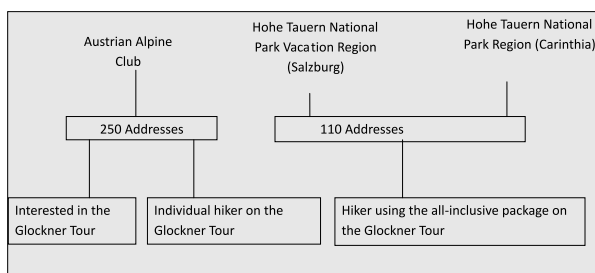
Based on the information gleaned from the narrative interviews, three frameworks were developed for interviews with experts, which followed. These semi-structured interviews targeted tourism offer suppliers, particularly tourism experts, lodging managers, and accommodation



owners. A total of eight semi-structured interviews were conducted either in writing or via telephone from November 18, 2009 to March 22, 2010, whereby the telephone interviews all lasted about ten minutes.

As far as the demand side is concerned, trekkers were studied using standardized questionnaires. As a general rule, studies in hiking research are carried out as destination-intercept surveys, and thus hikers are surveyed directly on the route or in their accommodations (e.g. Brämer, 2004; Stakelbeck, 2009; Muhar, Schauppenlehner et al., 2006). However, these surveys generally only provide spur-of-the-moment impressions, which is why from a methodological standpoint, it is generally invalid to draw conclusions from them or to deduce general information about hikers (Vogt, 2009). On the other hand, surveys of hikers conducted after they have returned home are rarely used, as such surveys are often too general about tourists' demands, and results can thus only be transferred to individual offers on a limited basis (Vogt, 2009). The reason for this lies in the lack of contact information available on hikers. It cannot be denied, however, that there are advantages to conducting interviews with hikers after they have completed the tour over surveys conducted with hikers intercepted at various destinations. Interviews after an event has taken place occur after a certain period of time has lapsed following an experience, and impressions are thus cemented in a person's mind. Only the most important memories remain, as the majority of impressions are stored in hikers' minds as "mental maps." It is these very impressions that are often passed on by word of mouth and are therefore most relevant (Scherer, 2006). It should not be forgotten, however, that with such surveys conducted after time has lapsed, often only an overall impression remains and a number of details are lost or are evaluated differently retrospectively.

This study relied on standardized surveys of hikers after they had returned home from their trekking trip, using a questionnaire with open and closed questions. The Austrian Alpine Club, the Hohe Tauern National Park Vacation Region (Salzburg), and the Hohe Tauern National Park Region (Carinthia) provided the contact information on hikers with the exclusive purpose of conducting these surveys. Altogether, 360 questionnaires were sent out. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of the groups surveyed.



**Fig. 3:** Overview of the groups surveyed

Note (Own figure)

Of the 360 questionnaires sent out, 136 were returned, thereby making for a return rate of 37.78%. The statistical and analytical software SPSS was used to analyze the data.

#### **4. Analysis of the trekking offers for the Glockner Tour and all-inclusive Glockner Tour package**

##### **4.1 Tour design**

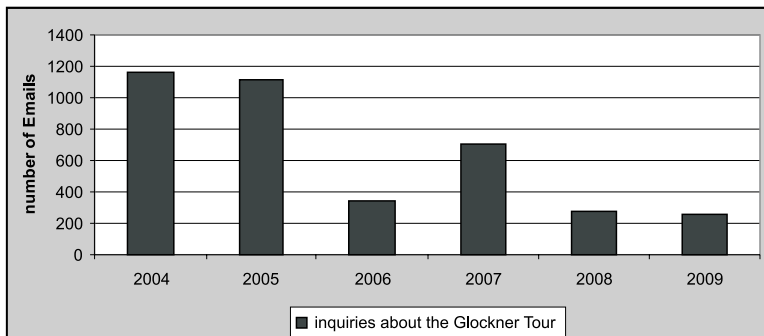
The most important instigator of the Glockner Tour was probably the Austrian Alpine Club, which is responsible for a number of the alpine paths and huts and is also the biggest property owner in the Hohe Tauern National Park. Representatives from the National Park administrations in Carinthia, Salzburg, and Tyrol, regional tourism organizations such as Ostirol Werbung, Hohe Tauern National Park Vacation Region (Salzburg), and Hohe Tauern National Park – Grossglockner Tourism (Carinthia) were invited to an initial kick-off meeting and exploratory discussion on the initiative of the Austrian Alpine Club (Hasslacher, 2003 in Essl, 2006; Expert 3, personal communication, September 29, 2009 and February 9, 2010 ). At this meeting, it was decided that the participants would work together on a cooperative project called the Glockner Tour. In addition, initial tasks were delegated and the exact route and route description were agreed upon with the help of mountain guides, various commissions, and community representatives (Essl, 2006). The fact that the managers of the various accommodations were not consulted during this planning phase is something that they criticize to this day. They would like to be included and have a bigger say in what happens in the future and demand this for the safety of hikers (Expert 4, personal communication, September 26, 2009 and Expert 6, personal communication, September 26, 2009). It can thus be determined that the Glockner Tour was designed using a top-down strategy, since not all players affected on-site were included from the beginning. The result is that the tourism experts responsible for this route have to remain actively involved to ensure that this offer can continue to be provided, for the danger exists that the number of hikers will decline as soon as the advertising campaign for the Glockner Tour is scaled back (Expert 5, personal communication, September 19, 2009).

##### **4.2 Demand trend**

Analyzing the demand trend for the Glockner Tour is difficult insofar as the Glockner Tour can be completed individually or booked as an all-inclusive package tour. Individual hikers on the Glockner Tour are especially difficult to measure quantitatively since there is “no enclosed space for which entrance fees must be paid” (Expert 3, personal communication, September 29, 2009 and February 9, 2010). Therefore, this study could only rely on subjective feelings and experiences of participants. It is another story, however, with hikers who book the Glockner Tour as an all-

inclusive package. These hikers can be measured quantitatively and thus allow for more detailed assessments about the development of this tourism offer. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the number of individual hikers far outweighs the number of hikers who completed the Tour as part of an all-inclusive package (Expert 3, personal communication, September 29, 2009 and February 9, 2010). It is only possible to speculate as to the ratio of all-inclusive hikers to individual hikers, as the statements given vary greatly, but this study focused more on all-inclusive-package hikers for methodological reasons.

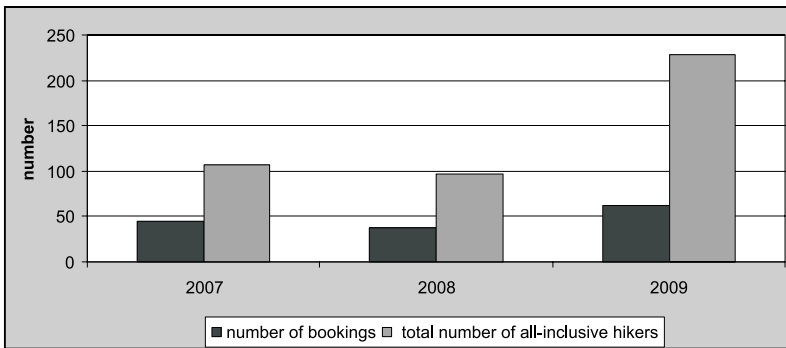
The inquiries processed by the Austrian Alpine Club serve as an initial indicator of the demand for the Glockner Tour (figure 4).



**Fig. 4:** Inquiries about the Glockner Tour via e-mail to the Austrian Alpine Club since 2004. Own compilation based on the Austrian Alpine Club, Department of Development – Nature Conservation, 2010.

Accordingly, it can be seen that people were initially highly interested in the Glockner Tour. In the beginning years, especially, there were a number of e-mail inquiries about the Tour to the Austrian Alpine Club, Department of Development – Nature Conservation. It is entirely possible that the number of direct inquiries to the Austrian Alpine Club significantly receded with time due to an increase in the number of first-hand accounts posted on the Internet. At the same time, this decline can also be explained by a decrease in information found in the press. On the whole, however, this information does not reveal the number of people who decided to complete the Glockner Tour after their initial inquiry, let alone in what form they actually did the tour, be it on an individual basis or as an all-inclusive package tour.

On the other hand, it is possible to glean concrete quantitative evidence from the number of people who booked the all-inclusive Glockner Tour package with the Hohe Tauern National Park Vacation Region (Salzburg) as well as from the total number of all-inclusive-package hikers who booked the all-inclusive Glockner Tour package (figure 5).



**Fig. 5:** Development of the number of bookings for the Glockner Tour and the total number of all-inclusive package hikers since 2007. Own compilation based on Hohe Tauern National Park Vacation Region (Salzburg), 2009.

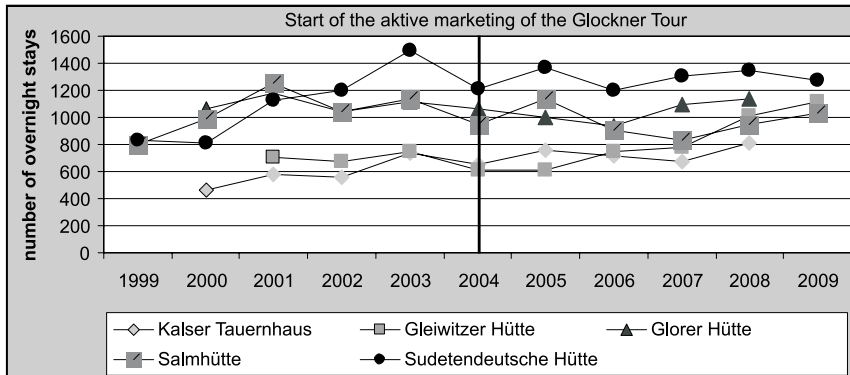
As can be seen, in the last few years the number of bookings has increased on the whole. Nevertheless, the numbers have fluctuated greatly. While a number of bookings were recorded in 2007, there was a decrease in 2008 despite the fact that the amount of advertising for the Tour remained constant, according to tourism experts (Expert 2, personal communication, September 30, 2009). Some lodging managers felt altogether differently: they accorded the decline in the number of bookings in 2008 to a decrease in the amount of advertising done for the Glockner Tour (Expert 5, personal communication, September 19, 2009). The number of bookings increased again significantly in 2009.

The number of bookings correlates closely with the total number of all-inclusive- package hikers on the Glockner Tour. The discrepancy in the number of bookings is due to the fact that the number of hikers per group varies according to each booking. The increasing number of hikers per booking indicates an increase in the number of hikers per group, which corresponds to the results of the survey conducted with hikers. Yet the number of all-inclusive-package hikers does not reveal anything about the total number of hikers on the Glockner Tour.

Statistics on the number of overnight stays in the alpine huts along the route are another means of analyzing the development of the total number of hikers on the Glockner Tour. Since the development of the number of overnight stays is closely linked to the economic activity of the respective lodging managers, and some of the managers have changed in some alpine huts since the Glockner Tour package came into being (Expert 4, personal communication, September 26, 2009), it is difficult to make generalizations, though it is possible to deduce tendencies based on statistics (figure 6).

While all lodging managers interviewed attested to a subjective increase in the number of hikers on the Glockner Tour, this trend cannot be seen in the number of overnight stays in the various accommodations. Instead, the numbers have remained relatively stable or the development is due to some

extra initiatives started by the individual lodgings, as is the case with the Gleiwitzer Hütte.



**Fig. 6:** Development of the number of overnight stays at alpine huts on the Glockner Tour since 1999. Own compilation based on various Alpine Clubs, the owner of the lodges

The reasons for this stagnation vary and allow for diverse conclusions. First, the Glockner Tour has only been marketed since 2004, and every tourism product requires a certain period of time to become established. Second, the numbers could have stagnated because the demand potential for such trekking offers is not really known, and there is increasing competition from numerous other such trekking offers. Based on the data collected, it cannot be determined whether the number of overnight stays increased due to the introduction of the Glockner Tour. It is therefore entirely likely that a number of trekkers completed the Tour before it was officially marketed in 2004. Likewise, it is also not possible to determine in how far the number of overnight stays would have decreased without the official Glockner Tour, as it is impossible to differentiate between the hikers on the Glockner Tour and other hikers. However, based on the data it is possible to formulate the thesis that before the Glockner Tour was marketed publicly, there were just as many hikers on these paths, but the route did not receive its official name until 2004.

#### 4.3 The Consumers

Based on the conditions of the surveys, three groups were distinguished to analyze the hikers on the Glockner Tour. The first of these is the group containing all the hikers surveyed, which combines all three groups (individual hikers on the Glockner Tour, all-inclusive-package hikers on the Glockner Tour, and those hikers who made inquiries into the Glockner Tour but did not do the Tour). The last of these three subgroups constitutes 36.3%. The second group is comprised of individual hikers who have already completed the entire Glockner Tour or parts of it and did so after planning the trip themselves. Finally, the third group consists of all-inclusive-package hikers, who booked the Glockner Tour as an all-inclusive tour and completed the entire trip as such. Nevertheless, even though this

study contains a higher percentage of all-inclusive-package hikers than individual hikers, it should not be forgotten that experts estimate that there are far more individual hikers on the Glockner Tour than all-inclusive-package hikers.

The following questions were at the core of analyzing the demand side of the Glockner Tour:

1. In how far can all-inclusive-package hikers be distinguished from individual hikers?
2. Does the all-inclusive Glockner Tour package target new groups of people?
3. Does this Tour make it easier to achieve the goal of making trekking tourism a more responsible, competitive form of tourism?

Questions one and two were analyzed using different criteria, although the individual results are not representative, as only those hikers were surveyed who had given their contact information when they booked their trip.

As a result of the study, the following significant differences were ascertained between all-inclusive-package hikers and individual hikers. Accordingly, all-inclusive hikers generally:

- are about four years younger,
- are more often single,
- travel in groups of two, though increasingly they can also be found in larger groups,
- are more often self-employed, manual or skilled laborers, or students and thus come from diverse occupational fields,
- have a higher average monthly net income,
- come more often from foreign countries, especially from Germany and the Netherlands,
- are less often members of alpine hiking clubs,
- have had fewer experiences hiking from alpine hut to alpine hut, but are more prone to choose hikes of average difficulty in alpine regions,
- prefer somewhat shorter distances between individual stages,
- and like to sleep in alpine huts as well as at guesthouses on the Tour, whereby the information they can obtain in the alpine huts and the conversations they have with the lodging managers are more important to them than to others.

As far as the socio demographic profile is concerned, all-inclusive hiking packages are only marginally able to attract new target groups.

For the most part, more experienced hikers also take advantage of this additional service.

With regard to the organization of such tours, this study has found out that it will become even more important in the future to offer more diverse target-group-specific choices in order to be competitive in the highly contested tourism market. One means to encourage more sustainable forms of tourism such as trekking is by offering all-inclusive tour packages. While this type of tourism will not be very important in the future, according to one general study on the topic of hiking (Muhar, Schauppenlehner et al., 2006), another study on the Salzburg Almenweg in 2008 showed that 50.16% of respondents were interested in all-inclusive trekking tour packages in the future (Stakelbeck, 2009). As far as all those surveyed on the Glockner Tour are concerned, 83.5% of interviewees could see themselves booking an all-inclusive tour in the future, while 42.9% of individual hikers on the Glockner Tour might contemplate booking such a package in the future. The number is even higher for those who had booked the all-inclusive tour, as 96.7% of them said they would book such an all-inclusive tour package again. This incredibly high number shows that people who book the all-inclusive Glockner Tour are satisfied with it, which proves that such all-inclusive trekking packages have enormous potential. This is especially true in such uncertain economic times as these when many vacationers shy away from any bigger, unclear vacation costs at the forefront. Herein lies the biggest future advantage of all-inclusive packages, which allow for the careful calculation of costs before the trip even, begins.

As far as providers of tourism offers are concerned, they have noticed a significant increase in demand in the last few years (Expert 3, personal communication, September 29, 2009 and February 9, 2010). The more satisfied customers are, the more likely they are to book and recommend such tours again. Even if many experienced hikers prefer to plan their own tours and see this planning as “part of the hiking experience,” all-inclusive packages may encourage new target groups to trek through alpine regions.

## **5. Trekking tourism and sustainability**

It is debatable what the future development of the quantitative demand for trekking tourism will be. Regardless, trekking tourism will be heavily dependent upon the specific characteristics and quality of the trekking tourism offers, which will determine their continued existence and thus also the importance of nature-oriented, sustainable, summer alpine tourism in the Alps. Some trekking offers in the Alps, such as the Grande Traversata delle Alpi (GTA), have existed irrespective of tourism trends for almost 30 years now. This proves that it is possible to create trekking offers on a long-term, sustainable basis in the Alps. Numerous locals generate a large portion of their income from hikers along the trekking routes. Being embedded in the regional economic structures leads to their being active in

ensuring the continual existence of the trekking routes. In fact, the majority of newly created trekking routes as of late have been supported greatly or almost exclusively by people politically active in the tourism industry, who largely pander to economic tourism interests. Locals and local players are not involved in these processes. In addition, a lot of money has been invested in new infrastructure, such as signposting, accommodations, etc. It will be difficult for such offers to establish themselves on a long-term basis in the future if they are not geared towards local structures, especially if the hiking trend declines. The result of such a development would be economic loss and new capacity problems at accommodation sites.

The goal of the Glockner Tour was to create a sustainable offer that is integrated in regional structures. The study of the supply side, however, has shown that it is largely dependent upon the initiative of individual tourism stakeholders. In order for this offer to be retained in the long run, it will be necessary to embed it even more fully in regional structures in the future, which could be accomplished by incorporating “partner companies” like, for instance, sports equipment outfitters or businesses that sell regional products.

At present there is no trekking offer in the Alps that can serve as a shining example for future offers. Nevertheless, based on positive and negative examples as well as on included detailed studies of offers, it is possible to determine some important factors necessary for creating and developing future-oriented trekking offers (table 2).

**Table-2:** Important prerequisites for sustainable trekking offers

Summary of important prerequisites for establishing a sustainable trekking offer:
- Including all players and the local population when developing and marketing a trekking offer
- Guaranteeing that the offer is well-known in the area and is accepted
- Using already-existing infrastructure (paths and accommodations)
- Gearing the offer towards demand based on regular interviews with hikers after they have completed the tour and returned home
- Concentrating on certain target groups and marketing strategies
- Where applicable, offering all-inclusive tour packages

Note (Own summary)

## 6. Outlook

Commensurate with the natural landscape realities of the Alps, trekking tourism has the potential to establish itself on a long-term and sustainable basis as a competitive alternative to types of tourism requiring encroachment on existing infrastructure and the environment. In fact, it could serve as the economic counterpart to winter skiing tourism.

Creating new offers and developing and marketing all-inclusive offers is a good for encouraging sustainable alpine tourism. However, careful



attention should be paid to avoiding market saturation (Steinecke, 2006). While creating ever new routes and marketing them is initially a lucrative business because “people always want to see new things” (Expert 3, personal communication, September 29, 2009 and February 9, 2010), too many offers on the market leads to confusion, thereby leading to consumer uncertainty due to market opacity, even if well-performing brands can help alleviate this danger somewhat (Kreisel, 2003).

The further development of trekking tourism as a lucrative and sustainable type of summer tourism in the Alps depends once again on the quality of offers and not solely on the quantity of them. Sustainable structures should be at the forefront in the planning phase for such offers. By conducting regular destination-intercept surveys about special offers, the quality of such offers can be maintained and improved, thereby meeting consumer demands, which are constantly in flux. By carrying out more surveys of consumers after their trekking experience – with general questions about hiking and trekking, using as large a sample as possible to determine general trends, as well as with questions pertaining to special trekking offers – existing offers can be evaluated and optimized, thereby helping them to establish themselves on a long-term basis.

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### **Select interview partners:**

Surname, first name / Label	Facility	Interview conducted
Expert 1	Tourism information	Sept. 29, 2009
Expert 2	Hohe Tauern National Park	Sept. 30, 2009
Expert 3	Hohe Tauern National Park	Sept. 29, 2009 / February 9, 2010
Expert 4	Lodging manager	Sept. 26, 2009
Expert 5	Lodging manager	Sept. 19, 2009
Expert 6	Lodging manager	Sept. 20, 2009

All interview partners requested to remain anonymous.

### **About the Author**

Sabine Dümmler has completed her master in Geography at the University of Trier, Germany, and her master thesis was concerned with the development of the Glockner Tour in the Austrian Alps which has become an important trekking product in the European Alps. Her paper is based on her research conducted during her master thesis. The author can be contacted at: [sabine.duemmler@googlemail.com](mailto:sabine.duemmler@googlemail.com).

# Trekking in the Alps? Spaces in Trekking Tourism from the Perspective of Europe

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**Abstract:** *The paper deals with the trekking product in the Alps. It analyses the question whether the Alps are a destination for trekking or, due to the high quality, a destination for hiking. To give an adequate answer, the authors first define the different types of mountain tourism: trekking, hiking and adventure tourism. Relevant articles to be found in the literature are discussed in order to deduct relevant research questions for the empirical study in hand. The methodical research is divided into two steps. First an online based research was made in order to identify core issues and characteristics of the trekking product. Secondly semi-structured interviews were held to get a deeper insight into the selected topics. The result of the research is that the Alps can more be described as a hiking destination than a trekking destination. Finally the study concludes by giving some implications and hypotheses for further research.*

**Keywords:** Trekking and hiking tourism, adventure tourism, Destination Alps, marketing and products.

## 1. Introduction

Trekking and hiking are ranked among the most popular outdoor sports in the Alps (Thiene & Scarpa, 2008). In recent years, the term “trekking” has become a popular phrase in marketing outdoor products. Originating from tourism activities in remote areas and exotic places, trekking products have found their way to the Alpine region. Therefore, tour operators in the German market, e.g. “Frosch Sportreisen” (2012) and “Wikinger Reisen” (2012), offer a variety of trekking products. The ambitious development and marketing of trekking products has led media discussions (Gerbert, 2005) to the question whether the term trekking describes a certain product or if it is solely applied in order to shape the presentation of those goods in a more extraordinary and contemporary way than for the term hiking.

The Alpine region looks back on a long history of hiking. Due to the number of tourists – the Alps count more than 50 million tourist nights per year (Bätzing, 2003) – the Alpine region has have a permanent degree of innovation. For that reason, new products of outdoor activities emerge in the Alps to meet the changing customer's demands.

This paper aims to answer the question to what degree the offered product in the Alps can be seen as a kind of trekking product. The first chapter deals with the theoretical background and definitions of relevant themes are given. Additionally a literature review is used, which gives an

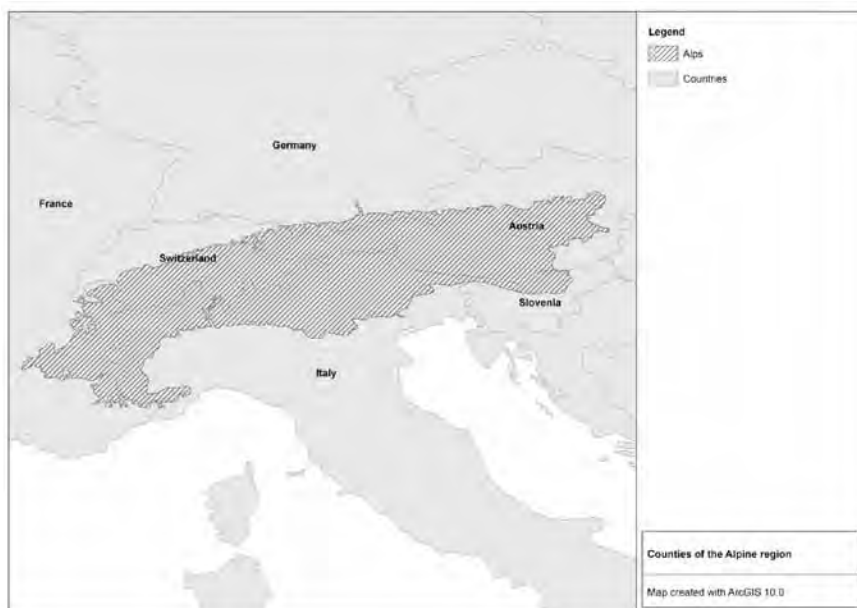
insight in to the scientific research field. The last part of this chapter deals with the spaces in tourism and the typology of different spaces in trekking tourism.

Based on that first chapter, the second chapter describes the methodologies. The raised question, to what degree the offered products in the Alps can be seen in the field of trekking, is answered. The last chapter summarizes the results and ads some limitations to the research topic.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The following chapter presents the theoretical background of the study. To get an insight into the discussed topic, definitions of the central themes are given first. With this knowledge a systematic literature review is made to analyze existing literature dealing with trekking tourism in the Alps. Based on the results of this research a theoretical model is presented which is used to structure the empirical study. Moreover, before getting a deeper insight into the thematic field of trekking, the chosen destination will briefly be presented.

The Alps are a 190,000 square kilometers range in Europe and are located in the countries Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland as can be seen in Figure 1.



Source: Own figure.

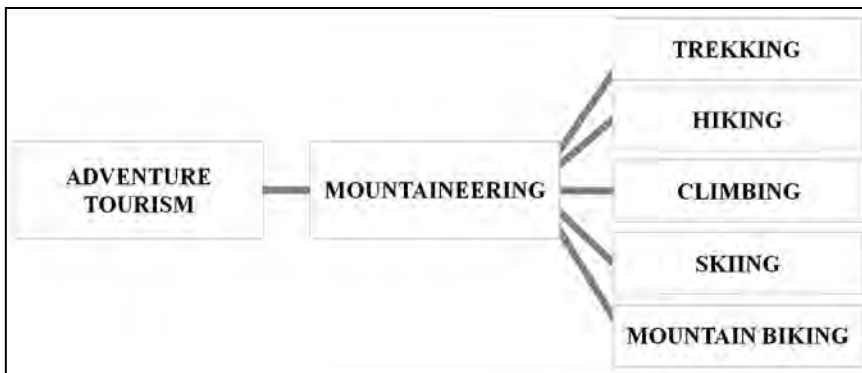
**Fig. 1:** Map of the Alps.

The Alps are among the most popular local recreation areas in Europe. This is favored by the location of the Alps, surrounded by urban agglomerations, like Munich, Milan and Vienna (Bätzing, 2003). The

inhabitants of the agglomerations use the Alps as an area for leisure activities such as hiking, trekking and skiing. This makes a difference to typical trekking destinations, like e.g. Nepal, where tourists come for an outdoor experience and spend a lot of time in the mountains. It can be assumed that this is one reason a broader array of products developed in the Alps in order to cope with the demand of the tourists. A large proportion of this array of products are trekking and hiking.

## 2.1 Adventure Tourism

Both trekking and hiking in high altitudes belong to the adventure tourism segment as can be seen in figure 2.



**Fig. 2:** Segments of adventure tourism. Adapted from *Adventure Tourism* (p. 204), Breedie, 2003, New York, USA: The Haworth Hospitality Press.

“Adventure tourism is fundamentally about active recreation participation and it demands new metaphors based on ‘being, doing, touching and seeing’ rather than just seeing” (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003, p. 70). Adventure tourists travel to unfamiliar places to make new experiences.

“Definitions of adventure consistently allude to the importance of risk” (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie & Pomfret, 2003, p. 70). The term adventure implies “freedom of choice; intrinsic rewards; and an element of uncertainty, for instance when the experience outcome is uncertain, or its risks are unpredictable” (Fluker & Turner, 2000, p. 380). Therefore risk is an important factor for adventure tourism. The risk determines a person’s enjoyment of an adventure. “Indeed, any absence of risk from the experience could well result in a decline in satisfaction or even a loss of the urge to participate” (Sung et al., 1997, cited in Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie & Pomfret, 2003, p. 70).

## 2.2 Definition Hiking

A strict distinction between trekking and hiking poses problems. Both terms describe the covering of a distance e.g. by foot, with a bike, by boat

or on skis (Brockhaus, 1999; Häuptl & Schott, 2005). According to Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß (2008) trekking is a subcategory of hiking. Hiking is seen as an amplified kind of walking. Criteria of demarcation are for example the overall length, the pace and the outfit. Contrary to trekking, hiking relies on a minimum dimension of infrastructure (Dreyer, Menzel & Endreß, 2008). That means that paths for walking as well as huts for accommodation are used. As mentioned in the beginning, trekking and hiking cannot be separated accurately, but for trekking the adventure aspect is more important (Weaver, 2001).

### 2.3 Definition Trekking

By regarding existing literature it becomes obvious that the term trekking is defined in many ways. In Table 1, some definitions are presented.

**Table-1:** Selected trekking definitions in the literature

Author(s)	Elements of trekking definition
Leder (2007)	Hiking on a higher level with higher altitude difference to surmount; trekking tours are much longer and much more difficult than hiking tours.
Shakya (2009)	Hiking in mountain areas, especially outside of Europe for touristic/recreational purposes; e.g. in Nepal, most trekking activities take place at altitudes from 800 to 6,000 m. In contrast to mountaineering, trekking does not require special climbing techniques; the distance covered by trekking tourists can range between a few kilometers and hundreds of kilometers.
Bisht (1994), Bartsch (2000), Dearden (1998) or Baumgartner (1989)	Trekking takes place in mountain areas (average- or high-mountains) of Asian regions like Nepal, Thailand or India
Schurman/Schurman (2009)	Trekking is more taxing than hiking; it requires repeated endurance efforts with minimal recovery
Dreyer/Menzel/Endreß (2010)	Walking for several days on long, ambitious routes; getting to know remote areas; carrying the luggage all the way

*Note (own summary).*

It becomes obvious that trekking lasts for at least a few days and the altitude plays a large role as well: Trekking tours take place at high altitudes, cover a longer distance and are more exhausting than hiking tours. To arrive at a common definition, the term trekking is a trip that lasts at least a few days while carrying baggage but without using infrastructure like paths or non-portable accommodations (Vogt, 2008). This is why trekking used to be undertaken in mountain areas, far from any appearance of civilization and could only be offered from professional expeditions (Hauck, 1996; Vogt, 2008).

Nowadays, after many remote areas have been made accessible the term trekking is used for different touristic products. As this term sounds more *"out of the ordinary"* it is now often used in touristic marketing

(Gerbert, 2005). That is reflected in the different motives for trekking as well, as it is not only about covering a distance. Reasons to go trekking are to be outdoors, to enjoy the nature and landscape, to immerse in a foreign culture and to switch-off from everyday life respectively.

From the given definitions which can be found in the literature, the most suitable is presented by Fuchs, Mundt & Zollondz (2008) in the German Tourism Encyclopedia. This definition is used in the following research as there is no regional concentration set and not only the physical aspects but also psychological aspects like adventure feeling are focused on:

*“The trekker consciously goes on a journey (on foot, by bike, with a boat or on skis) without using the typical tourism infrastructure. He follows natural paths in difficult terrain in order to experience nature intensively. Today trekking tours are also organized by tour operators e.g. as an expedition. Trekking is not only conducted in faraway countries, but it is possible all over the world” (p. 723).*

As the presented definitions shows it is not really possible to speak about trekking tourism without using hiking or adventure tourism. According to that, the main aspect of this paper is to analyze whether adventure can be experienced in the Alps. This theoretical background provokes the central research questions:

*In which way can trekking tourism in the Alpine region really be defined as a form of trekking according to the given scientific definitions?*

#### ***What elements characterize trekking products in the Alps?***

To answer the questions given above theoretical and empirical approaches are applied. The theoretical analysis in a first step aids to enlarge the theoretical background of trekking in the Alpine region via a systematic literature review. In a second step, with the guidance of a theoretical model the basis for further empirical research is set.

## ***2.4 Literature Review***

To get an insight into the scientific research field of trekking tourism in the Alps a systematic literature review has been conducted. This research method is an effective tool to identify key scientific aspects of a research field which can be used as an evidence base (Tranfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003). So in the first step, three important databases in the area of socio – economic research (EconLit, Business source complete and SpringerLink) are examined in use of a keyword search in full text of academic journals and books. To be up-to-date there are just those full text journal articles analyzed which were published after the year 2000. Every journal is just counted once. Table 2 summarizes the result of this literature review.

**Table-2:** Result of Systematic Literature Review “Trekking Tourism in the Alps”

Source Database	Search Key Words	Number of Articles	Relevant Papers
ECONLit	“Trekking & Tourism & Alp*”	7	No relevant papers identified
ECONLit	“Trekking & Alp*”	8	No relevant papers identified
ECONLit	“Hiking & Alp*”	45	No relevant papers identified
Business Source Complete	“Trekking & Tourism & Alp*”	33	De Knop 2004; Fosztó & Kiss 2011; Weed 2006
Business Source Complete	“Trekking & Alp*”	51	No relevant papers identified
Business Source Complete	“Hiking & Alp*”	191	Arnegger, Woltering & Job 2010; Behrens, Bednar-Friedl & Getzner 2009; Beier, Woratschek & Zierschang 2004; Ciolac 2011; Gios, Goio, Notaro & Raffaelli 2006; Robinson & Gammon 2004; Scott & Mowen 2007
SpringerLink	“Trekking & Tourism & Alp*”	18	No relevant papers identified
SpringerLink	“Trekking & Alp*”	57	No relevant papers identified
SpringerLink	“Hiking & Alp*”	113	Burtscher 2004; Dembeck, Sonntag, Liechti & Becker 2012; Scarpa, Thiene & Tempesta 2007

*Note (Own elaboration).*

With the help of the keyword search “Trekking and Alp\*” just three papers are identified as relevant for further study. By searching for the keywords “Hiking & Alp\*” there are ten articles found which seem to be useful to gain insights in the topic.

The identified articles deal with case studies in different European countries like Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Austria as well as with theoretical studies. Subjects focused in the examined papers reach from different forms of tourism like sports tourism, nature based tourism, adventure tourism and rural tourism over sustainability approaches and customer characteristics to specific forms of quality management or mountain rescue systems. So the systematic literature review shows that hiking in the Alps is a broad topic that crosses many fields. Nevertheless, there has been no journal paper identified which focuses on trekking tourism in the Alpine region. Relevant aspects of the examined papers are now shortly summarized to get an overview of the topic “Trekking Tourism in the Alps”.

First of all it has to be noted that trekking and hiking are identified as special types of summer sports tourism (Fosztó & Kiss, 2011). Sports tourism is, in general, described by Weed (2006) who defines this form of tourism as a “wide-ranging and diverse area” (p. 22). Robinson & Gammon



(2004) try to classify this diverse area and they characterize hiking as one part of the “soft definition in sport tourism” (p. 225). So hiking is seen as a primarily active recreational participation in sport. The paper of Scarpa, Thiene & Tempesta (2007) adds the aspect of outdoor activity. Here outdoor recreation in the Alps is seen as different activities “which all require some degree of hiking” (p. 448).

However, in the examined literature hiking is not only seen in the field of sports tourism but also in the field of adventure tourism and rural tourism. Scott & Mowen (2007) describe hiking as one form of adventure tourism in which the exploration of a new experience is seen in association with personal challenges to sample a “perceived risk or controlled danger” (p. 146) and Ciulac (2011) identifies hiking as one possibility to attract tourists to rural areas. The term trekking tourism is not especially considered in these papers at all.

In regard of the thematic focus in the examined papers, there are three major topics processed. First, the hiking customers’ characteristics and needs are identified. Arnegger, Woltering & Job (2010) for example analyze changing market structures and trends in nature based tourism. The authors develop theoretical tourist types to understand tourist needs. One identified tourist type in their paper is the “Classic Alpinist” whose travel motivation is seen in sports and adventure and which is characterized by a high individuality of the tourist. From a medical point of view Burtscher (2004) states that a high degree of physical fitness should be given for being able to go hiking. In addition to that Scarpa, Thiene & Tempesta (2007) note that the outdoor experience of the customer seems to be a relevant determinant for the demand in the Alps – here hiking in the Alps is described as an “acquired taste” (p. 459).

To identify customers’ needs Beier, Woratschek & Zieschang (2004) measure customer satisfaction in the German Alps with the ISL-approach (Identification of Service Lacks). Those authors recognize that for hiking the infrastructure in general is really important, particularly the condition and the state of the hiking paths.

The second topic the identified articles deal with is the influence of tourism on ecology and economy. Gios, Goio, Notaro & Raffaelli (2006) state that tourism on the one hand “seems able to provide economic development in many mountain areas” (p. 79), but on the other hand it “can cause imbalances between the various components of the ecosystems” (p. 79). Also Behrens, Bednar-Friedl & Getzner (2009) focus on this two-side effect of tourism in protected areas.

In the third field the infrastructure in Alpine mountain areas is chosen as the central topic. Here, Scarpa, Thiene & Tempesta (2007) identify some strengths of the foothills of the Alps: the closeness to main urban centers as

well as the presence of challenging hiking routes lead to many local day-trips in this region.

Another infrastructural topic is discussed by De Knop (2004) who identifies safety as really important in outdoor sports tourism. This author claims that quality management of offered natural sport programs should focus on safety of the participants and the leaders as well. So it can be concluded that the apprenticeship and the training of the tour guides are really important in sports tourism offers. And last but not least Dembeck, Sonntag, Liechti & Becker (2012) describe the importance of Alpine rescue systems and the importance of trained mountain rescue teams and ambulance crews. The special three years apprenticeship to become part of the mountain rescue service in Switzerland is necessary to achieve skills needed in case of an accident.

To provide new insights into this scientific discussion, the authors of this paper focus on trekking as a touristic product in the Alpine region. In consideration of the Alps being a destination for trekking tourism the theoretical model of destination spaces (Pechlaner, Herntrei, Pichler & Volgger, 2012) is used as a basis to develop a theoretical model of trekking tourism in the Alpine region as it is presented in the next chapter.

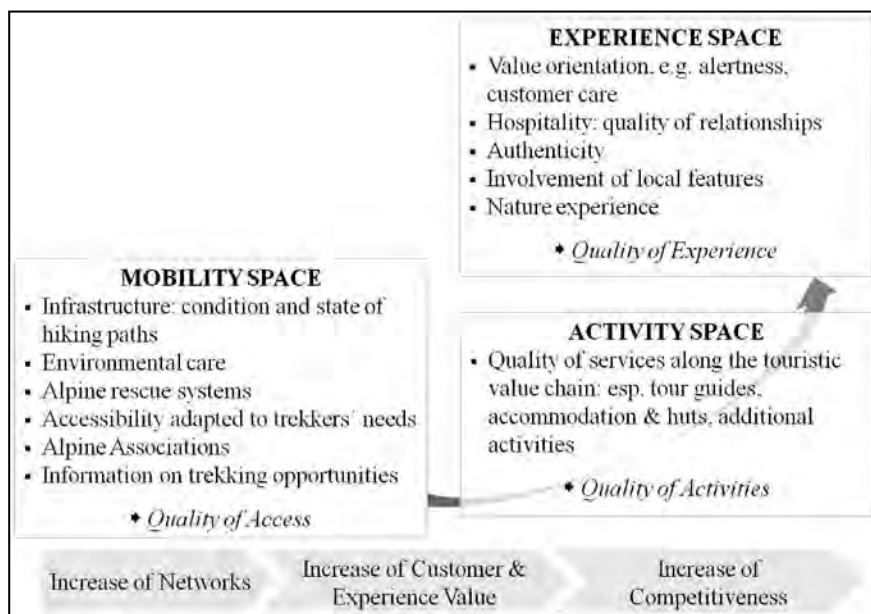
## ***2.5 Trekking Tourism and Destination Spaces***

In the systematic literature review three aspects of trekking in the Alps are identified as essential: hiking customers' characteristics and needs, impacts of trekking tourism on environmental and economic development of a destination as well as provided infrastructure. Bringing those results together, it becomes obvious that trekking tourism in the Alps cannot be defined solely on the basis of physical features. Therefore, this article aims at defining trekking tourism in the Alps from another perspective – the product perspective. By that, within this study emphasis is put on soft features such as the quality of accessibility, products, services, and experiences in order to create valuable and competitive trekking destinations.

Based on the **tourism spaces** approach by Pechlaner, Herntrei, Pichler & Volgger (2012) this paper follows the idea that competitive tourism destinations rely on a bundle of quality, productivity and experiences (Pechlaner, Herntrei, Pichler & Volgger, 2012). Therefore, tourism destinations consist of mobility, activity and experience spaces which are closely linked and interrelated. By strategic management of these spaces closer networks among stakeholders, increased customer value and competitive advantages for destinations are created. The approach aims to link spatial planning concepts with product development and innovation processes.

Combining the theoretical background of the tourism spaces approach with specific requirements of trekking tourism in the Alps there is a need for

competitive trekking destinations to focus on all aspects - access, tourism activity and experience quality (see Figure 2).



**Fig. 2:** Typologies of Spaces in Trekking Tourism in the Alps.

Adapted from “From destination management towards governance of regional innovation systems - the case of South Tyrol, Italy,” by Pechlaner et al., 2012, *Tourism Review*, Vol. 67, p. 37.

The **mobility space** includes all kinds of physical and institutional environment, such as natural resources, tourism and non-tourism infrastructure, human and capital resources, all facilities of supply, traffic and communication infrastructure. As such, it serves as a platform for social and spatial mobility (Pechlaner, Herntrei & Kofink, 2009). With a special focus on trekking destination features such as the condition of trekking paths, environmental care and protection, rescue systems, professional institutions and associations, as well as accessibility adapted to the customers' needs are crucial to enhance a destination's mobility space, create quality of access and generate added value.

The **activity space** is considered to be the operationalized mobility space (Pechlaner, Herntrei, Pichler & Volgger, 2012). It is the space in which the visitor gets involved in trekking tourism by the use of products and services along the tourism supply chain such as accommodation and mountain huts, catering and attraction points as well as e.g. trekking activities and guide services. Therefore, the activity space is determined by the individual behavior and activities of the tourists (Pechlaner, Herntrei, Pichler & Volgger, 2012). While most responsibilities in developing the

resource space are on the spatial planning side, activity space development strongly depends on tourism service providers. Within the activity space a quality of activities is addressed.

In working closely together both spatial planning and the private tourism sector are responsible for the creation of visitors' experiences within the **experience space**. By staging, that means an adapted capitalization of natural and cultural resources of a destination the quality within this space can be enhanced (Pechlaner, Herntrei, Pichler & Volgger, 2012). The experience space is considered to include authenticity and involvement as well as trekking experiences. Hospitality and value orientation play a vital role along the whole service chain.

This model of spaces in trekking tourism provides the framework for the empirical study. By the use of the mobility, activity and experience space it is possible to structure the findings of the empirical research.

### 3. Empirical Analysis

The paper's central questions – to what degree the offered products in the Alps can be seen in the field of trekking and which elements are offered here - can hardly be answered solely on the basis of the theoretical findings given above. Due to that an empirical analysis is carried out which will be presented in this chapter.

#### 3.1 Methodology

The empirical study is systematically structured as shown in Table 3. To be able to answer the central questions in a first step the six countries with the biggest regional share of the Alpine range (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, and Switzerland) are selected for further study. With the help of internet based research, three thematic subjects are identified as being relevant for further in-depth research: Marketing and Products, Safety as well as Education and Apprenticeship.

**Table-3:** Process in the empirical research

Process	Purpose
1. Online-based research on homepages of selected Alpine countries and tour operators	Identifying relevant issues in the thematic field of trekking tourism in the Alps
2. Online-based research for thematic core issues	Identifying existing characteristics of the Alpine trekking product
3. Semi-structured expert interviews via telephone	Analyzing the relevance of the trekking products' characteristics

*Note (Own figure)*

As presented in Seipl & Rieker (2003), the online-based research is an effective method of getting an informative basis for following research steps. Information can be achieved not only fast but also extensive. Additionally, people who couldn't be reached for example due to the spatial

distances can be included in the study (Seipl & Rieker, 2003). Because of the wide range of the destination Alps the online-based research method is an adequate tool to analyze existing structures in trekking tourism.

To gain a deeper insight into these existing patterns, 13 semi-structured expert interviews have been conducted via telephone. As Hoffmann (2005) notes, an expert interview is conducted if a researched topic is quite vague and therefore an expert has to clarify the facts from a scientific point of view. Thus the experts in this study have been chosen because of their knowledge in the identified fields of interest: marketing specialists, product managers, online marketing supervisors, mountain safety guards, Alpine school trainers and mountain guides are interviewed with the help of pre-defined questions (see Table 4). In the next chapter the results of the empirical study are presented.

**Table-4:** Selection of questions within the core topics

Core Topic	Questions (Selection)
Marketing & Products (including Web 2.0 and Social Media)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which elements of the trekking product do you rank to be the most important in your destination? Where do you see strengths, where do you see weaknesses?</li> <li>• Which platforms and networks are used for touristic marketing?</li> <li>• Please describe your experience with Web 2.0 and social media.</li> <li>• Why do you use social media platforms in your destination?</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the mountain rescue system arrange the rescue service? Which technical equipment do you use?</li> <li>• Please describe the future development of the mountaineering insurances from your point of view. Where can you identify chances and challenges?</li> </ul>
Education & Apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which competences are needed to become an Alpine mountain guide?</li> <li>• On which topics does the education of mountain guides focus?</li> </ul>

Note (Own figure)

### 3.2 Analyzed characteristics of trekking in the Alps

This chapter presents the results of the empirical study which are selected with the help of online-based research and semi-structured expert interviews. The most important aspects of this research are figured with the help of significant examples. The theoretical framework of spaces in trekking tourism is used to structure these findings and afterwards to identify relevant characteristics of the Alpine trekking product.

#### Marketing and Products

Tourism marketing is described by Freyer (2009) as a systematic method of tourism management which emphasizes on market mechanisms and relies to social values. With the help of marketing, pre-defined business objectives could be reached. In general marketing is defined as “what an

organization must do to create and exchange value with customers” (Silk, 2006: 3). Because of the relevance of marketing in every form of business it can be concluded that product development and its marketing are important issues in trekking tourism as well.

To get an idea about existing trekking products in the Alps the long-distance trail “E5” is going to be presented as one example. This trail is promoted by the phrase “with convenience across the Alps” (Wikinger Reisen, 2011). It is a guided tour with accommodation in huts, guesthouses or hotels and half board services. Daily luggage transport is offered and the different stages are clearly advertised (Wikinger Reisen, 2011). As one expert mentioned, to offer this trekking product a network of actors is needed: not only accommodation and transfer infrastructure is important, but also the advertising, the mapping or the maintenance of the trekking route.

Another example of a trekking product in the Alps is the “Tour Mont Blanc” which is a cross-border trek around the Mount Blanc, the highest mountain in Europe (Clubaventure, 2011). This trek is an all-season offer. It takes six to seven days and includes different levels of difficulty. For better recognition the route is colour marked (Clubaventure, 2011). One marketing-channel of “Tour Mont Blanc” is the internet. Here detailed explanations of the route character can be found, e.g. concerning the difficulty levels. Further details are presented with signs, symbols and icons which enable a fast overview for the customer (Clubaventure, 2011).

Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are able to support a destination in publishing news, pictures or videos to communicate with its customers. By that, as one expert mentions, Web 2.0 platforms are not only seen as a tool to generate bookings. They are more used as a tool to inform and to get in contact with potential guests.

Next to social media platforms, applications for mobile devices (apps) are analyzed as product presenting media. For example, the Swiss hiking mobile app lists 32 different hiking tours in Switzerland including duration, length and difficulty. So the customer is able to find detailed information about every one of the 32 tours listed.

To summarize, social media platforms as well as mobile apps are identified as a relatively new marketing tool in the Alpine area not only to generate bookings but also to get or stay in contact with guests within the whole touristic service chain. Additionally, they are a modern way of transporting information about trekking routes, quality of paths or services along the way.

These findings give an insight into existing Alpine trekking products and their marketing: Within the trekking product, not only the route is identified as being important, so are additional offers like accommodation, transfer, maps or route signs. Detailed information on offered treks can

be found in marketing channels like the internet. In the model of spaces in trekking tourism, the additional product aspects could be allocated to the mobility space of a trekking destination because of their infrastructural characteristics as well as to the activity space due to the service quality of different tour operators. Through marketing strategies a destination might emphasize its USP, which could guarantee authenticity and increase the quality of the experiences.

## **Safety**

Dealing with adventurous and outdoor tourism activities in remote and high-altitude areas, safety aspects become a crucial factor for both operators and guests. Safety is a term with various meanings, this paper includes the following definition for better understanding: The safety concerns “not only affect individual tourism decision-making but also have a broader influence on economic and political confidence, which in turn affects the wider environment within which the tourism industry operates and in which individual destinations are perceived” (Hall, Timothy & Duval, 2003, p. 2). In the course of protection possibilities, the rescue services have been developed.

Rescue services within the European Alps are mainly provided by non-governmental organizations (NGO) such as the Mountain Rescue Services of Germany, Austria or Italy.

In Germany the mountain rescue service is called “Bergwacht”. Established in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as part of a nature conservation association, the German Mountain Rescue Service aimed to help in cases of accidents in the Bavarian Alps. Since 1945 the “Bergwacht” has been associated with the German Red Cross. The organization is subdivided in different national associations and additionally there is a rescue cooperation between Bavaria, Austria, Switzerland and South Tyrol. Along with mountain rescue training and education, awareness building and protection of the environment are tasks of the association.

The traineeship to become a mountain rescuer takes two years and the trainee has to pass a pretest in skiing, physical condition and climbing first. As one expert commented, the traineeship consists of many disciplines like helicopter training, nature protection, climbing or medical education.

By looking at existing rescue services, a close interaction with different insurance possibilities is noticeable. For example, in Germany there is an insurance coverage for every member of the “Deutscher Alpenverein” (DAV) offered. So a covered member has a protection for the essential mountain accidents (DAV, 2011).

These findings show that the safety aspect is highly developed in the analyzed destination. This is also supported by the statement of one

expert who said that the knowledge about insurances is based on this long-term experience and that there are continuous efforts in improving risk management. The long tradition of mountain sports in the Alps helped to establish a mountain rescue system as well as special insurances for tourists in this region.

Furthermore the empirical background of the presented safety systems in the Alps features the typologies of spaces. The alpine rescue system could be indicated to the mobility space, but also to the activity space because rescue systems could influence the quality of access and activities through infrastructural prerequisites which are required to ensure safety.

### **Education and Apprenticeship**

Besides the safety systems, there are also some associations for education and apprenticeship which train and certify guides for the destination Alps. Apprenticeships are more than teaching students about a discipline, “apprentices are immersed within a community in which they engage in practices ‘at the elbows’ of more competent peers, experts, or ‘old-timers’” (Barab & Hay, 2001, p. 70). It is not only important to teach the basics about Alpinism, as one expert argued, efficient management of risks in the apprenticeship is also of high importance.

In Germany for example there is an association of mountain and ski guides. This organization was founded in 1968 and nowadays more than 500 certified and highly qualified mountain and ski guides are associated with it. To become such a certified guide many stages have to be passed which altogether take around three years (Bergführerverband, 2011).

In addition to several regional associations there is the International Federation of Mountain Guides Association (IFMGA). It was founded in cooperation of the Alpine countries Italy, France, Austria and Switzerland in 1965 and counts today 22 member-countries with around 6,000 mountain guides (IFMGA, 2011). To become an IFMGA mountain guide an IFMGA diploma is needed which can be achieved if the highest level in the disciplines rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering and ski mountaineering is reached. This takes between five and ten years.

The process to become a new member country of the IFMGA also takes between five and 15 years (IFMGA, 2011). As one expert mentioned, this association works together with national governments so that small mountain guide associations are able to be supported by their national government in apprenticeship and in establishing the profession of a guide. Main goals of the IFMGA are coherence between member states and standardization of rules for a mountain guide.

Because of those findings it can be indicated that the education sector in the destination Alps is well developed. Combining the theoretical



background of the tourism spaces approach with specific results of the empirical analysis in the topic education and apprenticeship it is obvious that the quality of activity is covered: By using, for example, guide services, trekking tourists are involve in the activity space of the destination.

#### **4. Conclusion & Limitations**

As can be seen in this paper, there are many different conceptions about the term trekking – definitions including geographic aspects or papers dealing with medical conditions of the trekker can be found frequently. So the need of a touristic perspective on trekking is identified. The model of spaces in tourism, developed by Pechlaner, Herntrei, Pichler & Volgger (2012) provides a useful theoretical framework to analyze relevant aspects of the trekking product in the Alps. Like the empirical study shows, marketing and products, security as well as education and apprenticeship are examples for product positioning in the trekking tourism market.

Hiking tourism has undertaken a lengthy process of perfection of the service products in the Alps. As illustrated in the empirical analysis, active mountain tourism in the Alps is characterized by a high degree of safety and service quality. It can be identified as an offer consisting of a bundle of quality, productivity and experiences.

Comparing the three related types of tourism – adventure tourism, trekking tourism and hiking tourism – it can be stated that they differ from each other mainly on the basis of the influence factors service level and destination development. While adventure tourism is characterized by a low level of services provided to the customer as well sparse development in the destination, hiking tourism is featured by a high service level and a long time of destination development. According to the findings discussed in the theoretical analysis, trekking tourism can be classified in between – reflecting a medium level of service and a medium level of destination development.

Nevertheless, mountain tourism in the Alpine region is a well-developed field. Based on the combination of the theoretical approach of tourism spaces and the findings of the benchmark analysis it can be derived that trekking tourism in the Alps (whether you call it that or not) is featured by a strong connection between mobility, activity and therefore, experience space. The identified core topics, marketing and products, safety as well as training and apprenticeship are well developed as single aspects on their own. But it is the combination of those three product features which builds a developed tourism infrastructure, and therefore the quality of mountain tourism in the Alps.

The research undertaken has several limitations. The Alpine region itself has been studied as a whole unit of space. Covering a range of 190,000 square kilometers and adjoining eight different countries, the

Alps are quite heterogeneous. For future studies, it is advisable to conduct small-scale studies to get deeper inside in specific topics. Due to the fact that the empirical analysis is based on expert judgements and explorative research some aspects such as adventure experiences could not be taken into account. For this reason, field studies should be conducted in further research. In accordance to this, it would be interesting to analyze the customers point of view with the help of a quantitative research approach to gain representative data.

Especially in the destination Alps further research is needed: While from a theoretical perspective there are hardly any connections found between trekking and the destination, the empirical analysis showed that the term trekking is often used in context with tourism management activities in the observed region. With the help of the systematic literature review only an extract of the existing literature could have been identified. Furthermore, the literature review has shown that just a few relevant articles are available about trekking in the Alps, although there is much more research potential in this region. To enlarge the analysis for further research it would be suggested to use additional databases and different key words in order to find more relevant papers dealing with the topic trekking in the Alps.

In summary, this paper shows that the Alpine region could serve as a model for an upscale service level hiking destination. There are lots of implications which are signs for a successful region like the standards for quality and certification or the existing rescue systems. The cross-border cooperation defines specified competences and also divides tasks between the institutions or associations. Also the implementations of professional marketing in the form of social media marketing or the creation of an identity-establishing brand or of product combinations, are helpful for a competitive positioning in the tourism market.

An overall impression which can be drawn from the analysis shows that the Alpine region itself could be defined as a hiking destination rather than a trekking destination. This is due to the broad product offers including accommodation, well-developed safety and insurance systems as well as new forms of destination-wide communication offers such as mobile applications and the special trained mountain guides. Questions could be proposed on how the combination of mobility, activity and experience space influence the overall quality of tourism in the Alps. Therefore, based on the empirical analysis the authors formulated three hypotheses explorative which can be seen as a starting point for further research:

Hypothesis 1: *The more standardized and consistently the Alpine mountain rescue systems are operating, the higher the perceived safety of trekking tourists in the Alps is, and therefore, the higher the quality of mobility within the whole destination.*

Hypothesis 2: *The better trained and educated Alpine mountain guides are, the more sophisticated the perceived quality of this service is and therefore the higher the quality of trekking activities in the Alps.*

Hypothesis 3: *The more integrated the mobility and activity spaces of Alpine trekking, the more unique and authentic the trekking tourists' experiences are, and therefore the higher the quality of experiences in the Alps.*

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## About the Authors

The authors Manuela Bauer, Elif Kablan, Doerte Kasueske, Anja Klauditz, Christian Nordhorn and Anreas Zilker have completed the Master of Science program, Tourism and Regional Planning – Management and Geography at the Catholic University Eichstaett-Ingolstadt in 2012. In September 2011 the students took part in an project excursion to India in order to participate in a study about trekking tourism in Uttarakhand, that has been conducted as part of the so-called RED (Regional Economic Development) project of GIZ (Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit). Another aspect of the study included empirical research on trekking destinations in the European Alps, providing the basis for the paper presented above. Christian Nordhorn is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [christian.nordhorn@ku.de](mailto:christian.nordhorn@ku.de)



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## LIST OF CONFERENCES FOR THE YEAR 2013

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### **March 2013**

#### ***International forum for responsible tourism***

29th to 31st March 2013

Bucharest , Romania

Website: <http://amphitheatreconferences.gm.ro/>

Contact person: Raluca Eftimie

### **April 2013**

#### ***Tourism and the Shifting Values of Cultural Heritage: Visiting Pasts, Developing Futures***

5th to 9th April 2013

Taipei, Tajikistan

Website: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/iaa/departments/ironbridge/news/2012/cfp-conference-2013.aspx>

Contact person: Caroline Ashton

#### ***Conference on Innovation in Tourism and Hospitality - CIT2013***

16th to 19th April 2013

Valencia and Benidorm, Valencian Region, Spain

Website: <http://cit2013.florida.es>

Contact person: Amparo Lopez

### **May 2013**

#### ***International Conference on Religious Tourism and Tolerance (RTT2013)***

9th to 12th May 2013

Konya, Turkey

Website: <http://rtt2013.konya.edu.tr>

Contact person: Asst. Prof. Dr. Yasin BILIM

#### ***International Interdisciplinary Conference - IISES Venice Conference***

12th to 15th May 2013

Venice, Italy

Website: <http://www.iises.net/conferences/venice-conference-may-12-15-2013/>

Contact person: Robert Holman

***2nd International Scientific Conference „Tourism in South and Eastern Europe” (ToSEE): Crisis - a challenge of sustainable tourism development?***

15th to 18th May 2013

Opatija, Croatia (Hrvatska)

Website: <http://www.fthm.uniri.hr/tosee>

Contact person: Daniela Soldi Frleta

***The Macrotheme Conference on Business and Social Science: IBIZA 2013***

23rd to 24th May 2013

Ibiza, Spain

Website: [http://macrotheme.com/international\\_conferences/ibiza\\_2013\\_business\\_and\\_social\\_science](http://macrotheme.com/international_conferences/ibiza_2013_business_and_social_science)

Contact person: Damir Tokic

***World Conference on Hospitality, Tourism and Event Research & International Convention & Expo Summit 2013 (WHTER & ICES 2013)***

25th to 28th May 2013

Millennium Hilton Bangkok Hotel, Bangkok , Thailand

Website: <http://ices2013.wix.com/siamu>

Contact person: Aurel Tomas Maracsko

***Sustainable Development and Planning 2013***

27th to 29th May 2013

Kos, Greece

Website: <http://www.wessex.ac.uk/13-conferences/sustainable-development-and-planning-2013.html>

Contact person: Genna West

***June 2013***

***ICOT2013 (International Conference on Tourism)***

5th to 8th June 2013

Limassol, Cyprus

Website: <http://www.iatour.net/icot2013/>

Contact person: Konstantinos Andriotis

***ARWTE 2013 - Advanced Research Workshop in Tourism Economics***

6th to 7th June 2013

Coimbra, Portugal

Website: <http://arwte2013.apidt.com>

Contact person: Alvaro Matias



***9th Annual International Conference on Tourism, 10-13 June 2013, Athens, Greece***

10th to 13th June 2013

Athens, Greece

Website: <http://www.atiner.gr/tourism.htm>

Contact person: Gregory Papanikos

***2nd Annual International Conference on Tourism and Hospitality Research (THoR 2013)***

17th to 18th June 2013

Singapore

Website: <http://www.tourism-conf.org/index.html>

Contact person: Conference Secretariat

***Welcoming Encounters: Tourism Research in a Post Disciplinary Era***

19th to 22nd June 2013

Neuchatel , Neuchatel, Switzerland

Website: <http://www.tourism21.com/untitled1.html>

Contact person: Dr William Feighery

***3rd Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing & Management Conference***

25th to 30th June 2013

Taipei, Taiwan

Website: <http://ahtmmc2013.ncut.edu.tw/index.php>

Contact person: Brendan Chen

***July 2013***

***International Conference on Bio-Diversity 2013***

1st to 2nd July 2013

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Website: <http://futureevents.org/biodiversity>

Contact person: Prabhath Patabendi

***The International Conference on Events ( ICE2013)***

3rd to 5th July 2013

Bournemouth, United Kingdom

Website: <http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/tourism/news-and-events/events/conferences/ice2013.html>

Contact person: Karen Ward

***Design, User Experience and Usability in Tourism-related Applications***

21st to 26th July 2013

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Website: <http://www.hcii2013.org>

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**August 2013*****6th International Colloquium on Tourism & Leisure***

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