

**LONG-DISTANCE HIKING:
LANDSCAPE EXPERIENCES ALONG THE VIA ALPINA**

by

Anne Weißenborn

submitted to the Department of Environmental Sciences, Cultural Geography Chair Group in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

Supervisor: Dr. Henk de Haan

Examiner: Prof. Dr. Claudio Minca

Study program: Leisure, Tourism and Environment

Course code: GEO-80436

Date: March 11, 2015

Registration number: 870714-937-040

Abstract

This master thesis examines the landscape experiences of long-distance hikers on the Via Alpina trails in the European Alps. By conceptualizing walking as an embodied mobile practice, the hikers' individual reflections on the journey are analyzed from a non-representational perspective. An interpretive research angle and qualitative methods are employed to study their experiences of natural and cultural features of the landscape, social encounters along the way, and personal meanings of the hike. Theorizing long-distance hiking in the context of Alpine tourism, the thesis shows that the hikers experience deep, multi-sensual immersion in their surroundings, make meaningful social connections during their journey, and take lasting positive memories with them that have a significant impact on their lives.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Abstract | I |
| Illustrations | IV |
| 1 Introduction | 1 |
| 2 Literature Review | 4 |
| 2.1 On the move: Walking as mobile landscape experience | 4 |
| 2.1.1 Theoretical framework | 4 |
| 2.1.2 The role of materiality and sensuality | 7 |
| 2.2 Stepping out: Walking in leisure and tourism | 10 |
| 2.2.1 Walking during leisure time | 10 |
| 2.2.2 Health aspects of recreational walking | 13 |
| 2.2.3 Walking as a form of slow travel | 16 |
| 2.3 The mountain calls: Exploring Alpine landscape on foot | 20 |
| 2.3.1 Characteristics of mountain tourism | 20 |
| 2.3.2 Hiking as nature-based tourism in the Alps | 24 |
| 2.3.3 Historic development of Alpine tourism | 26 |
| 2.3.4 Case: Via Alpina long-distance trails | 30 |
| 2.4 Passing through: Long-distance hiking | 34 |
| 2.4.1 General characteristics and hikers' motivations | 34 |
| 2.4.2 Long-distance hiking as serious leisure? | 37 |
| 2.4.3 Conceptualizing the experiences of long-distance hikers | 40 |
| 3 Methodology | 45 |
| 3.1 Research approach | 45 |
| 3.2 Data collection and sample structure | 47 |
| 3.3 Data analysis | 51 |
| 4 Results | 52 |
| 4.1 Why hikers choose the Via Alpina | 52 |
| 4.2 Immersion in Alpine landscape | 55 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 4.2.1 | Perceptions of material surroundings | 55 |
| 4.2.2 | A multi-sensual experience | 60 |
| 4.3 | Social interactions along the way | 63 |
| 4.4 | Personal dimension | 67 |
| 4.4.1 | Physical challenges and the hiker's body | 67 |
| 4.4.2 | Mental challenges and emotional involvement | 69 |
| 4.4.3 | Personal meanings of the journey | 72 |
| 4.5 | Impact on hiker's lives | 77 |
| 5 | Discussion | 79 |
| 6 | Conclusion | 84 |
| 7 | References | 87 |
| | Appendix 1 – Written email interviews | 94 |
| | Appendix 2 – Telephone interview transcripts | 116 |
| | Appendix 3 – Telephone interview guide English | 174 |

Illustrations

| | |
|--|----|
| Illustration 1: Model for transformative effects of long-distance walking by Saunders et al. (2014, p. 142), with Seligman’s (2011) five elements of well-being highlighted bold | 14 |
| Illustration 2: Slow travel conceptual framework by Lumsdon and McGrath (2011, p. 276) | 19 |
| Illustration 3: Mountain tourism conceptual framework by Nepal and Chipeniuk (2005, p. 315) | 21 |
| Illustration 4: Map of the Via Alpina Trails by Repiquet and Simon (2015) | 31 |
| Illustration 5: Motivations for undertaking an Appalachian Trail hike, percentage of the total respondents of a study by Power Bratton (2012, p. 51) | 35 |
| Illustration 6: Adjectives the participants assigned to Alpine landscape | 59 |

1 Introduction

Walking has always been fundamental to any form of human mobility, and even today it is generally seen as a normative element of human existence and informs people's daily lives (Cresswell, 2010). Even though walking is also considered a core element of tourism, only a rather small body of literature from a tourism perspective can be found about it at the moment (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Tilley, 2012). Den Breejen (2007) points out that walking in general and also as a tourism practice plays a major role in people's lives, but is a strongly under-researched topic. Nevertheless, according to Lorimer (2011), walking lately moved more into the focus of academia, especially as a social practice that is incorporated with cultural and social meanings rather than just as "a functional mode of transport" (p.19). This 'cultural-interpretive' perspective is also the theoretical angle for this study, which examines the phenomenon long-distance hiking as a specific form of recreational walking in tourism.

Lorimer (2011) states that "to walk is to feel oneself engaged in a sustaining conversation with landscape" (p. 24). This means that long-distance hiking can be described as a mobile, multi-sensual experience that goes beyond the visual consumption of the subject's surroundings. The traveler is much longer exposed to landscape, which leads to intensive embodied experiences of visited places (Bold & Gillespie, 2009; Edensor, 2000). Traveling on foot is therefore a unique way to explore places leading to immediate proximal encounters of the tourist with the destination. According to Crust et al. (2011), long-distance hiking experiences are a niche topic in tourism studies and did not receive enough attention so far.

Hiking over a longer period of time, covering rather wide distances, can be considered part of the growing segment of nature-based tourism and often takes place on specifically designed trails (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). The Via Alpina, an international network of long-distance trails through the European Alps, will therefore serve as the case for this research project. By employing qualitative research methods, it intends to gain new insights into how long-distance hikers experience Alpine nature, encounter regional cultures, and interact with locals during their journey on foot. Drawing on concepts of non-representational theory, the notion of embodied practice and the role of materiality in touristic consumption of landscapes,

this thesis analyzes the hiker's mobile experiences in terms of their reflection on the journey after completing their hike and their personal meanings of the trip and the Alpine landscape. Central argument of this study is that due to their long-term and physically intense involvement with the destination as well as many chances for personal encounters, long-distance hikers experience this landscape differently than other summer tourists.

In this respect, I conceptualize landscape not as something static and external to human beings, but as the sum of all human and non-human activity as well as its material features. Hence, landscape is characterized by the cultural meanings that we associate with it and the practices taking place in it (Doughty, 2011). Furthermore, it is important to mention that when the term Alps is used in this thesis, it generically refers to the Alpine mountain range in Europe. In the case of this study, the Alps represent the distinctive place that motivates thousands of hikers every season to set out and travel on foot. Not only do they function as the geographical setting for a walking holiday, offering diverse natural and cultural sights to explore, but they also determine the very nature of the trip through their hut infrastructure, path network, weather conditions, local customs and so on.

Research objective and research questions

With this thesis I aim to study the phenomenon of long-distance hiking in the Alps as a mobile tourist experience from the point of view of the walker. More precisely, the objective is to explore how they recollect the embodied involvement with local landscapes and places during their hikes after having finished their journeys. Regarding long-distance hiking as an embodied practice as suggested by non-representational theory can help develop an understanding of walking experiences (Cresswell, 2010). Therefore, the hiker's recollections of their multi-sensual perceptions of the surroundings, their emotional responses to the journey as well as their social interactions along the way will stand in the center of this research.

Since the topic of long-distance hiking in general and its role in personal fulfillment in particular is under-researched (Saunders et al., 2013), the thesis examines the personal meanings their journey has for long-distance hikers and how their experiences influence their lifestyle, attitudes and well-being. In this regard, I also aim to find out how long-distance hikers

relate to Alpine landscape as their chosen travel area and how they reflect on their own involvement with it. Using an embodied, mobile approach to travel experiences, this thesis intends to fill gaps in tourism inquiry about landscape consumption beyond the visual 'gaze' as well as contribute knowledge about nature-based niche tourism in the Alps from the tourist's perspective.

The described objectives result in the following research questions:

- 1. How do long-distance hikers on the Via Alpina experience the Alpine landscape?*
- 2. What do these experiences mean to the hikers?*

The following chapter provides a comprehensive literature review on walking and its role in tourism experience. First, the general theoretical angle of my thesis is explained, followed by an overview on existing literature about walking as a leisure and tourism activity. In order to give a background of the nature and conditions of long-distance hiking in the Alps, the next section presents some general characteristics of mountain tourism as well as the development and shape of nature-based tourism in the European Alps. The case of the Via Alpina is introduced in chapter 2.3.4, followed by the theoretical background on the travel phenomenon long-distance hiking. Chapter 3 is concerned with the methodology and research design employed for this thesis, and the final two chapters include the research results and final discussion.

2 Literature Review

2.1 On the move: Walking as mobile landscape experience

2.1.1 *Theoretical framework*

With the conceptual shift of the social sciences towards movement and its various meanings, research of geographies of mobilities has gained importance during recent years. Rather than looking at social phenomena as singular static issues, the so called 'new mobilities paradigm' examines them based on interconnected movements of people, communication, and materials that are ever changing in a dynamic world (Sheller & Urry, 2006). While the interest in mobility itself is not new, there has been a considerable shift in attention towards the experiences of different types of mobility and the role of the body in producing space (Doughty, 2011).

According to Cresswell and Merriman (2011) “the philosophical agendas driving much of the 'new mobilities paradigm' are inspired by a post-structuralist sensitivity to movement and practice” (p. 5). Thus, the academic focus lies on what is happening during movement on various scales and how the relationships between tangible and intangible movements shape people's subjective reality. In this effect the focus of this thesis lies on walking as a mobile practice, examining it as one of the most basic forms of mobility that is vital to human experience and phenomenologies of landscape (ibid.).

From a functional aspect, walking can be defined as “a trip, made on foot, that involves physical activity, usually to access a place for a wide variety of reasons” (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010, p. 119). This definition however classifies walking as a mere category of transport, oriented more towards the destination than the act itself, seemingly disconnected from a variety of the walker's social, cultural and economic circumstances (Sheller & Urry, 2006). It can be argued that rather than just being transport, walking constitutes both a perceptual lens through which people see the world as well as a spatial expression of culture. May it be the walks of pilgrims, artists, protesters, athletes or simply the daily commute of an urban dweller: they all bear different contexts, motivations and objectives (Solnit, 2000). Other than only

movement, that simply constitutes the physical means to get from one point to another, walking as a form of mobility is contextualized movement bearing meaning (Molz, 2009).

This conceptual perspective, that Lorimer (2011) calls cultural-interpretive, lead the way to more academic attention towards the narratives and experiences bound in walking. Unraveling the dimensions of walking as a practice, Lorimer suggests that researchers are interested in three main elements: “the *walk*, as an event; the *walker*, as human subject; and, *walking*, as an embodied act” (ibid., p. 19).

Embodiment is commonly understood as multi-sensual, multidimensional experience with the body being involved with space and taking on an active role in creating its meaning (Rakic & Chamber, 2012). The term practice has been theorized in various ways, but in general it can be understood as human activity that is both governed by and expresses social behavioral norms; that is, all behavior is informed by the shared understanding that societies have about it (May, 2010). According to Edensor (2000), like any other practice, walking has to be seen as performative, repetitive action, induced with certain norms and values that do not only depend on *why* people walk, but also shape *how* they walk and what they *express* while walking. This means that walking can be seen as a starting point for social inquiry, in this case from a tourist experience perspective.

By regarding walking as a mobile, embodied practice this thesis is underpinned by the concepts of non-representational theory. This line of thought in cultural geography challenges the dominance of the representational paradigm and takes on a different perspective on the relationship between landscape and self. It argues that representation and discursive construction of reality alone are limited notions for interpreting and understanding this relationship (Lorimer, 2005). Looking beyond mental consciousness and intellectual perception, Thrift (2008) theorizes reality as 'lived' through the practices and performances of subjects. Doughty (2011) summarizes that “non-representational theory attends to how everyday life is practiced in a way that is open-ended and always in process, giving precedence to the nonintentional, nondiscursive, and elusory, that which is prior to cognitive thought and reflection and thus prior to any form of representation” (p. 29).

It needs to be noted that there are different perspectives on which role representation

plays in this context. Lorimer (2005) and Carolan (2008) for example prefer the term 'more-than-representational' in order to declare its significance in relation to the earlier dominance of the 'landscape-as-text' concept in science. Similarly, Crouch et al. (2001) suggest that non-representational theory does not simply reject representation, but seeks to complement social inquiry by including notions of performativity, agency and embodiment to a formerly 'one-sided' approach, acknowledging "flows of practice and negotiation rather than linear rationality" (p. 258). Nonetheless, when taking into account the complex meanings inscribed in tourism through media, industry, and every travelers individual aspirations and social background, cultural representations are entwined with practice and cannot be left out when examining tourist experiences. As Rantala (2010) remarks, representations are also continuously constructed, renewed and challenged within embodied practice itself.

Accordingly, in his concept of 'politics of mobility' Cresswell (2010) suggests that mobility is essentially made of the three components *movement* as physical reality, *representation* as meaning induced through social and cultural codes, and *practice* as the embodied experience. Therefore he points out that "walking is also an embodied practice that we experience in ways that are not wholly accounted for by either their objective dimensions or their social and culture dimensions" (p. 20). As these theoretical aspects blend in and influence one another, the idea of walking as an embodied practice will stand in the center of this thesis, but will not be examined detached from functional and representational aspects.

Referring to Bourdieu's (1990) concept of *habitus*, Ingold and Vergunst (2008) argue that walking is both an expression of thoughts and feelings as well as being an act of thinking and feeling itself, in each case continually shaped by social identity and at the same time generating it. Also, the walker never simply passes through a landscape, but becomes an active part of it in both a sensual as well as a conscious way. In the following section I present notions of materiality of landscape and multi-sensual experiences of walking in greater detail.

2.1.2 The role of materiality and sensuality

Non-representational theory is inspired by phenomenology, which places the embodied relationship with a person's surroundings in the center of their lived experiences. The focus lies on the affective qualities of the material world and a subject's multi-sensual and corporeal involvement with it, challenging the idea of a clear distinction between mind and body (Rakic & Chambers, 2012). Phenomenology does not consider the body as just the container of a human's mind, but as the direct connector to its physical surroundings. It acknowledges the integral role the body plays in how humans make sense of the world and how they behave in it.

In terms of tourism, the orientation towards the body as an active agent in experience has implications on how we understand place consumption: The hegemony of Urry's original concept of the 'tourist gaze' as both literal and symbolic consumption is disrupted by seeing tourism as a relational performance, questioning also the natural divide between place and tourist as in 'here we stand looking at something' (Rakic & Chambers, 2012). This perspective also pays more attention towards the integrated roles of texture, sensation and movement in tourist experience, which have long been neglected in tourism studies (Obrador, 2012).

I take on the argument that especially walking is a primary sensuous experience, because the physical surroundings strongly mediate the encounter between landscape and walker, and perhaps even contest, confirm or refine certain representations assimilated before the actual encounter (Crouch et al., 2001). As it happens in such close corporeal proximity to the material features of landscape, walking is not merely a passing through – like it might be when driving in a faster vehicle – but a direct immersion that affects the moving body. Tilley (2012) calls this a form of communication with landscape through the body, and states that the “body becomes the measure of all things in relation to me and the possibilities, or affordances, and constraints that the landscape provides” (p. 17).

The increased attention for affordances and affect in their roles in experience can be understood as a shift towards, as Doughty (2011) puts it, a neo-materialist concept of landscape within the non-representational school of thought. Affordances are a way to understand the material quality of the self-landscape relationship: they induce possible (re)actions of a person

towards an environmental condition (Rantala, 2010). Affect in turn describes in how far changes of a body's state of being can be evoked by the material environment or other bodies (Doughty, 2011). Hence, landscape is not a separate entity to be observed, cognitively made sense of and be inscribed with meanings, but 'comes into being' through the embodied, sensual and practical involvement of people and material (Haldrup & Larsen, 2006). In the context of walking, Wylie (2005) exemplifies the role of affect in self-landscape relations as

“configurations of motion and materiality – of light, colour, morphology and mood – from which distinctive senses of self and landscape, walker and ground, observer and observed, distil and refract. Just as there is no question of confining all sense, meaning and passion to the interior of the self, so there is no a priori and fixed exterior matter determining perception. Instead, the circulation and upsurge of affects and percepts is precisely the relation, the primary capacity of affecting and being affected from which these two horizons, inside and outside, self and landscape, precipitate and fold. [...] An affect is an intensity, a field perhaps of awe, irritation or serenity, which exceeds, enters into, and ranges over the sensations and emotions of a subject who feels” (p. 236).

In that respect Lorimer (2011) argues, that walking practices should generally be seen as resulting from the physical characteristics of specific places, for example landmarks, monuments, viewpoints or remarkable scenic features. That is, subjective meanings of walks originate from the spaces they are undertaken in. By theorizing walking as a mediated movement that co-constitutes landscape instead of just happening on it, the walker does experience both landscape and their own selves as moving bodies simultaneously (Tilley, 2012).

One result of the stronger focus on materialities of landscape in non-representational theory is an increased scientific scrutiny for other human senses besides sight and with it a growing body of literature challenging the primacy of visual experience (Scott et al., 2009). In tourism research it has recently been more acknowledged that experiences through smell, sound, taste or touch also play an important role in how tourists make sense of places (Markwell, 2001). It can be argued that walking as an embodied experience is essentially conditioned by the body's multi-sensual exposure to the material conditions of the walking grounds. To a certain extent, experience is always mediated through representations, personal

equipment, local tourism infrastructure, and the body itself, but the complete detachment of tourists from their surroundings during a landscape encounter as implied by the 'tourist gaze' is not the primary understanding of experience anymore (ibid).

Rakic and Chambers (2012) point out that Urry, informed partly by the mobilities paradigm, has reconceptualized his visual and representational take on the 'tourist gaze' and acknowledged the significance of performativity, sensuality and practice in tourist experiences. Furthermore, in their new mobilities paradigm, Urry and Sheller (2006) also advocate for relational, non-static approach towards 'place' and suggest that there can be no clear distinction between places and the tourist activities happening there. This matches the previously described concept of the contested, fluid nature of landscapes that are constructed and made meaningful through embodied practices. Based on this notion, Rakic and Chambers (2012) argue that “at the point of experiencing or visiting a place, there is no dichotomy between construction and consumption of places and that these processes are dual, active and indistinguishable” (p. 1614).

In summary, this thesis regards walking as an embodied practice that both expresses and defines the relationships hikers on the Via Alpina have with Alpine landscape and places. Walking can produce a high degree of intimacy between landscape and self, as it breaks down the experience to a human scale in terms of speed and perspective (Wylie, 2005; Tilley, 2012). While speed remains similar, the perspective is constantly shifting and places are consumed on the move. The materials taken in through all senses give the walker an utterly subjective experience of the landscape structure, distances and the flow of places (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008). As affordances continuously change while passing through, walking remains an improvisational activity that needs to be adapted in order negotiate a passage (Edensor, 2010).

In the words of Waitt et al. (2009): “Walking is revealed to be a place-making practice sustaining a sense of self-discovery through ascribing order over a place by passing through, rather than simply inhabiting a pre-configured world” (p. 42). Finally, when examining walking experiences, the circumstances of people's lives need to be taken into account, as they have just as big an effect on the way they walk as the physical characteristics of the landscape or the physiological constitution of their bodies (Ingold, 2004).

2.2 Stepping out: Walking in leisure and tourism

2.2.1 Walking during leisure time

Even though this thesis refers to walking as a somewhat extraordinary activity during a vacation, Edensor (2010) points out that most walking happens as a part of daily life and has a very mundane nature. Most walks are also habitual, especially when they are done in routine and out of necessity. Indeed, walking for pleasure is a rather young phenomenon that developed in Europe within the Romantic Era, when writers and artists ventured out into nature searching for inspiration and a higher meaning of existence (Hockley, 2011). Yet, for quite some time it remained a leisure activity for a small elite. Before the nineteenth century and the industrialization, walking was mainly considered a tiresome necessity only to be done in close proximity to home in order to keep up with daily chores (Seaton, 2012).

According to Ingold (2004), also traveling in Europe was long not associated with walking at all, but with more comfortable and faster means of mobility like coaches. Arriving at the destination was what mattered, not the straining and sometimes dangerous journey. Later however, countryside walking rose in popularity mainly due to better access to mobility and a new appreciation of scenic landscapes outside the urban centers: “For one thing, as public transport came to be affordable to ordinary working people, walking figured as a matter of choice rather than necessity, and the stigma of poverty formerly attached to its practitioners faded away (Urry, 2000: 51). And for another thing, transport could take people to the places – the scenery – within and around which they wanted to walk” (Ingold, 2004, p. 322).

The scientific attention for walking practices motivated by recreational needs also attests quite a western perspective. According to Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010), for walking as a form of travel the focus of academia lies primarily on pleasure, which contrasts the situation in many less developed countries where walking may be the only choice of mobility for many people. It is a means to simply survive, rather than to enjoy and reflect, and involves hardship and health risks. With traveling being a privilege for people in less developed countries, it is seldom associated with walking. In addition, empirical research on walking experiences is mostly done with the western tourists in mind, which is also the case in this thesis.

For many western travelers today, walking is one of the most popular leisure and tourism activities especially in nature-based tourism (Davies et al., 2012). Seaton (2012) remarks that terms like 'hiking' or 'backpacking' are essentially just new marketing phrases for the same old Romantic idea of nature walks, but reflect different purposes and attitudes towards walking developed over time. He also argues that motives of escape are still prominent in all forms of walking.

However, Edensor (2010) points out that there are various forms of recreational walking, determined for example by the choice of company, the use of defined tracks versus free drifting, and the length and intensity of a walk. In particular the underpinning motivations can be used to classify two main groups of walkers: Quoting Kay and Moxham (1996), Edensor names the casual walkers on the one side, who enjoy walking as a social, easy-going and rather spontaneous activity. These types of walks include for example 'strolling' or 'promenading', and only require basic physical abilities. On the other side, there is the smaller group of competitive walkers, for whom the sportive and challenging aspects of walking play an important role. Long-distance hiking can be categorized as the latter, as more preparation and strength is necessary. These notions will be discussed further in terms of the 'serious leisure' concept in chapter 2.4.2.

In particular for completing longer distances, Edensor (2010) suggests, that such walks in the countryside often represent somewhat masculine, archaic ideas about conquering wild nature and testing the over-modernized, pampered self. Even though these notions originate in historic accounts of walking, still today overcoming physical challenges in inhospitable conditions can be seen as a way to gain personal status and relate oneself to a certain naturalistic ideal (ibid).

From the subjective perspective of the walkers, their journeys on foot can provide a chance for self-reflection, and room to meditate over more existential questions about ways of living (Lorimer, 2011). The process of self-reflection is enhanced by walker's temporary escape from daily life and the greater distance from stress-factors, which can help seeing the current personal situation from another angle (Crust et al., 2011). In his account of walking as a reflexive practice that emerged during the Romantic era, Edensor (2000), argues that these 'mobile performances' constantly reenact ideological notions of self-improvement and

individuality, especially practiced as sensual experience in the rural countryside as contrary to the daily hardships of urban life.

It is important to note that walking as a reflexive practice is to some degree dependent on a conscious decision for a walk or, at least, a certain level of awareness for the self and the environment during walking. Similarly, Lorimer (2011) suggests that the chosen surroundings and personal motivations to complete a specific path are of great significance, because the journey is by far more meaningful than the destination and becomes an end rather than a means. Therefore I am concerned with long-distance hiking as an outdoor leisure activity in a region that tourists specifically travel to in order to walk, focusing on the 'recreational' as an exceptional experience rather than mundane walking.

2.2.2 Health aspects of recreational walking

Besides providing room for self-reflection, scientists have demonstrated that recreational walking also has a positive impact on physical health and can increase personal well-being. The health aspect has recently been very high on the research agenda about walking (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). It is fairly easy for most people to start walking in order to exercise, but it can have strong impacts. For instance, already one hour of walking per week can lower the risk for coronal heart disease of women and is as effective as taking up more vigorous activities (Lee et al., 2001).

Furthermore, walking – whether in the countryside or in urban areas – is increasingly used as a promotion tool for public health campaigns, for example by the British government (see Doughty, 2011). Like other developed industrialized countries, Britain struggles with high numbers of obese inhabitants due to inactivity and poor diets, which causes other illnesses and high costs in health care. In order to stimulate more physical activity, engagement with nature and social interaction among citizens, walking is promoted by various initiatives for almost everyone lowering health risks (ibid). On an international level, the World Heart Federation recommends walking as “a great way to increase physical activity levels. It is one of the most accessible forms of physical activity: most people can do it, it is free, can be easily incorporated into a daily routine, and evidence has shown that it can improve your heart health” (WHF, 2013, p. 3).

In terms of mental health, intensive walking over longer periods of time is proven to be an effective exercise as well. In their study on long-distance walking on trails in Northern England, Crust et al. (2011) found that the participants experienced enjoyment, detachment from problems and fulfillment during their walk, which match the notions of positive psychology. They also reported walkers to be strongly engaged with their activity and experiencing so called 'flow', described as “being completely absorbed in the walk, on automatic pilot, where the exertion itself seemed effortless and when all sense of time was lost” (p. 254). By overcoming frequent challenges during their walk, for example physical exhaustion or bad weather, they felt a sense of personal achievement and a growth of self-confidence afterward (ibid).

Similarly, Saunders et al. (2014) studied how long-distance walkers from Australia and New Zealand make changes in their lives after the journey, and could match their results with concepts of positive psychology. Based on Seligman's PERMA scheme of well-being, which includes the five elements positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement, it is demonstrated that the walks lead to an increase in mental health (Seligman, 2011, cited in ibid, p. 131).

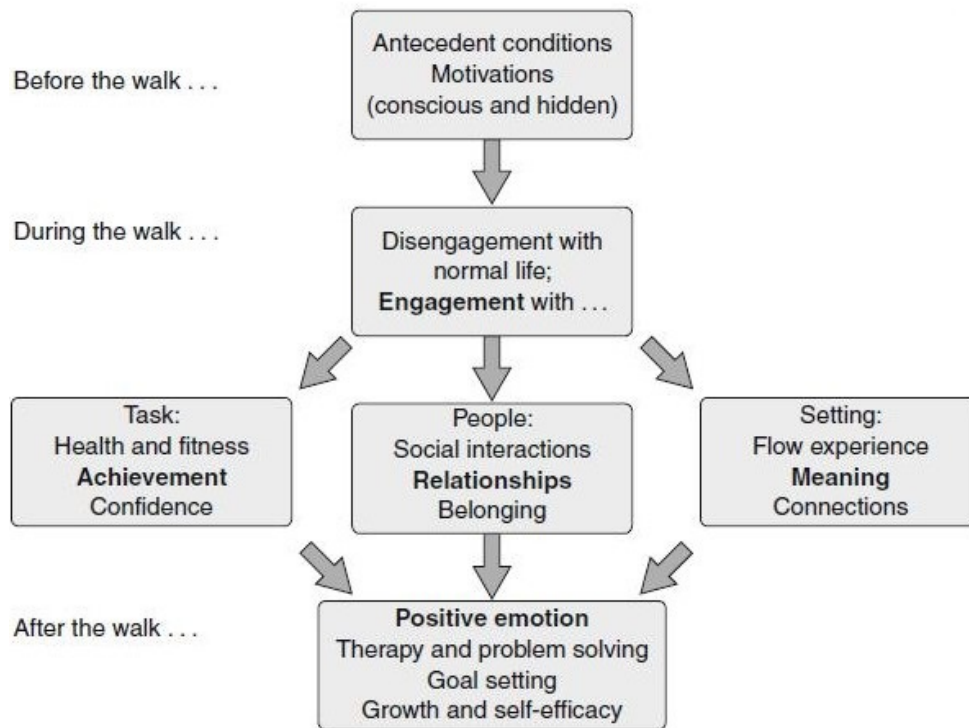


Illustration 1: Model for transformative effects of long-distance walking by Saunders et al. (2014, p. 142), with Seligman's (2011) five elements of well-being highlighted bold

The researchers conclude that the participants undergo a process of positive personal transformation, which is initiated by the walk and extends into their daily lives after the journey. Long-distance walking can therefore “facilitate processes of relief and disengagement from common stresses and problems in life and [...] can foster enduring positive self-directed change in participants’ lives by building confidence and a sense of purpose” (p. 143). Matching the five PERMA scheme elements with the main aspects of the walking experience they present a model for the stages of this transformative travel process, as shown above in illustration 1.

In her analysis of the effects that walking through so called 'therapeutic landscapes' can have on well-being, Doughty (2011) draws on non-representational theory and argues that places become meaningful through the moving human body and its rhythmic immersion in landscapes. Hence, the positive health effects depend highly on subjective experiences and are characterized by a complex relationship between place, space and the people in it. She also highlights the important role social interaction plays for the benefits of walking. Accordingly, Doughty suggests a relational concept of well-being, meaning that besides the subjective experiences of the practice walking, it also matters who people walk with, how they jointly make sense of their surroundings and with whom they share experiences.

Criticizing the often one-dimensional perspective of health geography on 'aesthetics' with focus on the visual aspect, she presents the concept of *"an embodied aesthetic that involves not just the visual sense and scenic appreciation but includes our perception of sounds, smell and touch as well as sight. [...] The aesthetic appreciation of the rural walkscape entails an affective engagement with the place and the event of the walk, including the other walkers. [...] This conception of the aesthetic conceives of the body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation. But not only this, it also emphasises relationality and the shared creation of the aesthetic experience"* (Doughty, 2011, p. 193). It is this appreciation of the surroundings, complemented by shared experiences and an active engagement with nature that renders health benefits for walkers.

Similarly, Maddrell (2013) examines walking pilgrimage from the perspective of mental well-being, and highlights the growing academic attention for emotionally affective landscapes as a form of therapy or at least therapy support. Pilgrimage is arguably one of the oldest forms of walking for its own sake, with the journey itself being spiritually just as important as a sacred destination. Since pilgrimage is consciously underpinned with the search for religious meaning, it is a positively transformational walking experience that extends beyond walking in pleasant company, resulting in a strong sense of personal renewal and spiritual interconnections with fellow pilgrims that render direct health benefits (Maddrell, 2013).

2.2.3 Walking as a form of slow travel

As mentioned before, walking was long not in the spotlight of tourism research or was usually discussed as a transport topic (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). However, with the social science agendas changing towards mobility-related issues, walking becomes increasingly important as a specific tourist experience and an alternative means of travel by its own right. A phenomenon that conceptualizes the relationship between walking and tourism very aptly, is so called 'slow travel'. According to Molz (2009), "'Slow Travel' refers to a grass-roots movement that encourages tourists to travel locally, to stay in one place rather than packing a lot of destinations into their itineraries, and to reject motorised transportation like air or automobile travel in favour of walking or cycling" (p. 277).

The general trend to 'slow down', for example when eating, working, traveling or communicating, emerged around the year 2000 as a reaction to the ever accelerating pace of life in the modern world and seeks alternative ways of living. Slow travel, starting with gastro-tourism, emerged from the older movement 'Slow Food', which already started 1986 in Italy and promotes local food products, the preservation of traditional cuisines, and respect for farmers and the environment (Heitmann et al., 2011). Contrasting with notions of rationality, efficiency, and control, the movement's paradigm is to bring more meaning and quality to all kinds of activities (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

Accordingly, traveling slow aims to stronger connect to the visited places and engage more detailed with a destination. Time takes on a different meaning: instead of trying to fill in as many activities as possible, 'slowness' aims on using the available time differently to make more intensive memories (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011). This also means that the term 'slow' in this context is not associated with negative connotations like boredom, ineffectiveness or laziness, but adopts the positive meaning of 'taking time' for what is individually perceived as important. In this sense McGrath (2013) suggests that slow travel also facilitates a journey of the mind, that is "an identity affirming experience" (p . 25).

In order to explore a destination slowly, travelers try to consume local products, appreciate local cuisine, put strong emphasis on multi-sensory experiences including taste and

smell, respect local cultural traditions, try to interact more with residents, and therefore consciously express an alternative consumption pattern (Markwell et al., 2012). Instead of just visiting a place, the traveler immerses into it and tries to absorb a 'feeling' for it. With its emphasis on a consciously embodied consumption of places, the theoretical stance of slow travel clearly relates to ideas of non-representational theory in tourism experience and should be scientifically considered within this framework.

Even though its' gradual commodification has partly been criticized as a niche product for western hedonistic elites, the slow travel movement still constitutes an ethical-political signal: "Slow travel practices are informed by a diverse range of ethical sensibilities that bring together pleasurable modes of engaging with nature, or culture, and a politically reflexive sense of identity that is critically aware of the impact of one's own tourist behavior" (ibid, p. 4). The conscious traveler tries to balance pleasure and responsible behavior, and rejects speed as a lifestyle error (Molz, 2009). These attitudes can easily be extended into leisure in general and liaises with other contemporary movements of the recent western *Zeitgeist*, like 'downshifting' or 'work-life-balance' (McGrath, 2013).

Consequently, another vital component of the slow travel idea is sustainability – indeed Heitmann et al. (2011) suggest that slow travel needs to be analyzed in the context of sustainable tourism development. That is, even though sustainability ideas are not explicitly stated, slow travel's trend towards local product use and cultural immersion indirectly expresses a sustainable philosophy. Regarding mobility, this means that environmental friendly and 'low-carbon' options, like walking, cycling, kayaking, or horseback riding are preferred and the use of local public transport in the destination is promoted. By staying longer in one place and self-catering instead of booking a resort, the local communities ought to benefit more directly from the tourists (ibid). This approach also advocates for a different type of host-guest-relationship than the so called 'industrialized' tourism, making the interactions more personal and meaningful. From an economic perspective, slow travel emphasizes qualitative growth instead of increasing visitor numbers, which can reduce capital leakages and make destinations more independent of market fluctuations (Dorin-Paul, 2013).

Using the Alps as an example, Matos (2012) suggests that slow travel can be a sound way

to improve tourism sustainability in environmentally vulnerable regions. His overall argument is for industry and policy makers to diversify tourism products in line with the slow travel principles in order to reduce negative environmental impacts, which especially emerge in the Alps due to a strong focus on mass winter sports. He breaks down slow tourism into two principles, first to take time and second to attach to a place, stating that “tourists must be able to change pace, to look rather than to see, to experience to area rather than to endure it” (p. 100).

Drawing on emerging lifestyle trends like wellness and quality-over-quantity, Matos claims that an increasing number of tourists search for more authentic, meaningful ways to spend their holidays. However, it needs to be pointed out that not all notions of the slow travel concept are really new. Especially destinations in the Alps have long been pioneers for sustainable tourism innovation, for example with food tourism, farm stays, and public transport concepts (such as the car-free destinations Zermatt or Avoriaz). An overview on the characteristics of Alpine tourism is given in chapter 2.3.

As for the focus of this thesis, slow tourism – done consciously or unconsciously – is an exemplary trend for the role of walking in off-mainstream travel experiences. Molz (2009) suggests that the slow movement's icon of the footprint reflects sustainable ideas by symbolizing both the mission to reduce one's travel-induced carbon footprint and the central role of walking in slow travel. In fact, walking is an essential element of slow travel, as it practically does not produce any emission and allows close engagement with landscapes, people and local atmosphere (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). Places are experienced in a human's most natural pace, which takes travelers closer to being active participants instead of just passive spectators. This is what Molz (2009) describes as experiencing the world as a sphere a human is bound in, involving body and mind. “Slow Travel seems to rescale tourism geographies and mobilities to the human body as a way of resisting the rush, detachment and mastery associated with the speed of modern life” (Heitmann et al., 2011, p. 280). Furthermore, in contrast to faster forms of holidays, slow traveling embraces the journey to a destination as an equally important and meaningful part of trip as the stay in a destination which is arguably the essence of long-distance walking (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011).

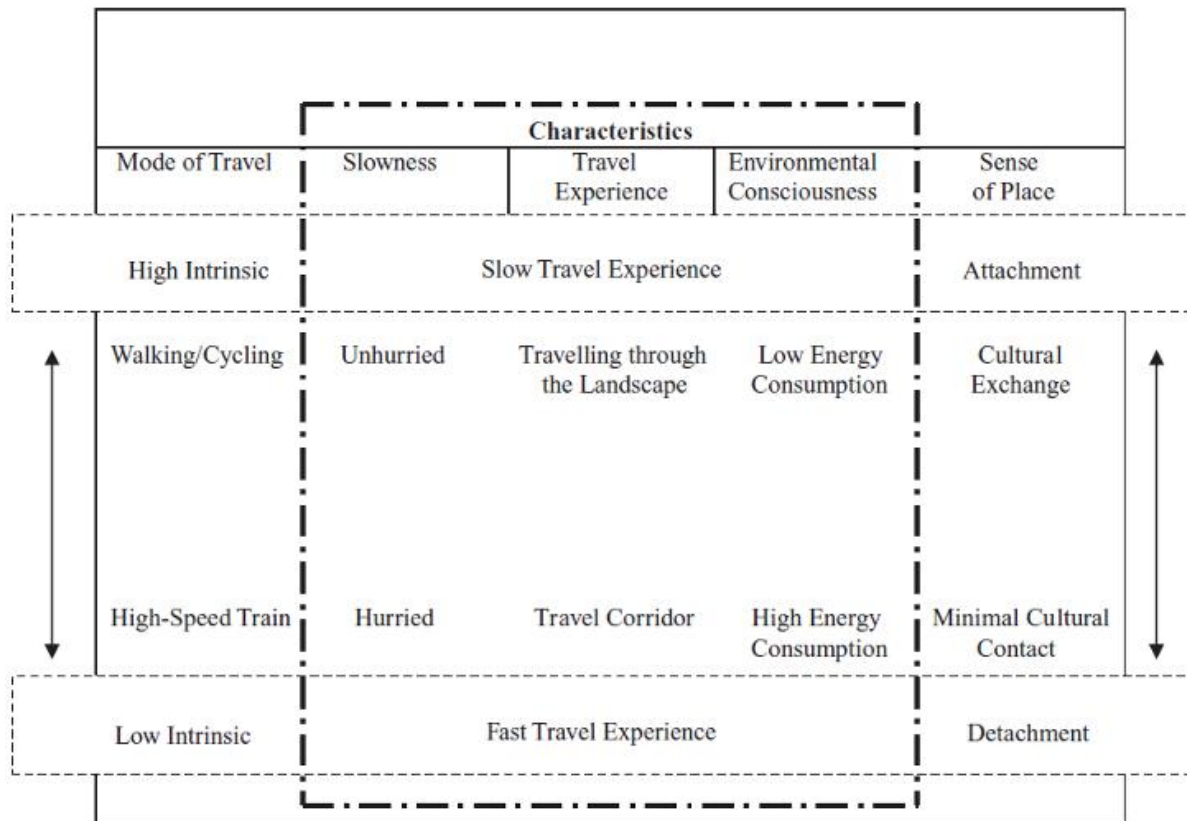


Illustration 2: Slow travel conceptual framework by Lumsdon and McGrath (2011, p. 276)

Of course, slow travel is just one conceptional take on walking and it does not necessarily have to be consistent with all kinds of walking holidays. Long-distance hikers might not explicitly perceive themselves as slow travelers or deliberately incorporate the movement's values, such as “giving back to local communities” or “tourists should (...) avoid aircraft” (Gardner cited in Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011). The same accounts for aspects of sustainability, which is probably a rather indirect factor in the decision-making for walking tourists, than a conscious choice. Nevertheless, the slow travel idea can help conceptualize the experiences of hikers as it does not focus on mobile practice as a detached activity, but takes into account the relationships between subject and space, as shown in illustration 2. Slow travel in this regard can be described as more of a mindset, entailing certain attitudes towards rewarding travel experiences, than a clearly defined 'travel type'.

2.3 The mountain calls: Exploring Alpine landscape on foot

2.3.1 Characteristics of mountain tourism

Nepal and Chipeniuk (2005) argue that, in contrast to other forms of tourism, mountain tourism is a rather under-conceptualized phenomenon even though mountain landscapes belong to the most popular and frequently visited tourist destinations. It is often the isolated, rugged nature of the destination that is of interest for tourist and at the same time restricts economic progress. The researchers also point out that tourism development in mountain regions involves both socio-economic opportunities and threats for local communities, but can also be a driver for sustainability: “Tourism development is an obvious means for achieving sustainable mountain development, particularly where other economic resources necessary for development are limited” (p. 314).

They also state, that in order to evolve research on mountain tourism, the scientific perspective needs to pay attention to these region's distinct geographical and structural characteristics. This is especially applicable for the diverse mosaic of places, cultures and landscapes in the European Alps. In addition, various forms of tourism need to be more acknowledged. Accordingly, they propose a conceptual framework based on the features “diversity, marginality, difficult access, fragility, niche and aesthetics” that characterize the resources of mountain regions, as shown below in illustration 3 (p. 316). I will use the resource side of this framework in order to give an overview on tourism activities and characteristics in the Alps. As the focus of this thesis is only on tourists and their experiences, I will leave out the management perspective and the other users, which are local recreationists and amenity migrants.

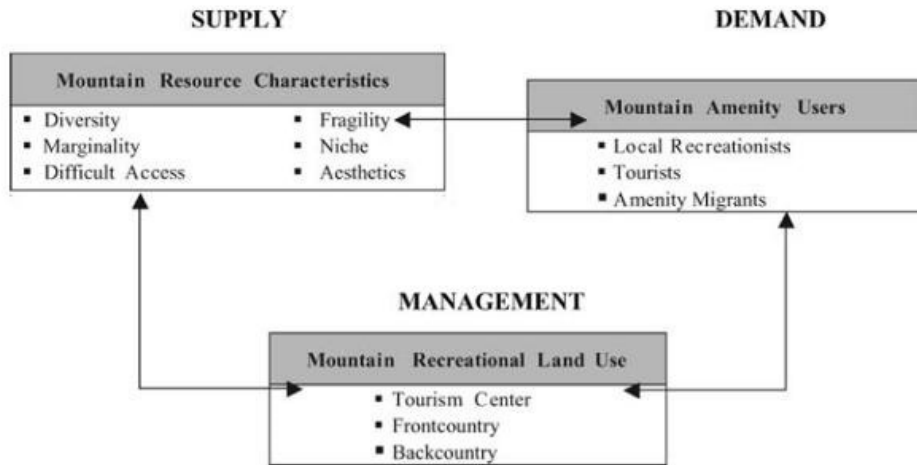


Illustration 3: Mountain tourism conceptual framework by Nepal and Chipeniuk (2005, p. 315)

Mountain regions often stand out as manifold landscapes with high cultural and ecological *diversity* as humans, flora and fauna adapt to unique living conditions within comparatively small areas. Also, a large spectrum of landscape alterations by humans can be found, varying from almost untouched to significantly modified regions (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005). Even as some regions appear similar to each other on the first glance due to the same scenic appearance, a closer examinations might show great differences not only in human modes of living, but also in for example endemic animal or plant species. For tourism in the Alps, this variety offers the opportunity to address specific visitors and develop distinctive attractions.

In terms of both geographical and economical *marginality*, Nepal and Chipeniuk (2005) summarize that due to their often peripheral location, mountain regions are more depended on economic subsistence and are historically neglected by overall development policies, which makes especially smaller communities more vulnerable to poverty. Even though the European Alps give a very heterogeneous impression in terms of marginality and the neighboring countries are considered highly developed, quite a significant number of Alpine communities do face the described problems due to a decline in agriculture since the 1970's and structural crisis in former industrialized regions (Bätzing et al., 1996). One result of structural change can be economic dependence of Alpine regions on tourism, characterized by strong summer-winter seasonality (Franch et al., 2008). Yet, since the 1990's, many destinations face difficult

challenges, such as high competition with other Alpine resorts, inability to adapt to demand changes and negative environmental impacts (Smith, 1996). Sustainable tourism development is often seen as a chance to strengthen marginal mountain communities, and walking holidays are often promoted as a successful strategy (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005).

Difficult *access* of certain mountain regions can have disadvantages regarding economic networking and tourist volume, but can also generate a higher value of these regions for tourists who appreciate remoteness – or what is perceived as such (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005). Already in 1992, Kariel and Draper state that access is one of the key factors for mountain travel besides attractiveness and image of a destination, but also warn that increased accessibility can lead to growing numbers of visitors in sensitive areas and hereupon to negative environmental and social impacts. The better a mountain area is accessible, the more mass tourists it attracts, which meant an acceleration of the touristic penetration of remote environments and urbanization of valley communities in the Alps since the mid twentieth century (Bätzing et al., 1996).

The access dilemma is directly connected to the *fragility* and low carrying-capacity of mountain regions. Remote back-country areas are particularly vulnerable “mainly due to steep topography, altitude, geology and climatic extremes. [...] The implication is that particular activities can be undertaken only at a certain scale and at specified locations. However, due to increasing pressure for [tourism] development, issues of fragility have often been overlooked” (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005, p. 319). It seems that in many cases, policy changes only take place after some damage is already done in order not to jeopardize favorable economic developments. In the Alps, measures such as nature education for visitors, down-scaling of tourism activities, protective zoning of fragile areas, investments into public transportation, and more local participation in planning were taken to make tourism more sustainable (Kariel and Draper, 1992). Especially in remote areas that become increasingly popular among hiking tourists, the biggest challenge is to find a balance between providing sufficient tourism facilities and retaining environmental quality (Boller et al., 2010).

One of the most important resources of mountain areas for tourism is *aesthetic value*, even though not much research has been done so far to find out why many people regard mountain

landscapes as beautiful to the eye (Nepal and Chipeniuk, 2005). Aesthetic appreciation roots deeply in the sociocultural background of the viewer and is influenced by familiarity with a place, personal history and the perception of public images inscribed into scenery. Especially the Alps have long been constructed as sublime, majestic landscape, an ideal that originates from the writings and paintings of the Romantic period (Beza, 2010). Many nature tourists still associate the Alps with romanticized notions of a better, simpler life and unique natural qualities, which was also used for the promotion of the Via Alpina.

Finally, according to Nepal and Chipeniuk (2005), the result of high diversity is the development of tourist market *niches* for a broad spectrum of mountain-related outdoor activities that can only be practiced in suitable regions. However, the practical implications for industry and policy makers in the Alps have proven to be challenging, as tourism is a rapidly changing business and mountain areas only have a limited capacity to adapt (Macchiavelli, 2009). The most significant factors since the 1990s are negative social and environmental impacts as well as the slow fade of snow tourism and stagnation of summer tourism, resulting in the need for product diversification, increase in service quality, and innovative tourism strategies (Bourdeau, 2009).

2.3.2 Hiking as nature-based tourism in the Alps

Nature is often regarded the number one tourist attraction of the Alps, offering numerous recreational opportunities in both seasons, with hiking being one of the main activities in summer (Franch et al., 2008). However, the definition of 'nature' in such a diverse and partly cultivated region is difficult. From a constructionist perspective, which rejects a predetermined culture-nature dichotomy, the understanding of nature is regarded socially and culturally constructed. In order to be consumed by tourists, nature is turned into a commodity and the experiences in it are commercially facilitated (Markwell, 2001). Therefore, from a tourism perspective, nature is often represented as resource for recreation in its own right (Hockley, 2011). However, considering walking as an embodied discovery of nature, Waitt et al. (2009) suggests to "become alert to possibilities of how the boundaries between categories such as 'society' and 'nature' are simultaneously made resilient and ruptured" (p. 43).

Other than the contested idea of 'wilderness', which is seen as free of human influence, nature is not necessarily completely secluded. Arguably, 'untouched' nature does not exist, not just because of widespread physical influences of human activities, but also because every space is filled with cultural meaning through human ideas about it (Saarinen, 2005). Instead, nature is where humans locate it: it can be found in urban areas just as in the own garden or sparsely inhabited regions like the high Alpine valleys. Therefore, nature-based tourism is often vaguely defined as located in natural landscapes and using natural resources for recreation. Tisdell and Wilson (2012) name it a phenomenon of "wildlife-orientated recreation tourism" (p. 32), while Fredman & Tyrväinen (2010) state that "nature-based tourism is associated with leisure activities taking place in nature areas, and that key components are the visitor (being away from home) and experiences of, or in, nature"(p. 180).

Accordingly, in this thesis I examine hiking in the Alps mainly as a form of nature-based tourism, because it is a leisure activity based on the resources of the natural mountain environment. Indeed, sometimes hiking is still the only way to access certain remote natural areas in the Alps (Boller et al., 2010). Furthermore, the majority of walking journeys takes place both in what is commonly referred to as natural areas and in cultural areas dominated by agriculture. Besides a number of urban centers in the main valleys, these two landscape types

with a rather low population density mainly constitute the Alpine arc (Lehmann & Messerli, 2007). Hence, hiking can simultaneously be regarded as rural tourism, which is equally difficult to define and can be described as “tourism in a 'non-urban territory where human (land related economic) activity is going on, primarily agriculture; a permanent human presence seems a qualifying requirement” (Dernoi, 1991:4 cited in Oppermann, 1996).

Furthermore, the dominating discourse on Alpine tourism still regards natural beauty, mountain landscapes and local rural heritage as the main resources for the industry, that is, also promoting these resources to be 'protected' in conservation efforts or sustainable tourism concepts (see for example Alpine convention, 2010; Verbeek et al., 2011). Also, romanticized notions of nature still largely inform the attractiveness of Alpine landscape to the majority of tourists (Seaton, 2012). Especially for hikers, visible conservation efforts and the chance to experience seemingly 'intact' nature with as little human influence as possible are very important (Davies et al., 2012).

2.3.3 Historic development of Alpine tourism

While a wide range of nature-based activities like walking, hiking, cycling, water- and winter sports generally dominate the tourism industry, the exploration of Alpine landscape on foot has by far the longest history (Franch et al., 2008). Most of today's hiking infrastructure originates from the development of Alpinism during the eightieth, ninetieth and early twentieth century. Before that, the Alps were mostly regarded as a massive, wild 'obstacle' in the heart of Europe: dangerous, inhospitable, barely inhabited, and filled with dark legends (Seaton, 2012). Travelers only took journeys through the Alps if there was no other option. At the beginning of the eightieth century, the public discourse slowly changed through literature praising the majestic, yet dangerous beauty of the Alpine landscape, and through stories published about the quests of a small number of early Alpinists and explorers (Grupp, 2008).

According to Lauterbach (2010), two phases of early Alpinism can be distinguished that differ regarding the participants' intention and the impacts of the discoveries. The first, so called 'scientific phase' started during the era of Enlightenment around 1750. It was mainly informed by the rationalization of nature in the public discourse and scholar's quests for scientific discovery of formerly 'unknown' regions. The first successful ascent to the Mont Blanc in 1768 marks the most important milestone at the time (Grupp, 2008).

The second phase, that Lauterbach regards the 'sportive' phase, emerged in the early ninetieth century and paved the way to modern mountain tourism in the Alps. This phase was significantly shaped by the new passion for natural scenery of the European Romantic era. Emotional sensibility towards nature was seen as the key to understand the world and one's own role in it. Romanticism regarded traveling through beautiful and sublime landscapes, especially on foot, as enhancing this sensibility, leading to more thoughtful recognition of nature and its spiritual value (Barsham and Hitchcock, 2012). The Alps functioned as a projection screen for the duality of positive and negative emotions towards nature: "Romantic selfhood [...] could move rapidly between inspired creativity and self-destructive depression. Such extremities found a natural correspondence in alpine scenery and the restless crossing of boundaries, whether geographical or cultural" (ibid, p. 58).

At the same time a new desire to overcome the sublime power of nature and prove oneself against its challenges motivated Alpine travelers. Especially upper-class British adventurers were pioneers of sportive mountaineering during that time, trying to gloriously 'conquer' the wilderness of the Alps and claim the first ascent of challenging summits. Most of them would hire a local guide and climb a mountain not for scientific reasons, but simply for the sake of climbing itself. This phase was accompanied by many publications about adventures in the Alps and culminated in the foundation of the first 'Alpine Club' in 1857, an upper-class civil society for competitive mountaineers in England (Lauterbach, 2010; Grupp, 2008). It was followed by several Alpine associations in Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and France in the second half of the nineteenth century modeled after the British example that later widened their scope into science, cultural preservation, politics, and also tourism.

Until today, the hiking infrastructure including paths, huts, information material, guide trainings, and other services in the Alpine countries has been maintained mainly by these associations and plays an important role on how visitors experience the mountain landscape on foot (DAV, 2014). Based on early mountaineering journeys of foreigners international Alpine tourism started to develop around 1900 and quickly expanded to other nature-based recreational activities. Until the middle of the twentieth century, some regions of the Alps evolved into a typical summer holiday destination commonly associated with awe-inspiring nature and traditional rural idylls contrary to the hectic 'modern' life in the increasingly industrialized lowlands – an idealized longing for a more authentic lifestyle not so different from today's images of Alpine tourism (Grupp, 2008).

The Alpine associations promoted the Alps to the European upper class as healthy escapes from the city and primarily focused on hiking and mountaineering as tourist activities. Using the example of the Eastern Alps and their representation in Germany and Austria, Anderson (2012) argues that also the physical infrastructure itself, developed by the associations, played a significant role in shaping the understanding of the Alps as a landscape to be 'opened up' and 'developed'. Until today, the German term *Alpenerschließung* coins these historic long-term efforts to make wild Alpine areas safely accessible for public exploration and enjoyment, which also included imposing lifestyle and behavior changes on local inhabitants.

With the advent of packaged holidays, skiing as a popular sport and sophisticated marketing strategies of the tourism industry an Alpine vacation became increasingly accessible for the middle class in the 1950's, leading to "mass tourism in summer, starting around 1955, and to mass tourism in winter, from about 1965" (Bätzing et al., 1996, p. 348). Even though the winter seasons dominated the tourism industry for decades in popular Alpine destinations, environmental problems due to extensive development of skiing slopes and market stagnation have evoked a strategic reorientation in some areas since the 1990s (Pechlaner & Tschurtschenthaler, 2003).

Many high developed destinations on middle or low altitude have now entered the mature phase of the product life-cycle. They struggle not only with stagnating visitor numbers in winter, but also with decreasing snow security due to climate change, and negative effects of artificial snow production (Franch, 2008). With regards to high altitude destinations in the Western Alps, Bourdeau (2009) points out that the tourism industry is in a phase of transition, suffering from the "standardisation of the offering, seasonal specialisation, dependence on the real-estate market and trivialisation of the landscape and of the experience" (p. 2).

All these factors have stimulated two main trends since the 1990s: First, a diversification of tourist activities in the Alps with a strong tendency towards adventure tourism and extreme sports. Second, a sustainability approach taking into account the individual limits of destinations in terms of visitor numbers and use of environmental resources for recreation. This 'softer' form of tourism shifts attention back to the summer and embraces low impact nature-based activities. Scholars have recommended that for destinations to develop strategies to niche the highly competitive market, they must also react to the general western lifestyle trend towards unique, individual tourist experiences. Bourdeau (2009) for example observes a revival of small scale off-beat destinations, a stronger public awareness of environmental issues, and a growing demand for close-to-home recreation within the Alpine countries itself.

Hiking as the most fundamental nature-based activity in the Alps must be examined in the context of these developments. It has by no means been rediscovered, as it remained a popular activity since the early mountaineers, but experienced a significant increase in popularity, especially among younger visitors, during the past 20 years. In many current tourism trends,

such as slow travel as described above, traveling on foot is key for 'authentic' landscape experience and has been promoted as a cornerstone for sustainable tourism in the Alps.

Certainly, hiking on long-distance trails is a small touristic niche and it is by far no new phenomenon either, as trails like the the GTA (Grande Traversata delle Alpi) or the European route E5 have more than 40 years of history. However, what makes the establishment of Via Alpina stand out is its openly embedded sociocultural agenda inspired with the values and goals of the Alpine Convention, such as resource protection, sustainable tourism, cultural preservation, which originated partly in the structural challenges described above and significantly shaped new tourism trends during the past 20 years. The following chapter provides an overview of the Via Alpina as case for this thesis.

2.3.4 Case: Via Alpina long-distance trails

The Via Alpina is a long-distance trail network through the European Alps. Since it is a comparatively young project, it does not yet seem to have the iconic status like other European distance routes among experienced trail walkers. Since 12 years hikers can walk on the Via Alpina through the eight countries that share the Alpine territory: Austria, Italy, Monaco, Germany, Liechtenstein, France, Slovenia and Switzerland. The project was initiated in 2000 by the French hiking association Grande Traversée des Alpes (GTA) based on the philosophy of the Alpine Convention for sustainable development. Its development was underpinned by the idea to create a trans-alpine trail connecting all the countries that signed the treaty and creating a certain awareness about the Alpine Convention among the travelers (Chaumereuil & Morelle, 2013a).

The Alpine Convention itself is a cooperation project for development of the Alpine region initiated in 1991, which also includes the European Union as a contracting party. It is defined as “an International treaty consisting of a Framework Convention which sets out the general objectives for the protection and sustainable development of the Alps and the operating rules for the decision-making bodies of the Convention, together with various implementation protocols” (Alpine Convention, 2010, p. 10). Since the development of the Via Alpina is interwoven with political notions, the project receives subsidies from the EU programme INTERREG IIIB (Alpine Space), and the eight member states to cover the total project costs of 6.3 million Euros (Crevar, 2007).

Today the Via Alpina comprises of a network of five colored trails with 342 separate stages covering approximately 5000 km in total (Chaumereuil & Morelle, 2013b). Operated as a joint international initiative of several public and private actors, the route is mainly based on existing trail and hut infrastructure which is additionally marked with the Via Alpina logo (DAV, 2013). Several criteria were employed upon the decision which trails to include, such as international character, good accessibility, consistent service level along the way, cultural attractions in close range as well as high number of protected natural areas en-route (Gondolo et al., 2004).



Illustration 4: Map of the Via Alpina Trails by Repiquet and Simon (2015)

With 161 stages and 2.414 kilometers the red route is the longest trail, both starting and ending at the Mediterranean Sea, crossing all eight Alpine countries, and covering almost the entire Alpine arc. The purple trail (66 stages) and the yellow trail (40 stages) lead through the eastern Alps, while the blue trail takes the hikers along 61 stages through the western Alps of France and Italy. The shortest green trail leads through Switzerland only (see Illustration 4). In this thesis, I will not distinguish much between the trails, as they show similar characteristics in terms of distance-hiking, maintenance and route planning. The participants of my study have been hiking on different routes and lengths within the Via Alpina network.

Hikers can choose trails and stages according to how much time they like to spend walking and find extensive route descriptions on the Via Alpina website, including accommodation suggestions and sights located along the way. The website received much praise from travel resources for its comprehensive service. National Geographic's Alex Crevar

(2007), for example, highlighted the translation into five languages, the information on the difficulty of all stages and the publication of GPS coordinates.

The GTA seated in Grenoble used to be the official coordinator of the project, when in early 2014 the CIPRA, International Commission for the Protection of the Alps, took over the overall secretariat work. Declared aims of the trails are not only to provide hiking infrastructure for the experience of scenic beauty, but also to raise awareness about the culture of various regions and to promote sustainable means of tourism in the Alps, as the National Secretariat Via Alpina Austria and Germany (2008) states. The trails are also regarded as a direct contribution to implementing the objectives of the Alpine Convention (Wachter, 2003).

The trail's philosophy includes a larger framework beyond the provision of outdoor services and is also promoted actively to potential visitors. As stated by the Via Alpina Quality Group, which established a strategic planning and marketing guide, the 'spirit' of the Via Alpina comprises of four main aspect: "An immersion in the unique and multi-faced world of the Alps; a means to discover new areas on foot; a link between all the countries of the Alpine range; a contribution to sustainable development" (Gondolo et al., 2004, p. 6). In this effect, the trails also function as a connector between several long-established, traditional hiking areas with their own iconic routes, such as the Tour de Mont Blanc or the Triglav Lakes Valley Circuit (Crevar, 2007).

Hiking therefore becomes more than a travel activity and is not only promoted as a sportive challenge, but is inscribed with the aim to raise awareness among visitors about cultural and natural heritage. This aim sets the Via Alpina apart from other long-distance trails in the region and accords with recent recommendations of researchers for a different tourism strategy as mentioned before. While the European trail 'E5' for example focuses on a crossing and the GTA route on Italy only, the theme of Via Alpina is the Alpine arc as a whole. Accordingly, the trail network also deliberately includes thinly inhabited, structurally weak regions as well as touristy less developed places (Tognina, 2004).

Within the larger political frame of the Alpine Convention as an example of 'new' regionalism, the trails are one of many means to depict the Alps as a trans-national region with unifying characteristics (Price, 1999). While the significance of European national borders for

daily life as well as tourism decreases since years, the identity of Alpine region is being reconsidered both internally and externally: “This new interest in the Alps as a single area is a post-war phenomenon – a phenomenon connected with two movements: European integration and regionalism. [...] Hiking on the Via Alpina trails is therefore also a way of (re)discovering the Alps as a shared environment, even though it is also a region of significant cultural, linguistic and physical differences.” (Tognina, 2004: p. 1). Its special background and interesting underlying connotation is also partly what motivated the decision to use the Via Alpina in this thesis, rather than one of the many other trails available in the Alps.

2.4 Passing through: Long-distance hiking

2.4.1 General characteristics and hikers' motivations

There is no general definition of long-distance hiking or what kind of journeys qualify as such. Dreyer et al. (2010) suggest that it is a journey on foot that takes at least three days or crosses a distance of at least 100 km (p. 35). They also highlight the sportive, challenging character of long-distance hiking and make a clear distinction from 'hut tours', as hikers are more flexible in terms of accommodation and also use tents, hotels, or BNB's besides traditional mountain huts. Similarly, den Breijen (2007) describes it as taking place on a route, that “transforms recreational walking into a multiple-day holiday, where the destination is the linear corridor of the path” (p. 1419). Following particular established routes also distinguishes long-distance hiking from trekking.

What is important to remark is that the term 'hiking' rather than 'walking' is used in this thesis, because the journey of the study participants takes place in high-altitude and rough terrain. Compared to walkers, hikers consciously choose for more difficult routes and require more experience, specific equipment, better physical capacities, and have to be fairly surefooted (Dreyer et al., 2010). Similarly, hiking can generally be regarded a form of mountaineering, but differs in terms of motivation and itinerary (Pomfret, 2006). Even though ascending to some summits might be part of a long-distance hike, it is not the major objective of the journey, because the physical challenge lies in crossing large horizontal rather than vertical distances.

In order to understand long-distance hiking experiences better, the initial motivations of travelers have to be taken into account. The motivations for recreational hiking in general are diverse and range from having exercise and improving physical conditions over enjoying landscape aesthetics to very personal objectives like gaining a sense of achievement, 'feeling' good, or having social interactions (Davies et al., 2012). As for long distances, hikers often have more specific reasons to undertake the journey that depend both on their personal situation as well as on the characteristics of the chosen trail and meanings commonly associated with it. On the one hand the geographical location of a trail plays a general role, on the other hand specific places of interest along the way influence the decision to hike it: While some trails follow

historic events or showcase interesting geological phenomena, others symbolize cultural myths or stories of nationhood.

For the Appalachian Trail for example, perhaps the most iconic long-distance route in the United States, Power Bratton (2012) found that most hikers seek the adventure of a lifetime or want to achieve a personal goal. She reports that others went on the journey because they were in a phase of personal transition, reached a turning point in life and were in need of 'self-discovery', or simply wanted a break from their daily routine. Illustration 5 shows her study results for hikers' motivations. The Appalachian Trail leads through the mountain range of the same name from Georgia to Maine, attracting about 2,000 so-called 'thru-hikers' every year (Littlefield & Siudzinski, 2012). The hiker's motivations sometimes also personally relate to the complex meanings of the trail, such as colonial heritage, individualism, resilience, and American self-identity, but also images of protected nature and remote wilderness (Power Bratton, 2012).

| Motive | % | Motive | % |
|--|----|--|----|
| <i>Challenge, accomplishment or goal oriented</i> | | <i>Interest and aesthetics</i> | |
| Adventure or challenge | 37 | Interest, see region, nature | 24 |
| Life dream, aspiration | 27 | Beauty, scenery | 4 |
| Accomplishment or project | 13 | <i>Social, contact with other people</i> | |
| <i>Personal including dealing with change and reflecting on life</i> | | Meeting hikers or people along the trail | 10 |
| Taking a break from school, work, family, society, technology | 25 | Being with family or a significant other | 12 |
| Life transition, between school, work, military, retirement, and relationships | 23 | Being with friends | 5 |
| Self-exploration, reflection | 21 | Partying, having fun | 5 |
| Spiritual or religious | 11 | <i>Wellness</i> | |
| Appreciate life | 6 | Physical fitness | 12 |
| Simplicity | 6 | Weight control | 4 |
| <i>Wilderness or solitude</i> | 7 | Physical or emotional healing | 2 |

Illustration 5: Motivations for undertaking an Appalachian Trail hike, percentage of the total respondents of a study by Power Bratton (2012, p. 51)

On the Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea in turn, the hikers are mainly motivated by the thrill to face the dangers, trail difficulties and enormous physical challenges the journey poses (Saunders, 2013). This trail extends through the backwoods of an area known for a horrific campaign between Australian and Japanese troops in the Second World War. Its infamous reputation, partly gained because of several cases of death on the trail in recent years, influences the initial motivations of hikers more than it's historic background (ibid).

In general, den Breejen (2007) suggests that long-distance hiking has a multi-motivational character like other holiday forms. Her research on the West Highland Way in Scotland also confirms the theory that most travelers relate to a similar set of basic motivational factors for a journey, but that these occur in all kinds of combinations based on the individual situation of the traveler. Further it can be noted that motives of in-depth discovery and intensive exploration reoccur – may it be of the distinct cultural or natural features of the hiking region, of different lifestyles of their inhabitants, or in many cases also of oneself. This is probably more the case than when hiking shorter trips.

That is, hikers are interested in more than just aesthetic appreciation of landscape. The chance to gain a deeper understanding of 'place and people' than traditional forms of travel can offer plays a key role in hikers' motivations, especially in terms of language, attitudes, tradition, cuisine, and life realities (Wachter, 2003). "A long-distance hiking trail makes culture visible and sensible, in their historical development as well as in their current social-political situation, in the characteristics of settlements and constructions, in the daily work and livelihoods, in oral and written traditions, but also in gastronomy" (ibid, p. 36, translated). This also means that while the experienced landscapes may differ greatly from their usual surroundings, it is often the mundane and simple aspects of 'other people's lives' that are significant in evoking interest among long-distance hikers.

2.4.2 Long-distance hiking as serious leisure?

A very interesting theoretical take on long-distance hiking is the concept of 'serious leisure' as a modern phenomenon. Originating in the second half twentieth century, this concept has been particularly shaped by Robert Stebbins and plays an important role in theorizing the complex meanings and shapes of leisure activities in people's lives from a sociological perspective. Stebbins (2001) argues that many people have more free time available since the middle of the twentieth century and search for personal fulfillment, routine and interactions outside of work. When intensively pursuing their interests, they gain significant benefits for self-actualization from their activities and sometimes even substitute for less demanding job.

Serious leisure can be defined as a “systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity sufficiently substantial, interesting, and fulfilling in nature for the participant to find a career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience” (Stebbins, 2007, p. xii). In contrast to the more spontaneous and laid-back 'casual leisure', this definition already highlights the intensity, complexity and longer duration of serious leisure.

Six key characteristics of serious leisure have been proposed by Stebbins (1992), describing the large extent to which participants are invested in their activity: First, participants of serious leisure are required to persevere in some occasions and 'pull through' when facing challenges. Second, they often have active careers in their specific leisure activity, including personal milestones, drawbacks and improvements. Third, substantial personal effort is required when it comes to obtaining skills, knowledge and experience. Forth, participants gain durable benefits in terms of mental well-being and social engagement. Fifth, participants adopt a certain group ethos that shapes the informal 'subculture' of their activity. And sixth, they identify strongly with what they fill their time and are very enthusiastic about it.

Accordingly, Littlefield and Siudzinski (2012) suggest that thru-hiking on the Appalachian Trail can be conceptualized as serious leisure. Focusing on the social and technological aspects, that is hiker's equipment, they show that this long-distance journey satisfies Stebbin's characteristics. Not only develop thru-hikers an intensive relationship with the trail, they also

invest a lot of effort and money in their adventure and become involved with a strong hiking community. Littlefield and Siudzinski especially highlight the depth of the social interactions within the Appalachian Trail community, which passes on an egalitarian ethos and gradually becomes the most important support resource for beginners on the trail.

Presumably, not all characteristics of the Appalachian Trail do completely apply to other long-distance hiking trails as well. Their group ethos might not be defined by such a strong volunteer and hiker community that continues to influence the lives of travelers even years after their journey (Power Bratton, 2012). Also, since the Appalachian Trail thru-hike covers an almost extreme distance compared to other trails, it requires an extraordinary long preparation time and usually the interruption of the hiker's 'regular life' for at least four months (Mills & Butler, 2005). Hiking shorter trails or only certain stages of a trail during a summer holiday involves less effort and probably takes up a smaller part of the traveler's life.

Nevertheless, the main qualities of serious leisure as suggested by Stebbins are still fulfilled by long-distance hiking, especially for people going on such journeys repeatedly. For the case of the Via Alpina, self-discipline for the hardships of mountain hiking is needed, time and effort is invested in planning the trip, and the hikers gradually gain experience and knowledge about walking in the Alpine environment. Even though the trail is rather young, a community is already forming through the interactive travel platform on the Via Alpina website or blogs that share hiking experiences and advice.

I propose that the serious leisure approach is helpful when examining the experiences of long-distance hikers, because it complements the touristic perspective on these types of journeys. Instead of addressing them as yet another way tourists consume landscapes and cultures, long-distance hiking tours also need to be acknowledged as an active lifestyle choice. According to Worthington (2005), serious leisure does not receive much attention in tourism research, even though it aptly accounts for the role specific lifestyles play in shaping the tourism industry and forming niche markets. Analyzing two examples of leisure subcultures in tourism, he suggests that shifting perspective to individual narratives, instead of assuming that the majority are 'average' tourists with 'normal' leisure practices, can provide more depth to the research of tourist motivations and experiences.

Therefore, taking into account aspects of serious leisure can help conceptualizing tourism as an embodied practice, as I suggest it for long-distance hiking in this thesis. Worthington (2005) argues that tourists who participate in serious leisure often align this with their travel behavior, and hence actively co-create their spaces and experiences: “Let us suppose that ‘embodiment’ is part of a tourist or leisure process that is, in its essence, participatory. The participant is a variable in the process, but at the same time experiences pleasure in what they are helping to create. It is a process in which one pleasurable consumes one’s own productive activity, sometimes in a simultaneous action” (p. 227).

The lifestyles long-distance hikers take with them on a journey should be considered when examining their tourist practices. This aspect also accounts for the idea of 'doing' landscape and 'expressing' space through embodied performance and interaction with material features. By gaining knowledge about navigation and nature, persevering on difficult parts of the route, utilizing guidebooks and maps, or filling the huts and guest houses with stories of their adventures, the hikers themselves 'make' a part of their experience and shape the meaning of Via Alpina beyond simply being trail infrastructure.

2.4.3 Conceptualizing the experiences of long-distance hikers

What makes long-distance hiking experiences special is certainly the intensive long-term engagement with route and physical conditions of the landscape it passes through (Bold & Gillespie, 2009). The hikers have the chance to experience many different places during one journey and arguably obtain a much more detailed, holistic idea of a landscape than day-trippers. Describing walking experiences in general, Tilley (2012) refers to this as some sort of 'gathering places', which also aptly describes the journey of long-distance hikers who string places together in their individual speed and have to adapt during every stage to the natural influences over a long period. Furthermore, the journey allows an accumulation of various social experiences, both with other hikers as well as with local inhabitants and hosts respectively.

Considering embodied practice, the effects environment and walking conditions have on the human body are diverse: At first, crossing longer distances on foot and carrying all necessary baggage along entails a certain physical effort. However, the constitution of the ground, state of the footpath, vegetation in close proximity, altitude and steepness of the terrain, temperature and general weather conditions, but also different visual perspectives shifting during movement, all affect the body in addition (Wylie, 2005; Ingold, 2004). How hikers 'feel' when exposed to these circumstances and also how they 'deal' with them both emotionally and in action, can be assumed to be highly dependent on individual characteristics. Feelings of pleasure and strength alternate with distress and exhaustion, sometimes within a short period of time, influenced by a complex interplay of diverse external and internal factors (Crust et al., 2011).

While these circumstances are never static, but in constant change, the human body too is in motion and in an ongoing process of transition. This leads to different states of consciousness during the hike. In the example of the Kokoda trail, Saunders (2013) utilizes several experiential concepts for analyzing the participant's states of mind. One of them is 'absorption', constituting a highly focused, almost trance-like state of being, where the self and the surrounding world detach from one another. An absorbed individual can experience strong emotions, but is not necessarily cognitively engaged with a situation. Another concept helpful for analyzing long-

distance hiking experiences suggested by Saunders is the 'peak experience', a shorter, emotionally intense moment evoking feelings of a meaningful connection between self and 'world'. These moments are usually perceived as positive and very important, and are therefore often treasured memories in later life.

Furthermore, a highly positive state called 'flow' has been found to occur frequently among long-distance hikers (Mills & Butler, 2005; Crust et al., 2011). "Flow is a state of experience where a person, totally absorbed, feels tremendous amounts of exhilaration, control, and enjoyment. In flow states people push their abilities to their boundaries and in so doing experience a merging of action and awareness" (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 12). In order for flow to happen, the task at hand has to feel effortless, which means it should not exceed or underchallenge the hiker's skills, and there should not be too many distractions (ibid). Mills and Butler (2005) found that around two third of the Appalachian Trail thru-hikers in their study experience flow in their way, most of them regularly. They also report that hiking alone or enjoying a specific view on the trail most often lead to flow experiences.

This confirms that both the intimate relationship hikers build with their natural surroundings as well as their enduring physical efforts have a major impact on their experiences. According to Saunders (2013), the intrinsically rewarding flow, just like peak experiences, often constitutes the basis for subsequent positive experiences like letting go of pressures of daily life, reflecting on personal matters, or losing sense of time. As mentioned in chapter 2.2.2 before, these experiences are among the most motivational, best remembered and beneficial for the health of participants of long-distance hiking. However, den Breejen (2007) reported that the levels of overall enjoyment hikers experience remains fairly constant throughout the journey.

Eventually, also self-awareness changes when experiencing flow. During the period of activity the distinction between material surroundings and body blur into what Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) describe as a "unified sensation of motion, [...] so the construction of the world becomes based (...) on the sensation of movement" (p. 14). Afterward however, a stronger sense of self emerges from the experience, boosted by feelings of accomplishment and pleasure. From a phenomenological point of view, flow can be regarded a key notion for

embodiment and 'doing space', rejecting the separation of mental and physical aspects of an experience and suggesting an equal interplay between mind and body (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Concerning motivational factors, it has been found that the actual embodied experiences along the way sometimes influence what hikers perceive as important and motivational about their trip: In their research about the Southern Upland Way in Scotland, Bold and Gillespie (2009) found that for many hikers the interactive and holistic experiences of local traditions, extraordinary natural features, and encounters with local residents along the way turned out to play an even more important role than improving physical and mental well-being. Similarly, while most hikers on the Kokoda Trail start off with a desire to overcome a challenging adventure, during their journey they obtain a much stronger sense of national pride and meaningful connection with the tragedies that happened in the area during the war (Saunders, 2013). In this case the author even suggests that the hikers experience a kind of 'secular pilgrimage', as they become emotionally involved with the historic background of the trail, partly through a mobile reenactment of the physical strains endured by the soldiers (ibid).

Parallels between long-distance hiking and traditional on-foot pilgrimage have also been established by other researchers: "As in other types of walking, pilgrimage walks are an embodied practice and experience, with centre on the intersection of body, senses, movement and change of scene" (Maddrell, 2013, p. 65). Using the example of the trail along Hadrian's Wall Path in Northern England, Hockley (2011) suggests that long-distance hiking incorporates aspects of secular pilgrimage, because the journey itself plays a central role, often being associated with deeper symbolic meanings, resulting in collective social experiences, and leading to a personal transformation. Digance (2006) points out, that even though religious pilgrimage is usually motivated by faith and defined as the search for the 'sacred', modern secular pilgrimage can show similar intrinsic motivations and can lead to comparable spiritual outcomes for non-religious travelers depending on what they define as 'holy' for themselves.

In that respect, Lorimer (2011), suggests that walking produces intimate, emotional, almost meditative experiences: "Walking as an activity upon which founding aspects of the self can be centered finds contemporary expression in ideas of release, renewal and replenishment"

(p. 23). Resuming the perspectives described above, it can be established that the experiences of long-distance hikers can be broken down to two main aspects: the close relationship the hikers build, maintain and negotiate with the landscape they pass through and the simultaneous 'inner conversation' they have with themselves, as the hike offers room for personal thought and reflection. It offers both a continuous flow of experiences and a seemingly detached mental journey (Edensor, 2010).

Finally, when conceptualizing long-distance hiking experiences the mediated relationship between body and surroundings has to be taken into account (Hockley, 2011). As mentioned before, even researchers supporting a non-representational perspective acknowledge how shared cultural meanings inscribed into landscapes partly influence the individual's experience. Through the example of the rapid Alpine development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Anderson (2012) argues that material affect and cultural representation in fact often cooperate in the mediation of landscapes, proposing a 'hybrid system' for analyzing the material affect of communicative objects (p. 177). He suggests that by building a hut and trail infrastructure even in the 'wildest' areas, the Alpine clubs shaped the image of the 'modern' Alps among the urban middle class and demonstrated their own role in making them accessible. The clubs sought to introduce tourism in the alps and actively shaping the experiences of the visitors by deciding which views and natural phenomena are aesthetically adequate to be included in a path. Since most of this infrastructure has been used by hikers until today, they still mediate experiences in terms of perspective, walking comfort, and accessibility.

According to Markwell (2001), any nature experience that is undertaken on a designated path is culturally mediated, domesticated and regulated to a certain degree. However, he contends that through their embodied agency the boundaries between hikers and nature can sometimes be renegotiated and the experience might become as immediate and uncontrolled as many nature-tourists originally seek it. In moments with low influence of tourism infrastructure, the embodied performances of hikers can be informed by playfulness, imagination and a genuine sense of adventure (ibid).

Also the human body itself and the material equipment supporting it when hiking, such as clothing or maps, take up a mediating role. With regard to the Appalachian Trail, Littlefield and

Siudzinski (2012) notes that especially the experiences of novices stand and fall with their equipment, as they are not used to handling it in the beginning or struggle with the consequences of a bad purchase. In these cases the connection between body and surroundings does not function smoothly, which causes disruptions in the experience (Michael, 2000). However, when gaining experience and becoming comfortable with their tools, the hiker's awareness shifts towards other aspects of the journey, making it seem increasingly effortless. The most important mechanical equipment of hikers are walking boots, which profoundly influence the connection between body and ground, for example by causing pain and distraction, supporting the walk across obstacles, or signifying a certain lifestyle (Michael, 2000). The body-surroundings-relationship is therefore not perceived 'purely', but additionally altered through the equipment:

“Walking boots, which would seem to mediate the relationship between humans and the environment are, we see, not merely simple conduits or intermediaries. The cycles of communication between human bodies and nature are, in a multitude of ways, parasitized by the interventions – semiotic and material – that a mundane technology such as walking boots can manifest. As quasi-objects they are not faithful messengers, but inject their own messages” (Michael, 2000, p. 121).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research approach

As mentioned before, the theoretical framework for this thesis is underpinned by phenomenology, because I am concerned with both the lived, embodied experiences of hikers and how they make sense of them subjectively after their journey. According to Pernecky and Jamal (2010), phenomenology has recently inspired many studies in tourism research and can guide methodological choices, but needs to be informed by a clear ontological choice. Since I agree with the notion that humans can access phenomena of the world through their experiences and that these are essentially made of the relationship between the self, others and objects, I apply hermeneutic phenomenology in my thesis (ibid).

Consequently, the epistemological angle of this study is an interpretive paradigm, which is based on the notion that there is not one fundamental truth independent of human mediation to be accessed and uncovered in social inquiry. In contrast, people's individual realities come into being through their experiences and are shaped on the shared beliefs, practices and contexts characterizing the circumstances they live in (Schwandt 2000). This means that there is not one objective way to interpret knowledge, as all humans are self-interpretive beings living in the 'real' world and cannot detach themselves from it (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Therefore, as the researcher I always need to consider my own involvement with the studied subject and how my personal background, existing values and beliefs, and life experiences influence the way I am making sense of my data and co-create meaning (ibid).

Hence, I assess the "situatedness of the individual in the world" (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1065), and explore the lived experiences of long-distance hikers with Alpine nature and culture from their own point of view. As "it seeks to contribute to a better understanding of social realities and to draw attention to processes, meaning patterns and structural features" (Flick et al., 2004, p.3), a qualitative research methodology is employed. The study setting is partly uncontrolled by the researcher, as only participants who actually want to share details of their trip are included.

The collection of empirical data was done through two methods: Firstly, telephone interviews were conducted with people who previously hiked on the Via Alpina, in order to capture individual expectations, experiences and reflections on their journeys. The aim of the interviews was also to reveal how their experiences affected their previously held beliefs and images about Alpine landscape and to find out, if they feel changes in their lives as a result of their walk. Secondly, serving the same aim as mentioned before, email interviews were carried out with Via Alpina hikers. These did not provide such rich accounts as the telephone interviews, but they provided a high degree of freedom for the interviewees in terms of chosen subjects and length of narrative. Subsequently, with view to the research question, the collected data was analyzed in the light of the existing knowledge about long-distance hiking presented above. The following paragraphs specify the practical techniques used for this study, describing data collection, sample selection and data analysis in detail.

3.2 Data collection and sample structure

Because of the geographical distance, the empirical data for this research was gathered via individual semi-structured, in-depth telephone interviews (via Skype) and individual structured email interviews with participants who have hiked along the Via Alpina. Oral interviews are a common tool for qualitative research, as they have the advantage to gain immediate insights into the participant's personal viewpoints and provide direct contact with the researcher (Boeije, 2010). Since this thesis is informed by a phenomenological research approach, I aimed on obtaining rich descriptive narratives that focus on how the participants felt during their experience and how they thought about it, as suggested by Crust et al. (2011).

Therefore, corresponding with Jordan and Gibson (2004), I tried to mainly use open-ended questions, in order to stimulate a conversation and encourage the participants to talk about what perceive important. The conversations were guided by a prepared topical structure, but offered enough freedom to react to interesting answers or change the question sequence. However, this more open setting can also cause problems, because some important decisions need to be made directly during the interview and require a skilled researcher (Flick, 2009). My own practical research experience is limited, which made a thorough preparation of the interview guide crucial to ensure my control over the interviews.

The main topics of my interview guide were: motivation and expectation, physical and sensual experience, social interactions along the way, physical environment ('nature'/'culture'), extraordinary experiences, personal meanings of visited places, and life after the walk. All topics were covered by three to six questions, which I asked interchangeably depending on how the conversations went along and how much the participants already told me. Additionally, I prepared some casual opening questions establishing rapport, as suggested by Boeije (2010), as well as some optional ending questions to round up the conversation.

As for the written email interviews, a list of key questions from each topic were distributed to the participants and they emailed their answers back, deciding themselves how much they want to write and which questions no answer. While the raw data from the email interviews was already written down, the telephone interviews were recorded and later

transcribed in order to support ad-hoc note taking. The email interviews all contained the same questions, but the interview selection of my questions for the telephone interviews adjusted in the ongoing research progress using constant comparison (Boeije, 2010). I informed all participants about my research procedure and purpose before the interview, and ensured that the data was used confidentially and anonymously.

In order to draw a sample that fits the need of this research, a purposive sampling approach can be used in qualitative inquiry (Boeije, 2010). (add how that worked out, sources) The challenge for interviewee selection in this case was, that there is no clear definition in existing literature on what accounts as 'long-distance', even though there are some suggestions for covered distances and time spent on the trail. On the one hand, any walking journey from a couple of days to several months could be considered the 'true' Via Alpina hike. On the other hand, experiences are likely to vary greatly within this span, which means that a certain framework needs to be set. As the leading argument in this study is that long-distance hiking can result in very different perceptions of encounters with the destination than a usual Alpine summer holiday, I decided for a clear demarcation: only hikers who were on the move for at least one week, and covering approximately one stage per day, were to be chosen as participants for the interviews.

Finding suitable hikers for this study was supported by a preliminary Internet search, which showed that a substantial number of hikers report their journeys on the Via Alpina in open blogs; that is, web-based diaries accessible for any reader. These blogs were used as starting points for contacting potential participants. I contacted a number of blog authors via email and invited them for interviews. Hookway (2008) notes that when sampling from blogs, the average age of participants can be expected to be lower, since still mostly younger people are active online. However, this was not the case for this sample. In addition to these direct approaches, I contacted the secretariat of the Via Alpina to ask for support in finding participants, and I posted my request on their official Facebook page in order to draw attention to the study among the approximately 1.000 followers.

Since this study is the basis for a master thesis, time and material resources were restricted, which led to a number of limitations which are also taken into account in chapter 6.

One general limitation is the rather small final sample size of 12 interviewees in total, comprising of six participants in five telephone interviews and another six participants in five written interviews (in both methods, two participants responded together as a couple). The telephone interviews with hikers were conducted in German and English, lasted between 35 and 55 minutes, while the written interviews were all sent in English, resulting in 22 pages of material in total. The interviewee overview in the table below shows that most are of European nationality and already had hiking experience before starting on the Via Alpina. There is neither a balance between male and female participants, nor attention to their age, as my sampling strategy was solely focused on their Via Alpina hiking experiences.

| Pseudonym | Experience Level | Route | Gender | Nationality |
|-----------|------------------|---------------------------------------|--------|-------------|
| Lena | Intermediate | Red Trail: Lake Geneva – Menton | Female | German |
| Carl | Intermediate | Red Trail: Lake Geneva – Menton | Male | German |
| Joseph | High | Red Trail: Oberstdorf - Villach | Male | British |
| Evelin | High | Yellow/Purple Trail: different stages | Female | German |
| Martin | Low | Red Trail: Rapperswil – Dolomites | Male | Swiss |
| Alex | Intermediate | Green Trail: Sargans – Adelboden | Male | Swiss |
| Anton | Low | Red Trail: Sargans – Montreaux | Male | Finnish |
| Bob | Low | Green Trail: Lenk - Engelberg | Male | US American |
| Collin | Intermediate | Red Trail: Trieste – Monaco | Male | French |
| Lucia | Intermediate | Red Trail: Trieste – Monaco | Female | French |
| Marian | Intermediate | Red Trail: Monaco – Trieste (almost) | Female | French |
| Tristan | High | Various Trails: Monaco – Trieste | Male | French |

One major pitfall of this methodology is the lack of data gathered during the actual hiking trip. As suggested by den Breejen (2007), using in-situ data collection is very useful to capture experiences directly, record changes along the way and be present as a researcher. Since the research was carried out during the winter months when nobody hikes on the Via Alpina, this method could not be applied. However, gathering data from the reflexive accounts of hikers and relying on their memories has been done before in other studies (for example Crust et al., 2011;

Mills & Butler, 2005). As long as the time difference between hike and interview as well as the deviation between memories and immediate experience is taken into account, this method has the advantage of examining possible transformational effects the journey had on the participants. Another methodological weakness is the lack of probing for the written email interviews. Even though I could reach some participants after they sent their answers if I needed clarification, I could not directly ask for details on interesting stories as would be possible in an oral conversation. Therefore, this data is not as rich and spontaneous as the data from the telephone interviews, but still offers insights into the participants memories and opinions.

3.3 Data analysis

When analyzing the interview data, constant comparison was employed in order to identify main themes throughout the data collection process and adjust the interview guide if applicable (Boeije, 2010). Using open coding, the data was segmented into meaningful categories, identifying hikers' opinions and perceptions about their encounters with Alpine landscape and inhabitants, the meanings these experiences have for them, and the effects on their lives after the journey. According to Boeije (2010), coding is a useful tool to constantly interrogate the data and (re)conceptualize the meanings derived. Since this also meant breaking down some highly descriptive data and personal narratives into coherent themes, I employed thematic analysis. I immersed myself into the data by reading the transcripts and emailed answers several times and comparing my identified themes with the handwritten notes I took during the telephone interviews. It can be assumed that the analysis of empirical data is always influenced by the researcher's existing theoretical knowledge. However, as suggested by Jordan and Gibson (2004) I tried to keep an open mind about my data in order to consider any ideas or patterns that emerge from it and maintain the exploratory nature of this research.

Finally, even though this study is inspired by non-representational theory and a phenomenological approach, I still needed to take the representational aspect of my data into account, particularly because the study builds on memories of hikers and not their immediate experience. Hence, as mentioned before I adopted a 'more-than-representational' angle and agree with Carolan (2008) as he suggests that direct access to an embodied practice is impossible: "I find the term non-representational problematic firstly, because it at least suggests that what is of analytic concern ultimately dies the moment we try to talk (and write) about it, and secondly, because I believe the world of embodied experience is better explained as being more-than-representational. It is not that we cannot represent sensuous, corporeal, lived experience but that the moment we do so we immediately lose something. Representations tell only part of the story, yet they still have a story to tell, however incomplete" (p. 412). Every aspect of the participant's live after their experience mediated their account of the journey.

4 Results

This section of the thesis solely includes the findings that emerged from my gathered data, while chapter 5 presents a discussion based on the theoretical overview given above. Although the different themes tend to interlock, the section will first give an overview on the participants' motivations and expectations for the Via Alpina, followed by a characterization of their experiences during the hike, and finally an account on the impact the journey had on their lives. When examining the descriptions of their participants experiences on a long-distance trail, Bold and Gillespie (2009) suggest a subdivision into these three aspects: “external (visual and sensory stimuli; cultural and natural attractions); personal (the physical and mental challenges of long-distance walking) and human (interactions with fellow-walkers and businesses; the camaraderie of walking)” (p. 251). The presentation of my results is structured similarly, but focuses mainly on the embodied immersion into Alpine landscape instead of strictly separating its cultural and natural features.

4.1 Why hikers choose the Via Alpina

The motivations for hiking along the Via Alpina vary greatly between the participants, and depend a lot on their individual life situations. However, two main motivational patterns can be distinguished between beginners that are new to this type of traveling and experienced long-distance hikers. The former often aimed to extend their hiking journeys to a longer holiday, as they completed shorter trails lasting one or several days before, and wanted to try the Via Alpina as 'the next step'. The latter were motivated by a growing fascination for this type of holiday and intended to broaden their hiking experience on new trails. Only one participant was initially motivated by a professional project, because she is a freelance author and received a work order from the Via Alpina secretariat to write a hiking guide book for the purple trail.

What both traveler types have in common is a general passion for outdoor activities and movement on foot, which they all express very enthusiastically. For all participants, either

sports in general or outdoor activities, have played a prime role in their lives for a substantial period of time. However, while for some hikers the trail foremost poses a personal challenge they want to face, others are mainly intrigued by the chance to explore new and/or already slightly familiar places in-depth: “I wanted to immerse myself in the Alps for a longer period of time, to distance myself from automobiles and roads, and to get as close to Swiss culture as possible” (Bob, American, hiked with his wife and adult daughter).

For some participants a personal or professional interruption induced the interest in 'different' holidays in general, as they needed gain distance from their situation and find a new approach to their life. For example, Tristan from France was diagnosed with cancer at the age of thirty, prompting him to “start doing things”, as he put it, instead of focusing on work and being “just another sheep among others”. This metaphor shows that he perceived his life up to the diagnosis as ordinary, compared to turning towards an extraordinary way of life afterward by traveling off-mainstream. During the years leading to his 76-day Via Alpina journey he went on several active holidays around the world, either by bike or on foot, including a Pyrenees crossing within one month. Similarly, Joseph from England, started to travel and walk extensively after retiring early with suddenly a lot of free time to fill, and Collin from France took a longer leave from work after a professional “disappointment”.

Both hikers that live in or near the Alps and hikers that traveled there from further away associate the trail with a sense of adventure, discovery of new places, and a chance to leave everyday life behind for a longer while. Notions of escape, freedom, and change are reoccurring in different contexts and also reflect in the participant's expectations prior to their hike: to be free, to have time for a favorite activity (walking/hiking), to try something new, to be outside and move, to be gone from regular life for a while, to take on a challenge that is both intimidating and exciting. For Alex from Switzerland, many places along the way were not even new, but he expected to discover a new perspective on his home country:

“The expectation actually was to somehow connect the many individual places that I may have seen before during the last twenty, thirty years. So I think that was the expectation... really to walk the path and not just to do individual mountains. [...] And the expectation actually was to really dive in for once. Thus to be on the way for two, three

weeks and to do everything at once and then also, yes... to somehow also notice the geographical connection.”

Also, most participants perceived their decision for the journey as an extraordinary step with great relevance for their lives. Consequently, some of them indicated that the idea for the journey was nourished over a longer period of time before put into practice, calling it a “dream we had since several years” (Collin) or a “project” (Lucia). However, while most interviewees were very precise on what initially intrigued them about the Via Alpina, they often did not pin down what exactly triggered them to actually start the hike.

Finally, also the characteristics of the Via Alpina itself played an important role as a motivational 'pull factor' for the participants. They name a general interest in Alpine landscape and good information materials on the stages, huts, and sights as important reasons to hike this trail. Since the paths lead through various popular regions and can be easily customized, the Via Alpina offers an ideal basis for easy individual traveling: “It is not just the scenery, which is very good, it is also incredibly well resourced [...] it is extremely easy to organize yourself, to plan your own walks” (Joseph).

4.2 Immersion in Alpine landscape

4.2.1 Perceptions of material surroundings

The most frequent statement of the participants about their Alpine landscape experiences describes its great variety. Even though the hikers moved rather slowly, they remarked a constant gradual change in natural and cultural features, which filled every day with new discoveries and surprises. This was also named one of the most enjoyable aspects of hiking the Via Alpina, especially because there was plenty of time to observe, enjoy and discover the landscapes in detail and in one permanent flow of impressions. Below are two examples of this conception.

“There is an exceptional aspect in walking in mountains is the great diversity of views despite the slow progress. In a few hours you can see successively: a village and a forest, then alpine meadows, then minerals and arid landscapes and finally snow. Often my friends ask me if walking is not monotonous. No, it's never monotonous, because the landscapes are always different.”(Marian, from France)

“Very beautiful, very diverse. So we started at Lake Geneva, and there is was still very flat at first. Then it slowly started to get hilly, until we had the first free view of the Mont Blanc massive. This was really impressive with all the glaciers. Then we crossed through there [...] And then how the mountains changed towards the Mediterranean Sea, that was also great. Because two days before the Mediterranean Sea you were actually still really high up in the mountains and then how it became increasingly flat, I found that ... very diversified.” (Lena, from Germany)

The participants often associated uninhabited mountain landscapes with simplicity and seclusion, and in a way perceived them as detached from the stress factors of their 'modern life'. Commercial activities, motorized transport, crowds of people, or noise were named as examples of such stress factors; and even though they were present in some larger towns or tourist centers, the feeling of being far away from the negative traits of 'civilization' prevailed most of the time.

To this effect, for some interviewees the essence of hiking was ultimately to visit places that are only accessible by foot and convey a sense of both privilege and adventure. Marian explained that “hiking is to view wild places. [...] These areas are “no man's land” that are spectacular, lunar, wonderful, ... and sometimes distressing when they are very far from civilization valleys and the weather is very bad”. This fascination for the unknown, the chance to discover the seemingly untouched, is a prominent theme that emerged from most interviews.

Moments of seclusion and exposure to the landscape are often distinct memories as well, both positive and negative. Swiss hiker Martin recalls a highlight of his journey when passing through the Swiss National Park, which is usually very crowded in summer, but was almost empty on a cold day: “And then I practically hiked these 25 kilometers alone, was on the way alone, and the landscape sometimes maybe reminds you a little bit of Canada or Alaska or something like that, but this, this was an brilliant feeling. Thus that was somehow ... yes, I would say a bit of a strange feeling. [...] So in these moments you really feel like out in the wilderness”. In contrast, Carl from Germany remembers feeling distressed on particularly lonely stages of the trail, when the path was barely walked and therefore overgrown. This often resulted in long searches for the right way and exhausting detours.

The participants also described encounters with wild animals as exceptional, memorable moments. Especially because animal sightings were rare for most of the hikers, chances to observe shy species like deer, Alpine ibex, chamois, eagles, or marmots, was perceived as a privilege and a reward. Far more common were sightings of with smaller birds and various insects. Most interesting for the hikers were encounters with unknown or unexpected animals. For example Evelin from Germany recalls her strong fascination with various snakes, vultures, small scorpions, and wild living cats and dogs in the Slovenian alps. Comparing his journey with his experiences of previous hikes in Australia, Martin remarks that seeing animals sometimes requires a mindful adaption to the environment and a change of behavior:

“As long as you walk and are on the way, you see no animal, nothing. You practical see nothing. You really first have to pause, or sit down, and then you wait five, ten minutes and suddenly you notice that there are animals everywhere around. Of course, they are also well hidden in the forest and you have to take the rest, take the time, to really let the environment

affect you. And to, I would say, virtually open up towards the forest, towards your environment, and then you begin to notice the animals.”

Regarding vegetation along the trails, seasonal flowers played a substantial role in enhancing the visual appeal of Alpine landscape for many participants. Some were really impressed by the colorful mountain meadows, calling them for example a “show” and an “enrichment”, while others recall seeing endemic plant species that would only grow in a very small area along the way and make places unique.

What is more, the interviewees expressed a wide range of opinions and attitudes about the human component of Alpine landscapes in terms of villages and agriculture. Since they were free to mention anything they found important or interesting, every hiker focused on slightly other aspects for this topic. One example are small, remote villages away from major tourism centers. Depending on which stages they hiked, some participants perceived these villages as idyllic representations of traditional Alpine lifestyle and found that they beautifully complemented the landscape, while others expressed feelings of loneliness and anxiety when walking through there and barely seeing other people.

Different life situations and ways of dwelling as well as stark contrasts between wealthy and marginalized areas became apparent for many interviewees. One hiker mentions striking architectural differences along the way that very much defined the individual character of a place: “The typical Engadine houses, that ... yes that also forms the charm, the scene of the region. And then that looks different again in the Finschgau, they are building different there again. Thus I certainly perceived the villages very much through the architectural style and the local peculiarities” (Martin). Similarly, another participant who walked in some remote regions of the Slovenian Alps describes a strange mix of emotions when passing through tiny, desolate, neglected villages with only old inhabitants left and many overgrown, abandoned buildings: “this is fascinating, it gives me chills, it is sad, and it is beautiful, thus a mix of all this”.

At the same time, hikers often had a very pragmatic perspective on villages, as they constituted 'beacons' of civilization and offered basic comforts, like a supermarket, a bus connection, an ATM for cash, pharmaceutical necessities, or simply a chance to stay in a single room once in a while instead of sleeping in communal bunks on a hut. However, the attitudes

towards tourism infrastructure were mixed. Even though some participants expressed understanding for the economic needs of locals, others were annoyed by all too extensive skiing facilities or overcrowding in some places.

In general, contrasting impressions of 'wild' and 'inhabited' were often perceived as most interesting about Alpine landscape and depended much on what the participants were used from home. Evelin recalls to being very used to mountain farming in her home region in Southern Germany as well as the places she visits for day tours, and therefore perceived the steep, rocky, and overgrown slopes in the Eastern Alps as very wild. Also Collin was intrigued by “different kind of habitat” and different levels of human “occupation” depending on the region. On the one hand, the hikers sometimes felt completely isolated from any human contact, on the other hand even in the most remote places Alpine agriculture would remind them of how far up in altitude human influence actually reaches. For American hiker Bob the first-hand experience of Alpine farming and food production was an educational highlight of his journey, while compared to some American mountain ranges the landscape would not feel very 'wild' to him at all. Likewise, Joseph compared his Via Alpina experience with other long-distance walks, stressing how domesticated and organized the Alpine landscapes appear: “It is very clean and brisk to English eyes, you know, everything is manicured, the villages in particular are incredibly tidy. It is as if some sort of tidy police is going around and making everybody clean up all the time.”

Clearly, one of the most influential factors of the physical environment was the weather condition. Even though all participants perceived sunny and dry days as 'lucky', barely any of them would speak much about rainy days. They either mentioned not having many, or simply accepting the situation. In contrast, regular thunderstorms were described as the impressive, sometimes intimidating finale of typical Alpine summer days. Next to occasional heat waves or unexpected snow, thunderstorms constituted a main challenge for planning the day or finding shelter. Both Marian and Alex Switzerland recalled being genuinely scared during a thunderstorm that started before they reached the hut, and described enormous noise, storm and downpour as particularly negative memorable moments. Another weather phenomenon perceived as dangerous was mist on high altitudes, as it significantly impacts the hiker's orientation. The exposure to all kinds of weather situations during their journey meant a

learning process and a gain in mountain experience for some participants, as they learned to adapt and developed respect for certain risks.

Finally, several hikers were surprised by numerous historical remains along the way, for example bunkers and memorials from the two World Wars, old boundary posts, or relics of early farming and settlements. Coming across such places was often unexpected and sometimes emotional, as one participant recalls: “They sometimes had shared memorials for soldiers, who stood against each other as enemies during the First World War. So that impressed me, this respect for humans, for human suffering and human dignity, independent of nationality” (Evelin).

The word cloud below shows the participants' responses when asked to name some general adjectives that come to mind when describing the landscape they walked through. It aptly shows the great variety of perceptions of Alpine landscape and the contrasting attitudes towards it.



Illustration 6: Adjectives the participants assigned to Alpine landscape

4.2.2 A multi-sensual experience

Examining the hikers' stories about their landscape experiences, it becomes clear that the visual sense and the aesthetic appreciation of places plays a prime role for most of them. Already in their accounts about their motivations and expectations, all participants talked a lot about *seeing* mountain, passes, or valleys, and being stunned by great *views* of the Alpine landscape. English hiker Joseph for example praised the accessibility of dramatic heights without the need to practically climb and enjoyed the different perspective on landscape from a high altitude. With regards to seeing 'far', he states: "And high up you get, particularly as you are approaching these huge valleys, the views are just amazing. And then trying to work out what you are seeing is such a challenge in terms of which mountains are you looking at and all the rest of it. [...] I love long views and to get long views is what I am really looking for. [...] I just like to be out and see a long way in nice, crisp, lovely air". For some this was a main reason to choose the Alps for their trip and was also often perceived as a reward for their effort. Visual impressions were also often directly associated with experiencing something beautiful.

However, the participants remarked that this type of hiking often went beyond simply *seeing* a view, but constituted the chance to discover landscape in much greater detail. Having more time to intensively observe the surroundings was named as one of the most enjoyable aspects of their journey, because it led to greater mindfulness. Carl and Lena emphasized that it was very important and enjoyable for them to simply sit down at the hut at the end of the day, and taking in the surroundings without any stress or hurry. When asked what made long-distance hiking for him different from other means of travel, Alex answered:

"Mainly you discover so many small things that you overlook when you travel faster. So you see much more, you can really look at the mountains unhurriedly, you see every summit, you see every building, you pay attention to how the farm houses look like when walking by, you see animals, all kinds of things. Thus it is a more conscious traveling, or also a more calm traveling."

Naturally, the participants often named visual impressions of beautiful landscapes to be standing out during the hike and evoking strong emotional moments. Whenever an interviewee

talked about these 'view moments', they immediately mentioned light conditions as well. The light conditions influenced the hiker's personal mood and perceived atmosphere of places along their way. With regards to the clearest memories of her hike, Marian describes the combination of beautiful scenery with great sunny weather as “a magical result” that often evokes “feelings of euphoria, like a drug”. Lucia and her husband Collin only slept in their tents throughout their trip and for Lucia “a sunset or a sunrise, a whole moon that illuminates all the snowed rounding peaks” were distinct experiences. Since several participants maintain blogs about their journeys, they would also pay special attention to light for photography, as for example Joseph remarks: “the best days are the days when the lights are fantastic and it is clean and you get those long views.”

Nevertheless, it was the landscape's effect on the other senses that made the hikers feel most intimately engaged with their surroundings. While long views were mainly associated with vastness and magnitude of the Alpine landscape that sometimes allowed visually tracing one's journey back for several days, the immediate noises and smells of a location would create a sensation of immersion. Martin described feeling constantly engaged with different senses during the course of one day, because of the ever changing surroundings, and taking them in “like a sponge”. Evelin stressed that really crossing every meter on foot was like being “*hautnah*”, as in 'being in touch' with the landscape, and “sensing the ground”.

To this effect, participants would indeed feel literally 'in touch' with places, describing intensive aromas, noises, and tactile sensations. Swiss hiker Martin mused about what he called the “*Geruchsgedächtnis*”, meaning a 'smell memory', and how he adds these memories of intensive smells over time. Regarding his hike, he states: “It is the same with manure for example, just by hearing the word, you already smell it... yes, and the smell of larch forests, or conifer forests in general, or like resin, fresh pine resin and so on... these are really strong impressions.” He also remembers that “walking on craggy ground or on rocks feels completely different than on forest ground and so on”.

In terms of noises, on the one hand participants frequently named noises they associated with nature, like birds singing, rivers or waterfalls, wind blowing, the cow bells, or as mentioned before, the intimidating noises of thunderstorms, as key elements of their place experience. On

the other hand, almost all hikers indicated very positive connotations with “hearing the silence” and savoring the lack of any disturbances, which often was the opposite to their daily lives.

Another significant sensation was temperature, because it had a direct effect on the subjective well-being of the hikers and would therefore be perceived very consciously. Many participants spoke about feeling pleasure in warm sunlight during dry days, but also frequently remembered heat, often in combination with already difficult paths and thick vegetation, as an exhausting sensation.

4.3 Social interactions along the way

Concerning social interactions, the participants often distinguished between meeting other hikers that were either on shorter trips or had a similar plan, and meeting local inhabitants or accommodation owners. However, encounters with other hikers were often more frequent, especially when the trail would lead through high altitudes and pass by only a few villages. The two hikers mentioned before who only stayed in their tent indicated that they did not meet many people on their way, partly because trying to maintain autonomy was the key philosophy of their journey. They recalled the attitudes of others during their rather special journey as follows: “I think, in the first weeks [...], people take us for crazy people and didn’t think we’d succeed; in August, they were more impressed but still had doubts about our success; and in [September], they mostly congratulated us and were more curious.” (Lucia)

Yet, the other participants shared extensive stories about their encounters, mostly describing them as special, treasured moments, and sometimes they were of curious or emotional nature. Especially for French hiker Tristan, these encounters were a main aspect of his journey, because he initially had the theme “Meet the Locals” for his trip and also documented several interactions through video and photography. He explains his philosophy as an act of human exchange, by being as open-minded as possible and always trying to share “positive energy” with others. He also said:

“My idea was to meet the locals during the Via Alpina before I started the journey. Such journey can I think be done only in giving and receiving things to whatever you see (people, animals, landscapes). Meeting the locals cannot be dissociated from such journey in order to fully enjoy it. When you are self confident about yourself you can give more than others and not expecting anything back in return.”

Other hikers were often seen as like-minded people, and a closer relationship would develop during the evening at the huts, but these encounters depended much on the area where the participants walked. Both in the southeastern region of the Alps (Slovenia/Italy) and in the Maritime Alps (Italy/France), the participants would sometimes not meet any other hikers for days. Participants who traveled through popular areas in Switzerland and Austria in turn,

recalled meeting few other long-distance hikers, and far more people on short trips who would share dinners or join them on the trail for a while. For Joseph it was particularly refreshing to witness many young local hikers with families, because this was the opposite to English walking culture, which he ironically called a “grey-haired persons sport”. In some cases participants stayed in touch with their acquaintances after the hike, in particular if they shared similar ideas about their journey and experienced longer companionship. Marian pointed out that walking alone leads to more encounters: “When you walk alone, the contacts are more frequent because you're more available, more open to other people”. She also thought that hiking generally encourages friendly encounters, because everyone is more relaxed.

Some participants mentioned that exchanging with other travelers could be encouraging and inspirational when long-distance hiking, and that these encounters were also educational. Anton from Finland remarked that he was initially a bit insecure, because of his complete lack of mountain hiking experience, but occasionally met travelers he could learn from: “we got to know some other experienced long-distance walkers who taught us quite a lot [...]. Hikers are like a big family, especially among the ones who do longer walks. It's easy to chat about the routes, gear, weather and so” (Anton). Similarly, Swiss hiker Alex remembered meeting “well equipped mountain hikers, who were very familiar with places and had a lot of experience, and they would give you tips”, while Bob from the U.S. experienced genuine comradeship among hikers: “We found that every hiker we met on the Via Alpina, no matter where they came from, would greet us as we passed. [...] On the very steep descent from Hohturli on stairs, hikers would help each other as they passed.”

Regarding local inhabitants, the general sentiment of the participants was very positive, calling their acquaintances very friendly, helpful, courteous, and welcoming, only to name a few. Encounters with 'the locals' were often the most memorable and impressing moments for the majority of the participants, especially when their life situation would be perceived as very different from the hiker's own. Tristan experienced a very fulfilling encounter with two shepherds:

“The day I meet the shepherds Giulio and Mohammed at Grande Alpe, Vallon Saint Grat, Aosta. Knew such a day will come and it came. These men opened their humble

shepherd hut to a stranger without questioning. Listening to their personal stories and daily life was really emotional. When I left, Giulio said that he was happy to talk to someone and really felt that he had a lot to tell and sadly no one to listen what he had to say. [...] From that day I was 100% sure to complete the journey because those men gave more than just a place to stay for the night. From that day, filled up with positive energy it became very easy.”

He explained that for him they represented “Alpine culture”, and he was impressed that even though their lives were hard and simple, they would be generous and warm in their hospitality. In this spirit, Evelin told me several stories about very interesting and fascinating encounters in isolated rural areas. Even though she and her travel companion would once be the only guests in a pilgrim's hospice, the hosts would make an immense effort for them, and stay there until late at night to keep the bar open: “And then we left that bar, and literally behind our heels the roller blind went down, they dashed out, jumped into the car and drove off. And only then we realized: they sacrificed their entire evening for these two guests! An amazing friendliness and service.”

In some moments that Evelin described, there would be spontaneous disruptions of the 'normal' host-guest-relationship, for example when the accommodation recommended on the Via Alpina website turned out to be closed and a chef from a local restaurant drove them to the next village; or the sudden involvement in a village festival for the reconstruction of the church lost to an earthquake: “And then we got ourselves into this village festival, where the major of that village started roasting sausages for us,... so my Italian is really bad, and there they all speak Italian – we could basically only communicate with hands and feet, but suddenly we were the guests of honor in that village. That was great, fascinating!” For her as a German, the additional dimension of historic sensibility also played a role. They met several old hut owners who learned German during the Nazi regime, and never spoke it for more than 50 years, unless they had guests and told stories from their lives. These situations made her reflect on the complex relationship between guests and hosts in some places, like in this memory:

“We also hiked through areas that suffered very much both during the First and the Second World War. And we are Germans. And we have been in the Slovenian border region where people have been picked up for the concentration camps [...]. On a farm that we

stayed out for a couple of days, we found a memorial stone for the grandfather who spent I don't know how many years in a German concentration camp. And the people were friendly to us. That impressed me very much. [...] There was no hatred against Germans.” (Evelin)

Finally, another important factor for enjoyable encounters for some participants was language. American hiker Bob felt most welcome when utilizing his limited knowledge of Swiss German and saying some polite phrases. Likewise, Lena and Carl often had communication problems in France, because most people would not speak much English. Therefore, they explained, their nicest and most fun encounter was with a local guide they hired for some difficult stages, simply because they had the chance to engage in extensive conversations with him.

4.4 Personal dimension

4.4.1 Physical challenges and the hiker's body

Four main themes emerged from the interviews in terms of physical challenges: the sometimes difficult trail conditions and mountain environments, the hiking equipment, time planning, and the personal physical condition. Generally, the subjective 'feeling' during the journey was generally accounted as positive by all hikers. For example, Bob stated that “the combination of exercise, fresh and clean air, good food, comfortable lodging and camaraderie was very good for my health.” Most hikers reported to have developed a more intensive physical consciousness over time, experiencing themselves differently and gaining a better understanding of their capabilities and limits.

As for trail conditions and mountain environments, the interviewees frequently named the combination of long distances, difficult terrain and steep trails as particularly challenging. Swiss hiker Alex remembered feeling very exhausted after a long stage that also covered a great difference in altitude and at the same time required high concentration due to a very steep descent. Sometimes the hikers were also forced to cover a long distance and keep up a steady pace even when they were already tired, simply because there were no accommodations along the way and they needed to reach the hut before sunset. Another challenge was sometimes searching for the right path, especially when the hikers followed the wrong way for a longer while and then needed to turn around. Anton and Joseph also mentioned the lack of a “proper lunch” to have a fairly strong impact on the afternoon performance of their body.

In terms of hiking equipment almost all participants perceived the weight of the backpack as a key factor for well-being. Uncomfortable or too heavy luggage would often be a problem, especially for less experienced hikers. Furthermore, the time planning was a challenge for some participants. German hiker Evelin encountered problems with incorrect stage descriptions on the Via Alpina website, which resulted in long search efforts, while Lena and Carl recall their initially very tight schedule to quickly turn into a major challenge because of unplanned interruptions along the way. For Collin and Lucia from France who traveled autonomous in their tent, accurate planning was even more important, because they needed to stock up their food

supply on a regular basis.

Finally, the positive transformation of their own body was often an interesting and rewarding experience for many participants. Martin describes the gradual adaptation to the hiking activity as a personal learning process: “you quickly develop a feeling for how much you can hike and where to stop in order to have enough energy to continue the next day. [...] You also learn to listen to your body”. For most hikers this meant to start slowly in the beginning and gradually increase the challenge in order to maintain well-being. Lena and Carl tried to never reach their limit, but describe a feeling of immense physical satisfaction and calmness after completing a day's walking, even when they actually felt totally exhausted. Feeling strong and energetic in the morning, even with little sleep in the previous night, then a slight tiredness during the afternoon, followed by a positive exhaustion at the end of the day was typical 'performance curve' described by some participants.

For some hikers the journey was an intensive euphoric rush powered by their “endorphin factory”, as French hiker Tristan called it. He found that in the right combination of exciting places and physical activity “the sensation is close to getting 'high' especially when hiking up to reach a pass and not knowing what the trail is like”. Marian described a similar euphoria when hiking through a region she found particularly beautiful.

Others were positively surprised about the capabilities of their body and felt like they 'found' how much they could really do: “It was great to see that there is so much energy in your body to keep going” (Anton from Finland). Collin observed a visible transformation of his body into what he called a “walking machine”, making him eventually feel like he could continue forever. Looking back to what he accomplished, he concluded that “this journey shows me that our body has unsuspected physical and mental capabilities, that is fit to achieve hard and long mountain walk”. Feeling 'able' also gradually increased the hiker's self-confidence and enjoyment of the trip. The typical body problems encountered during the walk were blisters and joint pains, which however did not keep anyone from continuing.

4.4.2 Mental challenges and emotional involvement

This second subdivision of the personal dimension of the Via Alpina hike includes dominant thoughts and emotions that the hikers repeatedly had or found most important for their experiences. Especially during the telephone interviews, the participants often described memorable moments from their journey not through the practical situation itself, but through the feelings they evoked in them and how these made them self-reflect.

The mental challenge mentioned mostly by the less experienced participants was the uncertainty about embarking into an unknown type of journey. They worried for example about their lack of hiking experience in general (Anton), the rather tentative travel planning and difficulty to estimate realistic day stages (Carl and Lena), the distance from the family for a longer period of time when walking alone (Tristan), or the fear to lose the way and to not be able to orientate oneself without knowledge of the place and local language (Marian). For most participants these challenges and initial concerns eased significantly during their trip and turned into the opposite at the end of their walks, as they gained confidence, experience and practical knowledge.

Most participants recalled their immediate thoughts during the hike to often be very simple and fundamental to sustaining during the trip, for example about the path, the weather, the next accommodation, or the food supply. Martin remarked that this also led to being at ease with the experience and feeling relaxed, because he did “not ponder about specific topics all the time”. Furthermore, Lena said that she was very much engaged with thinking about the trip itself, the completed stages and what to expect next, and that she often pushed away any thoughts about her daily life at home. Her travel companion Carl explained: “The largest part of my thoughts centered on very essential things during this time, and that was also very pleasant I have to say. Thus the three basic needs, where do we sleep tonight, where can we get some food, and how the weather going to be”. If these things were 'ok', he would already feel satisfied.

In terms of emotions, all hikers talked about their overall joy, happiness and pleasure during the trip and at the end. However, all participants also recalled a whole array of different positive and negative emotions, sometimes all within a couple of hours, as these examples

illustrate: “We basically had almost all emotions, from self-loathing and thinking like 'how could we do this to ourselves to walk here?' – of course only for a short while – to absolute joy, for example when finished something.” (Carl); “Yes, so that goes from enthusiasm to the 'I do not want anymore'” (Evelin); “the mix of emotions in a short time frame make it something special” (Tristan). Some hikers also described a certain repetitive emotional curve during the day, similar to the previously described physical experiences, because they usually started highly motivated in the morning, had both very negative and very positive feelings during the day depending on how the walk went, and always felt a deep satisfaction and relaxation after arriving in the evening.

The data also shows that many positive emotions that occur immediately during walking are directly connected to the participant's landscape experience. Enthusiasm, excitement, and anticipation were commonly experienced when the hikers went up towards a new pass or summit, which often related to a sense of discovery and adventure. In turn, joy and exhilaration set in when reaching the top, hiking along a pass and having a view, as explained by Evelin: “If you have a more free view, then it is absolute elation”, and Anton and Tristan who both remembered feeling great joy when reaching a pass.

For some participants reflecting on the relationship between themselves and the landscape evoked strong emotions. His Alpine experience made Finnish hiker Anton feel small and somewhat insignificant, stating that “the grand scale of the mountains makes you feel very tiny, but in a good way; what are your own worries compared to those ancient rock formations? The feeling really kills your own ego and it's liberating”. Furthermore, he remarked that the geographical distance to his regular life gave him an additional sense of freedom, simply by not having to care about anything else than the hike during that time. He explained: “it's just you and the mountains, everything you need in life is in your backpack. The worries from normal life, school, job etc, are so far away.” For Swiss hiker Alex it was the constant flow of new landscape experiences that sparked astonishment, happiness and sense of discovery afresh everyday. Martin described moments of his intense emotional experiences of the landscape as follows:

“Yes, very often I was just positively overwhelmed by the beauty of the mountains, and I

always have liked the Alps. And yes, sometimes there were really just moments when you are in the middle of the mountain environment and it is simply so gorgeous, and then you could just about start crying, right? Out of joy that you can experience this right now. That you can just relish the experience so intensively with all senses and ... yes, actually ... joy, that is the main emotion."

Nevertheless, the hikers also described many different negative emotions they had when things went wrong during the trip. For Evelin, who had lots of trouble with wrong marking and badly maintained trails during her hike in the Italian and Slovenian Eastern Alps, not finding the way was a major problem and made her feel frustrated, desperate and helpless. Most commonly however, fear and discouragement emerged in situations with bad weather and challenging trail conditions. French hiker Tristan mentioned feeling scared when hiking along high passes with bad visibility. Marian remembered doubting herself and her own capabilities in these moments and also feeling a "sense of failure when I cannot pass through a pass because too snow and bad weather conditions". For her also the end of the journey felt like that, because she had to stop abruptly after an accident: "I felt a lot of frustration and sadness. And even anger. [...] I had a sense of failure, as the mountaineer who must renounce to go on the summit because the conditions are dangerous". Also Martin was stopped by an accident, and recalled similar feelings of disappointment and sadness. He felt like he "ran against a wall" and "was cheated by fate".

For those finishing like planned however, the end of the journey was associated with yet another complex mix of both positive and negative emotions, which many called "strange" or "hard to describe". While some hikers named euphoria combined with sadness, other mainly felt a strong sense of pride and satisfaction. Joseph for example stated: "There is a satisfaction of getting to the end of the plan. You know, it is always a little bit of anxiety, if things are going to work out, so it is nice to have completed what you have set out to do". For some hikers the end phase was also the time to realize what they had accomplished and consciously enjoy the final days. Lena and Carl from Germany stated: "It is an indescribable feeling to know, yes, we made it, but to not be there just yet". Alex and Martin, who are both Swiss, started at their home and only needed a couple of hours to get back. Both told a similar story about how they gradually comprehended the scale of their achievement while traveling back and retracing the hike from a motorized perspective.

4.4.3 Personal meanings of the journey

When asked to reflect about what their long-distance hiking trip meant for them retrospectively, the participants gave a wide range of ideas and stories. The common overall theme that emerged was that the journey had a lasting positive effect on their lives, which again took various forms and will be presented in chapter 4.5. Since the sample size for this thesis is very small, this wide range of meanings can neither be generalized nor regarded as representative. With my research angle being exploratory, I therefore decided to provide an overview of the hiker's perspectives in order to illustrate their individual variety and to be able to relate them to previously discussed literature.

1) Immersion

As mentioned before, for most hikers their journey was a way to intensively immerse themselves in the landscape, because they had the time to observe and take in any details they were interested in. Walking was perceived as a naturally human pace and a means to travel at reduced speed, and as “going back to our roots, it's the way humans have traveled”, according to Anton. This also resulted in a strong sense of calmness and relaxation. Carl for example explained: “Just to sit in the middle of nowhere and to know, you now just have the time and you can just sit here and can look at everything without hurry, those were wonderful moments.” By citing the German expression “Wo man zu Fuß war, war man wirklich” (literally: 'Where you have been on foot, you have truly been') he describes how the trip was not a mere passing through, but made him feel like he 'really' has been there and has developed a relationship with his surroundings.

Comparing her walking journey with driving to places by car, Marian aptly paraphrases how she experienced her intimate relationship with the landscape:

“By car, I have I feel to be disconnect from the environment. The window of my car is a barrier between him and me. I like a spectator in front of his television screen. When I walk, I am one part of the landscape such as trees, animals, rivers, I am acteur. the relationship is more intimate. By car, we arrive in one nice place without effort, without waiting, such as if in a restaurant, a good dish is served before we had time to have an appetite. To make a bit of effort

and take long time to arrive in wonderful place gives an extra dimension to this panorama”

This feeling of being an active part of the landscape, of becoming assimilated in the surroundings while walking, was voiced by more hikers in different words. Martin calls the sensual experience “permanent”, “slower”, and “more intensive”, because the surroundings constantly flow by. Also Marian's sense of getting special encounters with landscape as a reward for the efforts made during the hike reflected in other interviews. Evelin, Lena and Carl referred to this as “earning something on foot”. Evelin explains that she “feels the earth” more closely when walking than with any other mode of transport, while Bob states that the Via Alpina taught him “that difficult tasks can be very rewarding”.

2) Simplicity

Dealing mainly with basic needs like shelter, food, companionship, and orientation during the hike, prompted many participant to reflect about their personal priorities. Even though they very much relied on the few things they carried around with them, all hikers needed to reduce luggage as much as possible in order to walk comfortably. Some therefore started questioning the role of material values in their lives, which were often seen as something typical of 'modern society'. With their main focus on the walking activity, and on experiencing places and sustaining themselves, other aspects of the hiker's regular life were pushed into the background and felt less important. Living simply, as in having only the necessities that one 'really needs', was described as a positive and inspiring effect of the long-distance hike. Some of the statements below illustrate this notion:

“walking in the alps or any other place is just a good way for anyone to get back on earth and realise what is really precious and necessary in life.” (Tristan)

“My wife and I gave a lecture here in Montana about our trip on the Via Alpina. In our lecture, we explain what a long-distance hike on the Via Alpina can teach us. It teaches us how to be self-reliant. It teaches us how much our bodies can do. It teaches us about the mountain landscape. It teaches us to be grateful for the beauty of this world and for our own health.” (Bob)

“In today's civilized time, everyone thinks they have to shower every evening, they have

to take their shower gels, and they need tons of extra underwear to not give off any smell and that everything is clinically clean and sterile. This is what I most want to recommend people: Reduce the weight, you enjoy the hike much more, if you don't need to carry twenty kilos around. You can say goodbye to many things of civilization.” and “It is enough, if I have some water to drink, and if I have some bread and cheese to eat, so I do not have to go to bed hungry. It is enough.” (Evelin)

“In fact, walk, eat and sleep are enough to spend a good and well filled life! [...] As said before, this trek also showed me that we can live with more simplicity, less materialism, only health and food are mandatory!” (Collin)

In addition, some hikers came to value the basic necessities of life more. Anton explained: “you began to wait the moments when you are able to touch the commodities of normal life: shower, warm meal, bed, good food, and especially those waiting you at home. You learn to appreciate small things of normal life.” Similarly, for Alex two important things he looked forward to when traveling back home was sleeping in his own bed and being able to wash his clothes properly.

In contrast to what could be called a 'normal holiday', which usually adds comforts that are not available in daily life, this journey reduces comforts in favor of the experience. Sometimes these comforts were even consciously reduced and the simplicity of life became an important part of the travel experience, for example in the case of Collin and Lucia with their self-sufficient tent hike. Furthermore, the hiker's positive attitude towards simplicity sometimes reflected in romanticized ideas of local lifestyle as 'traditional', even if they encountered people with difficult livelihoods or witnessed social and economic marginalization.

3) Privilege

The chance to actually do a long-distance hike and take a longer vacation was perceived as a privilege by most participants. For some, it meant a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of to experience personal freedom and adventure. In retrospective, taking the chance when being presented with it was mostly seen as a highly important decision for the hiker's personal life. However, also the experience itself was often referred to as a “gift” or a “present” with lasting effects: “I felt like a lucky devil that I was able to do this. Even though it was exhausting at times,

overall I think I was lucky to get this book contract and that it fitted so well into my life and that I could do this. [...] It was a gift and an enrichment of my life." (Evelin). The trip was more than a holiday for all hikers I spoke to and many treasure their memories for years. Carl compared the journey with buying a TV. While feeling excited about it for the first days, after some time the TV becomes boring. In contrast, the hike on the Via Alpina is a constant source of inspiration for him:

"And with the trip it is the opposite. You torture yourself, you suffer, you sweat, you ask yourself why you are doing this anyways. And when you have a look at the photos a week later, then yes... the experiences virtually increase over the time, instead of decreasing. And yes, that is really true. Today I also looked at some photos and thought, yes, you can really well forget about the daily work for a few minutes and dream back to that time."

Martin referred to it as "a totally positive life experience" and "something that stays", something that he might tell his grandchildren about one day when driving through the areas where he walked. Joseph who goes on long-distance walks every year, described his trips as central to his life and explains that this lifestyle was a long-held dream of his. He jokingly said "I am living the dream".

4) Detachment

The final theme that emerged from the data is the sense of detachment from regular life. Most participants described their walk as a time to distance themselves from their daily challenges, responsibilities and routines, which often resulted in a sense of freedom and relaxation. This notion is interwoven with the themes 'immersion' and 'simplicity', because while feeling attached to the landscape they walked in, the participants felt detached from negative aspects of their regular life, such as materialism, hectic, noise, traffic and crowds.

"During the hike, I put my daily life in parenthesis. I change my life for a month. I forget daily problems, or I think about it a different way (we say in french "prendre du recul" ie take the problem with distance). I always feel during the time of a great hike that I am transparent or invisible to everyone." (Marian)

Some hikers also reported this as a specific expectation before their journey, because

shorter holidays never rendered the level of distance from daily life that they aimed for. “We often experienced when traveling somewhere that the first week is already gone by and you barely managed to get out of daily routines. That usually went quick, but then after a week it's like, okay, and in a few days you already have to go back again”, explained Carl. This was especially true for those hikers who also named reorientation in their personal or professional life as a motivation to walk the Via Alpina. Carl also described feelings of seclusion and unattainability in the Alps, because he was able to just switch of his cell phone and nobody would really know where he was.

4.5 Impact on hiker's lives

There was an overall consensus among the participants that their long-distance hike along the Via Alpina provided them with numerous memories that had positive effects on their lives for a long time after the journey. Two of the experienced interviewees completed their first Via Alpina hike more than four years ago, which was not ideal for the quality of my sample, but showed that their hike was still important for them after quite some time and was still perceived as cherished memory. The participants often felt inspired by their journey, and reported that they saw both themselves and the inhabitants and landscapes of the Alps with different eyes.

In general, the trip along the Via Alpina often “opened the doors” towards new long-distance hikes or similar travel experiences, as Collin formulated it. All the less experienced hikers and beginners stated that they wanted to go on another trip and some already had concrete plans. For the experienced hikers in turn, the Via Alpina was either the first in a row of hikes or one among others. Asked if his life changed in any way after the Via Alpina, Anton said that it will always feel special, because it was his first long-distance hike, and he stated: “It changed a lot as long-distance hiking has come into my life as my main hobby and something I’m wanting to do more and more. Planning and executing new trips has given me so much joy and great experiences.”

Personal change was also discussed frequently. Some hikers reported for example that they became more open and tolerant towards others as a result their social encounters along the way. Others felt that their ability to adapt to change increased and that they gained self-confidence both physically and mentally, after completing their personal challenge. Another aspect was the development of a better understanding of the Alpine cultures, mountain farming or the natural environment of the Alps, which was described as a personal enrichment. For some hikers, the journey influenced personal attitudes towards life, for example prompting Lena and Carl to question their current jobs, motivating Alex to “try out new things more often”, and making Evelin contemplate moving into the mountain area close to her home for some months. As mentioned before, the priorities often shifted during the journey itself. However, the data shows that the experience also resulted in long-term personal reflections.

Another interesting finding from the interviews with the two local Swiss hikers Alex and Martin as well as Evelin from Southern Germany was a changed perspective on Alpine geography. For all three, the Alps represented home to a certain degree as they lived either directly in them or very close by. Even though they always used to spend a lot of time in the mountain areas, they described their Via Alpina hike as a shift in their conception of the Alps. While for Evelin it was mostly the allure of the unknown landscapes in eastern part of the Alpine arc that made her rethink her own images of the Alps, the two Swiss hikers altered their spatial perception of the landscape of their home country. Alex explains: “As a Swiss person, if you already traveled a lot around Switzerland, the geography is somehow really burned into your brain. You always take this curve from Zurich into Bern. And then you suddenly discover that you can actually go straight – so when you're on foot – you can really cross the whole thing in one straight line. That was also fascinating!”

5 Discussion

Based on the results presented above, this study shows that long-distance hiking is a unique type of tourism, characterized by a distinct way of experiencing landscape in all its diversity. It also shows that this kind of journey can have a long-lasting effect on the hikers lives, as previously suggested by research about similar trails. In this chapter, I will discuss some of my findings in relation to the theoretical background outlined in chapter 2 and aim to answer my initial research questions, which were:

- 1. How do long-distance hikers on the Via Alpina experience the Alpine landscape?*
- 2. What do these experiences mean to the hikers?*

Considering the general experiences of long-distance hikers, I can state that most of my findings are consistent with existing research results. Similar to the hikers in the studies by Crust et al. (2011) and den Breejen (2007), the participants felt very relaxed during their journeys, gained enjoyment from landscape appreciation and felt positively detached from their daily lives. Also, their sense of personal achievement and increased physical well-being after completing the trail coincides with previous findings. Like suggested by Crust et al. (2011), long-distance hiking can create the feeling of being in a 'bubble', that is made of the combination of physical activity and time spent in nature away from home. In this case the qualities of Alpine landscape and culture played a prime role in creating this 'bubble'.

Also, several states of consciousness like flow, peak experience and absorption reflected in the hiker's narratives, even though the time difference between the interviews and the actual experiences limits the study's feasibility for interpreting such experiential concepts. Apparently, peak experiences on the Via Alpina happen mostly in connection with extraordinary visual stimuli, meaningful social interactions, and during moments of reaching a pass or summit. Flow experiences in turn often seem to be associated with good hiking conditions in terms of weather, path, and physical ease, which makes the hike effortless and allows the hiker to focus on positive impressions (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

In terms of motivation, most answers reflected previous knowledge and confirms den

Breejen's (2007) suggestion, that long-distance hiking is of multi-motivational character, but also indicates the significance of trail and area characteristics for the motivations. The participants' answers often resemble the findings of Power Bratton (2012) for the Appalachian Trail regarding personal motivations, but indicate different attitudes towards local heritage along the way as for most hikers the Via Alpina does not represent images of their own national identity, but European cultural diversity.

Remarkably, most hikers did not only feel mentally refreshed after their journey because they had time to reflect about personal issues, but mainly because they appreciated the simplicity of life during the hike. The need to let go from complicated thoughts reflected throughout the interviews. Maddrell (2013) suggests that “the role of movement and rhythm can cause the walker to simultaneously separate from and still the claims of everyday life” (p. 68). This is essentially what many participants described from their perspective after the hike, referring to it as a conscious decision to be unavailable to the responsibilities of regular life for a while, and deal with only fundamental human needs and physical challenges instead. Furthermore, the results sometimes indicated typical ideals of 'simple' local lifestyle compared to the hikers's own hardships of 'modern' life and showed romanticized notions of Alpine landscape (Edensor, 2000; Seaton, 2012).

In combination with the reported outcomes of the trip, these findings match with the model of transformative effects of long-distance walking suggested by Saunders et al. (2014). The hikers reported positive changes of their personal attitudes as well as life priorities, independent of any previous personal struggles. Especially the aspects social interactions and physical well-being lead to positive impacts on the hikers lives.

With regards to research question one, the most important aspect of the Via Alpina hiking experience appears to be the intensive immersion in Alpine landscape and the strong relationship hikers develop with it. Besides aesthetic appreciation, also the sensual engagement with the natural surroundings and the chance to educate oneself about Alpine culture played an important role for the hikers. In his account on the sensual experiences on the beach, Obrador (2012) suggests that “the haptic, the emotional and the cultural dimensions of the beach are indistinguishable and mutually constitutive”. Apparently, this can be transferred to hiking

experiences in the Alpine landscape, as these aspects show to influence each other and significantly inform the hiker's perceptions. In addition, their narratives demonstrate that even though the practice of walking seems mundane and simple, it was specific landscape setting and its affective material features that made the experience special (Lorimer, 2011). For all participants, their hike did not resemble a usual holiday and stands out even years after, indicating priorities beyond visual consumption as proposed by Wachter (2003).

This means that other than suggested by the concept of the tourist gaze, the hikers did not see themselves as spectators of mountain views, but often felt as a part of their surroundings and therefore confirm the notion of walking being an embodied practice. Their accounts show that they perceived the barrier between themselves and their surroundings as smaller than with other means of travel. The slow pace of walking, which was often associated with traveling on a 'human scale', supported this perception and allowed the sensual appreciation of details that might have been neglected otherwise, such as distinct noise or smell.

As my argumentation was inspired by non-representational theory, I suggested that the role of the hiker's body in landscape experience should be equally taken into account as the cognitive aspects constituted by their personal background, values and beliefs. The results confirm this notion, showing that the personal reflections of the hikers are informed by their physical and their mental relationship with Alpine landscape. Waitt et al. (2009) refer to this relationship as 'doing' nature and argues that our understanding of landscape is informed by how human and non-human actors perform it. Additionally, the participants highlighted the important role of their physical conditions for their journey and consciously reflected on the change of their body during the hike as being a part of the experience itself.

What is more, the characteristics of the Via Alpina as a long-distance trails with a cultural 'mission' proved to be an important factor in the landscape experience of the hikers. On the one hand the trail provided guidance and safety to the travelers, and constituted the strongest factor of landscape mediation. On the other hand, it also gained access to some dramatic, secluded and unusual places, inducing a sense of adventure and personal challenge for the participants, and it made immediate encounters with local inhabitants possible. According to Markwell (2001), the more tourists feel independent from mediation by tourism infrastructure, the more likely they

are to renegotiate normative behavior and experience a genuine relationship with landscape. The hiker's stories suggest that they frequently experienced such moments, in particular through unexpected and emotional social interactions as well as rare animal sightings.

The hiker's feelings of connectedness and active participation in landscape in turn help answering my second research question. Like previously suggested, the personal meaning of the walk does not derive from walking as a means of transport, but as a way to co-create landscape by walking through it (Maddrell, 2013; Tilley, 2012). In other words, "As walking becomes a natural practice to be indulged in for its own sake, so [...] it can become a means to contact the Earth, to be at one with 'nature', even to be deemed therapeutic" (Thrift, 2008, p. 68). The participants described their hikes as constant flow of new impressions, both of their surroundings and themselves, while also continuously changing their own perspective. According to Ingold (2004) this 'flow' makes mobile experiences special. By comparing it with being able to walk 'around' a material object as compared to viewing an image from only one angle, he illustrates how walking adds more dimensions to an experience. In my study, both foreigners and the participants that lived close to the Alps saw the journey as a discovery, simply because they choose such a different way to move through it.

In general, the personal meanings of the journey seems to be fundamentally influenced by how the hikers positioned themselves in the phenomena of the Alpine experience. Not only the long-distance hike as a way to travel, but also the landscape of the Alps is shaped by strong contradictions, that also reflected in the attitudes of the hikers: They aimed to cross huge distances, but choose the possibly slowest method of transportation. They focused on basic needs, but simultaneously contemplated big issues of life such as job change or family relationships. They were stunned by dramatic wilderness of the mountain landscapes, but encountered century-old traditions of mountain farming only one valley further. They felt utterly distanced from the world, but experienced moments of deep human connection and mutual understanding. They felt now shouting in triumph, then sunk in despair. And they discovered one of the most peripheral areas of central Europe, but still seemed to encounter one of its cultural centers.

In their narratives, the participants often explained that it was this contrast and unique

combination that made their experience so attractive. This confirms that the conceptional background of the Via Alpina trails lives up to their practical layout. Nevertheless, the meanings of the hiking experience are just as much co-created by the hiker, because the trails offer a high degree of individuality and challenge the common understanding of Alpine tourism that still dominates the tourism industry. In this respect, many ideas of the slow travel movement as well as sustainable tourism occur in my results, but are barely formulated as such by the participants themselves. Long-distance hikers therefore appear to make conscious decisions about their means of travel mainly with regards to their personal lifestyles and desired experiences, but less out of socio-political opinions.

6 Conclusion

In summary, this thesis gained some significant insights into the embodied experiences of long-distance hikers on the Via Alpina. It was demonstrated that their motivations, encounters with natural and cultural environment, and social interactions depend very much on their individual backgrounds and chosen trails. However, it can also be stated that long-distance hiking is generally characterized by a longing for individuality, intensive multi-sensual engagement with landscape, and a mental and physical detachment from daily life. In every case, the hikers' journeys differed substantially from traditional forms of tourism in the Alps, especially because they constitute an important milestone in the lives of the hikers, functioned as a lasting inspiration and treasured memory to dream back to in difficult times, and sometimes lead to major changes in the lives of the hikers.

By exploring different theoretical accounts on walking and landscape experience in existing literature, I gained an overall idea of how long-distance hiking can be scientifically understood. Even though some concepts, like serious leisure or slow travel, seem useful, but unrelated at first, their essential theoretical angle is similar. It bases on the idea to make sense of tourism experiences beyond the visual engagement with places and attractions, and adds the concept of walking as an active, embodied practice to the often one-dimensional aspect of representation and cognitive understanding. Employing a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach towards this topic proved useful for finding subjective attitudes and narratives, that also concerned physical and emotional experiences and went beyond factual statements of the practicality of long-distance hiking.

Future research should deepen the scope of long-distance hiking experiences in terms of trail characteristics, gender differences, the role of the hikers' experience level, and the differences between long-distance hikers that walk alone or with a companion. These questions arose during my data interpretation, but could not be taken into account due to scope of the thesis and quality of the data. In order to establish a clear theoretical model it would also be useful to compare long-distance hiking with similar types of tourism, such as trekking without relying on trails or long-distance cycling in, terms of the way landscapes are experienced

through embodiment and physical mediation. Another interesting aspect that emerged from my data is the self-perception of the hikers towards other tourists. They often felt alienated when encountering large groups or day-trippers who did not hike. Finally, with regards to the Alps as a tourism region, more attention should be paid to the perception of marginal, less developed areas by tourists. Scientific publications focus a lot on structural characteristics from an economic perspective, but not on how they shape individual encounters from the point of view from the tourist (in this case the hiker) and the inhabitant.

As already mentioned in the methodology chapter, the main limitation for this research is the small sample size. This does not allow much consideration of the hiker's age, gender, occupation, experience level or nationality when interpreting the data. Especially these characteristics of hikers could however be interesting parameters for research (Crust et al., 2011). Yet, this study does not aim on making generalized statements, but rather wants to contribute partly to the better understanding of walking holidays. Since I chose the participants mainly based on their availability and the contact information provided in their blogs, my sample selection was not random. Yet, Jordan & Gibson (2004) suggest that this problem can be dealt with by developing awareness about it as a researcher and treating the data accordingly: "However, as with all 'hard-to-reach' populations, sometimes researchers have to work within the constraints of available research participants and take account of the possibility that they have spoken to only a selection of the possible research participants in their discussion of the generalisability of their data" (p. 224).

Moreover, as mentioned before, the lack of data gathered directly during the participant's hikes and relying solely on their memories poses the issue of losing relevant insights. Through being aware of the distance between experience and data collection, this study can still capture individual meanings and analyze them as such. As a researcher I kept in mind that the interview data does not represent experiential snap-shots, but is shaped by participant's personal reflection and events after the trip. Therefore the hiker's life experiences after the Via Alpina and also the travel experiences of similar trips undertaken afterward probably influence the results presented above. To this effect however, Lorimer (2011) recommends that walking studies should reach beyond its physical aspects, and include the coming to terms with emotional experiences and the creation of memories as well.

Since my thesis is underpinned by a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, my own role as the researcher needs to be recognized as an intrinsic part of the research process. I cannot bracket myself and my personal values, knowledge, and attitudes from my data interpretations (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). I noticed that I am very emotionally invested with this topic and felt great empathy with the participants. I have many personal childhood memories of hiking in the Alps as well as in my home region, which possibly influence the way I understand the experiences of the interviewees. At the same time this allowed me to grasp their meaning easily when they talked about equipment or trail conditions, because I have a general understanding of this type of activity and the mountain landscape.

7 References

Anderson, B.M. (2012). The construction of an alpine landscape: building, representing and affecting the Eastern Alps, c. 1885-1914. *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 29(2), 155-183.

Alpine Convention (2010). *Reference Guide: Alpine Signals 1*. Innsbruck: Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention.

Barsham, D. and Hitchcock, M. (2012). 'Prophets of nature': Romantic ideals of nature and their continuing relevance for tourism today. In: Holden, A. and Fennel, D.A. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Tourism and the Environment* (pp. 54-64). London: Routledge.

Bätzing, W., Perlik, M. and Dekleva, M. (1996). Urbanization and Depopulation in the Alps. *Mountain Research and Development*, 16(4), 335-350.

Beza, B.B. (2010). The aesthetic value of a mountain landscape: A study of the Mt. Everest Trek. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 97, 306-317.

Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Bold, V. and Gillespie, S. (2009). The Southern Upland Way: Exploring Landscape and Culture. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 15(2-3), 245-257.

Boller, F., Hunziker, M., Conedera, M., Elsasser, H. and Krebs, P. (2010). Fascinating Remoteness: The Dilemma of Hiking Tourism Development in Peripheral Mountain Areas. *Mountain Research and Development*, 30(4), 320-331.

Bourdeau, P. (2009). From après-ski to après-tourism: the Alps in transition? Reflections based on the French situation. *Journal of Alpine Research*, 97(3), 2-9.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Carolan, M.S. (2008). More-than-Representational Knowledge/s of the Countryside: How We Think as Bodies. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 48(4), 408-422.

Chaumereuil, G. and Morelle, N. (2013a). *Hiking the Via Alpina: And first, a bit of history*. Available: <http://www.via-alpina.org/en/page/33/and-first-a-bit-of-history>. Last accessed: 17-11-2013.

Chaumereuil, G. and Morelle, N. (2013b). *Hiking the Via Alpina: The Via Alpina in figures*. Available: <http://www.via-alpina.org/en/page/200/the-via-alpina-in-figures>. Last accessed: 17-11-2013.

Cresswell, T. (2010). Towards a politics of mobility, *Environment and Planning. Society and Space*, 28, 17-31.

Cresswell, T. and Merriman, P. (2011). Introduction. In: Cresswell, T. and Merriman, P. (eds), *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (pp. 19-31). Farnham: Ashgate.

Crevar, A. (2007). *Hiking the Alps from End to End: Europe's new Via Alpina is a 3,100-mile (4,989-kilometer), high-altitude answer to the Appalachian Trail*. Available: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/travel/alps/alps.html>. Last accessed: 04-03-1-2014.

Crouch, D., Aronsson, L. and Wahlström, L. (2001). Tourist encounters. *Tourist Studies*, 1(3), 253-270.

Crust, L., Keegan, R., Piggott, D. and Swann, C. (2011). Walking the Walk: A Phenomenological Study of Long Distance Walking. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 23, 243-262.

Davies, N.J., Lumsdon, L.M. and Weston, R. (2012). Developing Recreational Trails: Motivations for Recreational Walking. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 9(1), 77-88.

Den Breejen, L. (2007). The experiences of long distance walking: A case study of the West Highland Way in Scotland. *Tourism Management*, 28, 1417-1427.

Deutscher Alpenverein e.V. - DAV (2013). *Info Wege: Die Via Alpina – Weitwandern durch acht Alpenstaaten*. Available: http://www.alpenverein.de/huetten-wege-touren/wege/weitwandern-via-alpina_aid_10218.html. Last accessed: 17-11-2013.

Deutscher Alpenverein e.V. - DAV (2014). *Info Geschichte: Geschichte des DAV*. Available: http://www.alpenverein.de/der-dav/geschichte-des-dav_aid_12067.html. Last accessed: 17-11-2014.

Dickinson, J. and Lumsdon, L. (2010). *Slow Travel and Tourism*. London: Earthwatch.

Digance, J. (2006). Religious and secular pilgrimage: Journeys redolent with meaning. In: Timothy, D. and Olsen, D. (eds), *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys* (pp. 36-48). London: Routledge.

Dorin-Paul, B. (2013). Sustainable tourism and its forms: a theoretical approach. *The Journal of the Faculty of Economics, University of Oradea*, 1, 759-767.

Doughty, K. (2011). *Walking and Well-being: Landscape, affect, rhythm (PhD thesis)*. University of Southampton.

Dreyer, A., Menzel, A. and Endreß, M. (2010). *Wandertourismus: Kundengruppen*,

Destinationsmarketing, Gesundheitsaspekte. München: Oldenbourg Verlag.

Edensor, T. (2000). Walking in the British Countryside: Reflexivity, Embodied Practices and Ways to Escape. *Body & Society*, 6, 81-106.

Edensor, T. (2010). Walking in rhythms: place, regulation, style and the flow of experience. *Visual Studies*, 25(1), 69-79.

Flick, U. (2009). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Flick, U., van Kardoff, E. and Steinke, I. (2004). What is Qualitative Research: An Introduction to the Field. In: Flick, U., van Kardoff, E. and Steinke, I. (eds.), *A Companion to Qualitative Research* (pp. 1-12). London: Sage.

Franch, M., Martini, U., Buffa, F. and Parisi, G. (2008). 4L tourism (landscape, leisure, learning and limit): responding to new motivations and expectations of tourists to improve the competitiveness of Alpine destinations in a sustainable way. *Tourism Review*, 63(1), 4-14.

Fredman, P. and Tyrväinen, L. (2010). Frontiers in Nature-Based Tourism. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 10(3), 177-189.

Gondolo, A., Chappaz, G. and Morelle, N. (2004). *Via Alpina Quality Guide*. Grenoble: Via Alpina Quality Group.

Grupp, P. (2008). *Faszination Berg: die Geschichte des Alpinismus*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag.

Haldrup, M. and Larsen, J. (2006). Material Cultures of Tourism. *Leisure Studies*, 25(3), 275-289.

Heitmann, S., Robinson, P. and Povey, G. (2011). Slow Food, Slow Cities and Slow Tourism. In: Robinson, P., Heitmann, S. and Dieke, P. (eds), *Research Themes for Tourism*. Cambridge: CABI.

Hockley, A. (2011). *Wayfaring: Making Lines in Landscape (PhD thesis)*. Buckinghamshire New University, Brunel University.

Hookway, N. (2008). 'Entering the blogosphere': some strategies for using blogs in social research. *Qualitative Research*, 8, 91-113.

Hunter, J. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). The Phenomenology of Body-Mind: The Contrasting Cases of Flow in Sports and Contemplation. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 11(3-4), 5-24.

Ingold, T. (2004). Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet. *Journal of Material Culture*, 9, 315-340.

Ingold, T. and Vergunst, J.L. (2008). Introduction. In: Ingold, T. and Vergunst, J.L. (eds), *Ways of*

Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot (pp. 81-91). Farnham: Ashgate.

Jordan, F. and Gibson, H. (2004). Let your data do the talking: Researching the solo travel experiences of British and American women. In: Goodson, L. and Phillimore, J. (eds), *Qualitative Research in Tourism: Ontologies, Epistemologies and Methodologies* (pp. 215-233). London: Routledge.

Kariel, H.G. and Draper, D.L. (1992). Outdoor Recreation in Mountains. *GeoJournal*, 27(1), 97-104.

Lauterbach, B. (2010). Der Berg ruft – Alpentourismus und Kulturtransfer seit dem 18. Jahrhundert. In: Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte Mainz (eds), *Europäische Geschichte Online (EGO)*. Available: <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/lauterbachb-2010-de>. Last accessed: 02-11-2014.

Lee, I., Rexrode, K.M., Cook, N.R., Manson, E.J. and Buring, J.E. (2001). Physical Activity and Coronary Heart Disease in Women: Is “No Pain, No Gain” Passé?. *JAMA*, 285 (11), 1447-1454.

Lehmann, B. and Messerli, P. (2007). The Swiss National Research Programme “Landscapes and habitats of the Alpine Arc”. *Journal of Alpine Research*, 95(4), 2-10.

Littlefield, J. and Siudzinski, R.A. (2012). ‘Hike your own hike’: equipment and serious leisure along the Appalachian Trail. *Leisure Studies*, 31(4), 465–486.

Lorimer, H. (2005). Cultural geography: the busyness of being 'more-than-representational'. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(1), 83-94.

Lorimer, H. (2011). Walking: New Forms and Spaces for Studies of Pedestrianism. In: Cresswell, T. and Merriman, P. (eds), *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (pp. 19-31). Farnham: Ashgate.

Lumsdon, L. and McGrath, P. (2011). Developing a conceptual framework for slow travel: a grounded theory approach. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(3), 265–279.

Macchiavelli, A. (2009). Alpine tourism: Development contradictions and conditions for innovation. *Journal of Alpine Research*, 97(1), 99-110.

Maddrell, A. (2013). Moving and being moved: More-than-walking and talking on pilgrimage walks in the Manx landscape. *Culture and Religion*, 14(1), 63-77.

May, T. (2010). *Our Practices, Our Selves: Or, What it Means to Be Human*. University Park: Penn State Press.

Markwell, K. (2001). “An intimate rendezvous with nature”? Mediating the tourist-nature

experience at three tourist sites in Borneo. *Tourist Studies*, 1(1), 39-57.

Markwell, K., Fullagar, S. and Wilson, E. (2012). Reflecting Upon Slow Travel and Tourism Experiences. In: Fullagar, S., Markwell, K. and Wilson, E. (eds), *Slow Tourism: Experiences and Mobilities* (pp. 227-236). Clevedon: Channel View.

Matos, R. (2012). Can Slow Tourism Bring New Life to Alpine Regions? In: Chon, K.S. (eds), *The Tourism and Leisure Industry: Shaping the Future* (pp. 93-103). London: Routledge.

McGrath, P. (2013). Escape from time: Experience the travel within. In: Elkington, S. and Gammon, S. (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives in Leisure: Meanings, Motives and Lifelong Learning* (pp. 18-27). London: Routledge.

Michael, M. (2000). These Boots Are Made for Walking...: Mundane Technology, the Body and Human-Environment Relations. *Body & Society*, 6(107), 107-126.

Mills, A.S. and Butler, T.S. (2005). Flow Experience Among Appalachian Trail Thru-hikers. In: Peden, J.G. and Schuster, R.M. (eds), *Proceedings of the 2005 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium* (pp. 366-370). Newtown Square: United States Department of Agriculture.

Molz, J.G. (2009). Representing pace in tourism mobilities: staycations, Slow Travel and The Amazing Race. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 7(4), 270-286.

National Secretariat Via Alpina Austria and Germany (2008). *Via Alpina and Ruperti Trail: The long-distance hiking loop through 5 national park and 3 countries*. Innsbruck: Department of Spatial Planning and Nature Conservation of the Austrian Alpine Association (OeAV).

Nepal, S.K. and Chipeniuk, R. (2005). Mountain Tourism: Toward a Conceptual Framework. *Tourism Geographies*, 79(3), 313-333.

Obrador, P. (2012). Touching the Beach. In: Dodge, M. and Paterson, M. (eds), *Touching space, placing touch* (pp. 47-70). Farnham: Ashgate.

Oppermann, M. (1996). Rural Tourism in Southern Germany. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23(1), 86-102.

Pechlaner, H. and Tschurtschenthaler, P. (2003). Tourism Policy, Tourism Organisations and Change Management in Alpine Regions and Destinations: A European Perspective. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 6(6), 508-539.

Pernecky, T. and Jamal, T. (2010). (Hermeneutic) Phenomenology in Tourism Studies. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37(4), 1055-1075.

Pomfret, G. (2006). Mountaineering adventure tourists: a conceptual framework for research.

Tourism Management, 27, 113-123.

Power Bratton, S. (2012). *The Spirit of the Appalachian Trail: Community, Environment, and Belief on a Long-distance Hiking Path*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.

Price, M.F. (1999). Towards co-operation across mountain frontiers: The Alpine Convention. *European Environment*, 9, 83-89.

Rakic, T. and Chambers, D. (2012). Rethinking the Consumption of Places. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(3), 1612-1633.

Rantala, O. (2010). Tourist Practices in the Forest. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37(1), 249-264.

Repiquet, J. and Simon, S. (2015). *Map of the Via Alpina Trails*, used in illustration 4. Available: <http://www.via-alpina.org/>. Last accessed: 17-03-2014.

Saarinen, J. (2005). Tourism in the Northern Wilderness: Wilderness Discourses and the Development of Nature-based Tourism in Northern Finland. In: Hall, M. and Boyd, S. (eds), *Nature-based tourism in peripheral areas: Development or Disaster?* (pp. 36-49). Clevedon: Channel View.

Saunders, R. (2013). Identity, Meaning and Tourism on the Kokoda Trail. In: Norman, A. (ed), *Journeys and Destinations: Studies in Travel, Identity and Meaning* (pp. 23-45). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Saunders, R.E., Laing, J.H. and Weiler, B. (2013). Personal transformation through long-distance walking. In: Felip, S. and Pearce, P. (eds), *Tourist Experience and Fulfilment: Insights from positive psychology*, (pp. 127-146). London: Routledge.

Schwandt, T.A. (2000) 'Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism'. In: N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (eds), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research* (pp. 189-213). London: Thousand Oaks.

Scott, A., Carter, C., Brown, K. and White, V. (2009). 'Seeing is Not Everything': Exploring the Landscape Experiences of Different Publics. *Landscape Research*, 34(4), 397-424.

Seaton, T. (2012). Tourism and romantic myths of nature: The evolution of a discursive relationship. In: Holden, A. and Fennel, D.A. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Tourism and the Environment* (pp. 94-113). London: Routledge.

Sheller, M. and Urry, J. (2006). The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning*, 38, 207-226.

Smith, S.L.J. (1997). Alpine Tourism. Conference Report for 'Alpine Tourism: Sustainability

Reconsidered and Redesigned' (Innsbruck, May 2-5, 1996). *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24(2), 469-470.

Solnit, R. (2001). *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. London: Penguin.

Stebbins, R.A. (1992). *Amateurs, Professionals, and Serious Leisure*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press.

Stebbins, R.A. (2001). Serious Leisure. *Society*, 38(4), 53-57.

Stebbins, R.A. (2007). *Serious Leisure: A Perspective for Our Time*. Piscataway: Transaction Publishers.

Thrift, N. (2008). *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. New York: Routledge.

Tilley, C. (2012). Walking the Past in the Present. In: Arnason, A. (ed), *Landscapes Beyond Land: Routes, Aesthetics, Narratives*. New York: Berghahn.

Tisdell, C.A. and Wilson, C. (2012). *Nature-based Tourism and Conservation: New Economic Insights and Case Studies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Tognina, A. (2004). *Via Alpina brings sustainable tourism to the Alps*, Available: <http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/via-alpina-brings-sustainable-tourism-to-the-alps/4020270>. Last accessed: 17-11-2013.

Verbeek, D.H.P., Bargeman, A. and Mommaas, J.T. (2011). A sustainable tourism mobility passage. *Tourism Review*, 66(4), 45-53.

Wachter, S. (2003). *Nachhaltiger Bergtourismus: Marketingkonzept für den Weitwanderweg Via Reticca*. Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag.

Waite, G., Gill, N. and Head, L. (2009). Walking practice and suburban nature-talk. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 10(1), 41-60.

World Heart Federation – WHF (2013). *Cardiovascular Disease, Steps to a healthy heart: A global partnership to promote walking*. Available: http://www.world-heart-federation.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Healthy_diet__Physical_activity/Walking__Heart_Booklet_-_English_-_FINAL.pdf. Last accessed: 29-03-2014.

Worthington, B. (2005). Sex and shunting: Contrasting aspects of serious leisure within the tourism industry. *Tourist Studies*, 5(3), 225–246.

Wylie, J. (2005). A single day's walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30(2), 234–247.

Appendix 1 – Written email interviews

Anton

What is your general experience with long-distance walking in mountain regions? (for how long, frequency, duration of trips, where)

By that time, 2009, I had no real walking experience in the mountains. I had hiked some day walks in Finnish Lapland and also in northern Norway. As a long-distance hiker, I was a complete novice before the Via Alpina. But I had done sports my whole life, so I was in good physical shape.

After Via Alpina the “hiking bug” has really bitten me so I have walked:

2010 – The Hollands Kustpad, 213km along Dutch Coast, 10 days

2011 – The Cleveland Way, 177km of UK coast and moors, 1 week

2011 – The GR20, 190km of Europe's toughest hiking trail in Corsica, 2 weeks

2012 – The West Highland Way, 152km of Scottish Highland, 1 week

2012 – Hardangervidda through hike, 100km of Norwegian mountain plateau, 5 days

2013 – The GR5, 600km through the French Alps, 1 month

After all these walks I feel pretty experienced about planning and completing a long-distance hike.

Why did you complete a walking journey through the Alps? (in the case of Via Alpina)

The previous autumn I was doing a day walk in northern Norway (Lyngen region). I found myself in a long, green valley, surrounded by real, snow-top mountains. It was something I had never seen before and I instantly knew that I need to see the Alps. The following spring I flew with my girlfriend to Zurich for a long weekend trip. I was able to see the Alps looming in the distance, and I knew then that I had to plan a hike there. I found Lonely Planet's Walking in the Alps book from my local library, and after reading about day walks, there was a note about a longer route that goes through the country. As a competitive person, I was instantly fascinated about that challenge. I then found the Alpine Pass Route guidebook by Cicerone Press and that was it then, the following summer we went to the Alps with my good friend.

What did you expect from your journey before you started walking?

As a first time in the Alps and as my first long-distance hike, everything in front of us was kind of unknown and a true adventure in that sense. I knew it would be tough, I knew my gear was not perfect but most of all, I knew it would be something to remember afterward.

How did you experience your own body during your journey?

I have cross-country skied my whole childhood so I was familiar with long days of physical effort. Your body needs to cope with long hours of constant walking, huge climbs, and usually manage the day without a proper lunch. So in that sense I did very well. I manage to get painful blisters though in the early stages of the Via Alpina but luckily they got healed along the way. I didn't have the best combination of boots and socks so my under feet (especially heels) got always quite sore. But overall I managed without any real problem, no bad muscle pains or knee pains. Most of these problems occurred because of the lack of walking experience, wrong and too heavy gear. I'm skinny but I lost still some weight. It was great to see that there's so much energy in your body to keep going.

To what extent did you have the chance to engage with locals or other travelers?

We stayed every night in hotel/hostel or similar, but most of the time dormitorys were quite empty and we had not much contact with other travelers. But there was few exceptions to this and we get to know some other experienced long-distance walkers who taught us quite a lot. Dealing with locals was mainly customer-client situations, although once we stayed in a guest room of a local Swiss family and it was really nice and I had to use my German skills. Locals were always helpful for example showing the way or helping to find accommodation.

Which impressions did you have about the people that you met?

Hikers are like a big family, especially among the ones who do longer walks. It's easy to chat about the routes, gear, weather and so. Local people in Switzerland were helpful.

How did you experience the Alps? (for example places, mountains, villages, vegetation, animals, architecture, condition of landscape, weather)

The landscapes are just amazing! The weather in July was good, typical weather in the Alps has clear and sunny mornings before in the afternoon clouds appear and it might thunder. We had few really rainy days and once even snow in the higher altitude.

The Alps are like a hiker's highway as the paths are in great condition and well marked, and there is so much services on route. One passes by all the time nice little villages and mountain huts.

It's also great how the landscape changes while you progress towards Lake Geneva and becomes slightly more gentle. The best mountain area is of course the famous Grindelwald area when you pass by the legendary north face of Eiger.

Plenty of Alpine flowers in their full bloom (not necessarily good for an allergic nose:) Unfortunately we didn't see much animals except cows.

How would you describe the Alpine landscapes you walked through? Can you list some adjectives that come to your mind?

Majestic, grand

Which moments from your journey can you remember most clearly? Why?

I remember the beginning, while getting ready in the Sargans train station, when an older and experienced looking muddy hiker came. That French man had just finished the Via Alpina from west to east, with a tent. It was inspirational start for our own journey.

Then another great moment was the last ascent to the last pass of the journey, and you'll see Lake Geneva for the first time. It appears beneath you and you'll realize that the long journey is done, you have reached the other end. It is very emotional moment. (You'll see a similar moment in my GR5 trip video if you'll have a look, <http://vimeo.com/73364471>)

I also remember clearly having a long lunch break a bit side from Kleine Scheidegg train station, watching mass of tourists but at the same time the most beautiful Alpine landscape all over, the line of Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau peaks.

Can you name some emotions you felt frequently during the walk?

Adventurous... walking towards unknown day after day.

Freedom... it's just you and the mountains, everything you need in life is in your backpack. The worries from normal life, school, job etc, are so far away.

Smallness... the grand scale of the mountains makes you feel very tiny, but in a good way; what are your own worries compared to those ancient rock formations? The feeling really kills your own ego and it's liberating.

Exhaustion... at the end of the day there was always a long stretch of road walking to reach the village and I remember being quite dead on those moments.

Joy... reaching another pass, reaching the day's goal, reaching the last pass and Lake Geneva.

Sadness... missing your girlfriend or couple at home is the hardest feeling during a long walk.

Companionship... when walking with a hiking buddy, you share a great adventure together. It was not always perfect but overall I felt great companionship.

Waiting... you began to wait the moments when you are able to touch the commodities of normal life: shower, warm meal, bed, good food, and especially those waiting you at home. You learn to appreciate small things of normal life.

For you personally, what were the biggest challenges during your journey?

Physical and mental challenge was always there but I managed well. Perhaps the biggest challenge was the uncertainty what comes with the lack of hiking experience.

What makes walking through the Alps for you different from other means of travel?

When walking a long distance, there's usually nothing waiting you in the end; it's about the journey itself. I mean if you fly or go by train, there's usually something happening in the destination (people, event, holiday destination etc.)

Walking is going back to our roots, it's the way humans have traveled. It's slow travel on it's best.

How did your journey change you and your life afterwards?

It changed a lot as long-distance hiking has come into my life as my main hobby and something I'm wanting to do more and more. Planning and executing new trips has given me so much joy and great experiences.

What does this journey mean to you now?

It was my first real hike, and it was not easy as a first one (long and arduous). Perhaps because of that it had such an impact. It really opened up new possibilities, to see that I'm able to walk three weeks through Europes greatest mountain range. A huge confidence boost and it will be always the special one as it was my first.

I would love to do Via Alpina, from Sargans to Montreaux again, but with a tent this time.

I would also love to do some of the longer Via Alpina variants.

Bob

What is your general experience with long-distance walking in mountain regions? (for how long, frequency, duration of trips, where)

I took this trip on the Via Alpina with my wife and our daughter. This trip on the Via Alpina was the longest hiking trip we had experienced. My wife and I have taken hiking trips in New Zealand (Milford Track, five days), Switzerland (Lotschental Hohenweg, five days) and the US (several trips of 3-5 days) as well as many day trips in the US, Canada, Switzerland, New Zealand and Great Britain. In addition, our daughter had taken a five-day trip in Chile's Patagonia.

Why did you complete a walking journey through the Alps? (in the case of Via Alpina)

I had always dreamed of hiking hut-to-hut over a long distance in the Alps. Over the years, I had visited Switzerland with my parents, my wife and our children. I had taken day trips and trips of up to five days on trails in the Alps, but very much wanted to experience a longer trip. To me, the Via Alpina green trail offers a combination that is unique: world-class mountain scenery, agricultural lands, comfortable hut lodging, excellent food and culture. That combination is not available anywhere in North America. I wanted to immerse myself in the Alps for a longer period of time, to distance myself from automobiles and roads, and to get as close to Swiss culture as possible. Also, I enjoy the freedom of hiking: being self-reliant and independent.

What did you expect from your journey before you started walking?

Although I bought a guidebook on the Via Alpina green trail, used the Via Alpina website, read blogs of other Via Alpinists and viewed photos and videos taken on the Via Alpina, I still was not sure of some things. For example, how difficult would the descent from Hohturli be? How many people would we encounter on the trail? From our previous hiking trips in Switzerland, we had a good idea of what the walking would be like.

How did you experience your own body during your journey?

I felt very good while on the Via Alpina. The combination of exercise, fresh and clean air, good food, comfortable lodging and camaraderie was very good for my health. I greatly enjoy traveling "under my own power."

My wife has a disease called fibromyalgia, which causes pain and fatigue. But she felt good on this trip, and finds that hiking is an excellent way to deal with this disease, because it keeps the muscles moving.

To what extent did you have the chance to engage with locals or other travelers?

We found that every hiker we met on the Via Alpina, no matter where they came from, would greet us as we passed. Sometimes the greeting was in Swiss dialect, sometimes in German, other

times French, Italian, English or various other languages. On the very steep descent from Hohturli on stairs, hikers would help each other as they passed. At huts, we enjoyed talking with the proprietors and with guests. Our daughter lived in Switzerland for a year, and speaks German and French, and a little Swiss dialect. My wife and I speak just a few words and phrases of German and Swiss dialect. When we spoke a little of the local language, Swiss people accepted us in a very friendly and courteous manner.

Several times, proprietors of huts took a special interest in us when we told them that we were hiking the Via Alpina from Lenk to Engelberg. Apparently, few Americans make such trips. Also, few Americans speak a foreign language!

Which impressions did you have about the people that you met?

We were very surprised to meet only two Americans on the Via Alpina. Those two Americans were hiking only two days on the trail, and were not prepared for alpine hiking. We had expected to meet quite a few experienced American hikers. We met some English-speakers from Canada, Britain and Australia. We found that Swiss and German hikers were very pleasant and courteous, and also were very experienced. During our trip on the Via Alpina, we met only two other hikers who were hiking farther than we were hiking. One was a British man who was hiking the entire green trail from East to West (with a Swiss friend joining him for a few days). The other was a Canadian woman hiking the green trail from East to West alone. We had expected to meet many other hikers who were going a long distance. It seemed as if most people on the Via Alpina were making trips of 1-3 days.

How did you experience the Alps? (for example places, mountains, villages, vegetation, animals, architecture, condition of landscape, weather)

For someone from North America, the Via Alpina green trail offers a completely different hiking experience. In North America, hiking across countryside (from town to town, across farms) is impossible. That is one reason why we enjoyed the Via Alpina green trail: for us, it was very enjoyable (and educational) to hike through meadows where a farmer was cutting hay, to walk through a herd of dairy cows, to walk up to a farmhouse and buy cheese and sausage made there. Those experiences connected us to agriculture and the growing of food.

Also, there are very few huts in North America, and usually they do not serve good food. The huts along the Via Alpina offer inexpensive lodging with comfort and style.

For me, the Via Alpina green trail also provided a well-rounded experience. There were high alpine passes with views of glaciers and peaks, but there were also meadows and towns. Most of the huts we stayed in were of very beautiful, traditional architecture. The food served was plentiful and of high quality.

We were surprised, and disappointed, not to see much wildlife while on the Via Alpina. In North America, we are accustomed to seeing much wildlife while walking (bears, elk, deer, moose, mountain sheep, mountain goats, eagles, etc). But while on the Via Alpina, we saw very few birds and just two chamois.

In North America, hiking is done almost exclusively on trails. We North Americans are surprised when the Via Alpina requires walking on roads. At one point in our Via Alpina hike, we were hiking along a very narrow road (hiking from Grindelwald to Grosse Scheidegg). A bus approached, and slowed to a crawl, with the wheels rolling within inches of our boots.

We enjoyed the benches that often are placed along wanderweg on the Via Alpina. They provided an opportunity to stop and relax, read, enjoy the view and eat a snack. Again, benches along trails are very rare in North America.

How would you describe the Alpine landscapes you walked through? Can you list some adjectives that come to your mind?

To a North American (especially one who lives in Montana, a very mountainous and sparsely populated state in the Rocky Mountains), it is surprising to see how “inhabited” the Alps are. Here in Montana, there are no farms or ranches in high elevation, alpine areas. But along the Via Alpina, we encountered farms, dairy cows and goats at very high elevations, above treeline. However, we were very impressed at how well Alpine farms, houses and towns complement the Alpine landscape.

To describe the Alpine passes: strenuous, challenging, windswept

To describe the countryside: welcoming, productive

To describe the towns: traditional, friendly to hikers

Which moments from your journey can you remember most clearly? Why?

I’ll mention two moments.

First, I remember reaching Hohturli pass after a long and difficult ascent. I looked back, and could trace our trail coming up from Oeschinensee, and could also see where we had hiked two and three days earlier. Then, looking forward, I could see into a new valley, and ahead into areas we would reach two, three and four days later. I had never experienced such a perspective, covering so much land by foot and being able to trace my journey by sight.

Second, I remember arriving at a particular hut, where we were the only guests. The proprietress greeted us warmly and showed us our room. We expected to eat cheese and bread from our packs for dinner, because this hut did not serve dinner to guests on Friday night. But then the proprietress surprised us by asking when we would like to eat dinner. When she learned we were hiking the Via Alpina from Lenk to Engelberg, she decided to make dinner for us. She was honoring us for our adventure.

Can you name some emotions you felt frequently during the walk?

While ascending a steep trail: anticipation

When on top of a pass: exhilaration

When in a hut: relaxation

For you personally, what were the biggest challenges during your journey?

Ascending steep trails was challenging, but very rewarding.

Every afternoon, we watched the sky for thunderstorms. We did not want to be high above treeline during a thunderstorm and lightning. Fortunately, we always reached the hut before the storm began.

What makes walking through the Alps for you different from other means of travel?

I have driven a car through the Alps, and ridden trains, buses and cable cars as well. I prefer walking through the Alps, because the experience of walking immerses me in the alpine experience. I hear more of the sounds (cowbells, wind, waterfalls). I see more of the sights. I experience the feeling of achievement when I rely on my own legs to travel across the land. Also, a hiking trip on the Via Alpina offers an excellent opportunity for sustainable travel and ecotourism, using a train or bus to reach the trail, and then walking.

How did your journey change you and your life afterwards?

My wife and I gave a lecture here in Montana about our trip on the Via Alpina. In our lecture, we explain what a long-distance hike on the Via Alpina can teach us. It teaches us how to be self-reliant. It teaches us how much our bodies can do. It teaches us about the mountain landscape. It teaches us to be grateful for the beauty of this world and for our own health. It teaches us that difficult tasks can be very rewarding.

What does this journey mean to you now?

We hope to return to Switzerland within a few years to continue our trip on the Via Alpina green trail. During our 2013 hike on the Via Alpina, we did not have enough money to hike the entire trail. We are now saving money, in hopes of finishing the trip.

Our 2013 trip on the Via Alpina was also an excellent opportunity for my wife and me to spend time with our daughter. Spending many days on the trail together is very rewarding.

Marian

What is your general experience with long-distance walking in mountain regions? (for how long, frequency, duration of trips, where)

I often walk on the mountains and other places. I make short trips (1 day or few days) in the Vosges near the city where I live. I make this walking the weekend or during my free days because I have a job. And I'm not free all days (as many people !). I also a bit longer walkings (one week to 10 days) in my holidays. In 2010, I crossed the "Ile de la Réunion" in 10 days. Recently, I went to the south of France on the "Sentier cathare" (12 days in October – November 2013) and in Auvergne (Massif central) with snowshoes (8 days in February 2014).

I am also in summer, longer hikes during 1 month or more : In 2008, I crossed the France by the GR5 from Wissembourg (North of Alsace) to Menton (Côte d'Azur) by the Vosges, Jura and the Alps in 60 steps approximately. In 2009, I was crossing the Pyrénées from Hendaye (Atlantic Ocean) to Banyuls (Mediterranean Sea) by the GR10 in 39 days. In 2010, I started the Via Alpina and since 2010 (in July 2011 and July 2012) I walk on a portion of the Via Alpina about a month. At this day, I almost crossing between Monaco and Trieste. 4 steps are missing to my crossing because I had an accident in Slovénia and I was forced to stop. In July 2013, I took another route of the Via Alpina (there are five routes) and I intend to return in July 2014 where I had stopped in 2013 to finish this route.

Why did you complete a walking journey through the Alps? (in the case of Via Alpina)

Consider and make a complete course is a satisfaction for me. The road is like a book that tells a story. When I start reading a book, I not only want to read the beginning, or a passage or an abstract. I want to read all the chapters and know the end. In 2012, 4 steps before the end (as I said in my previous answer) I had a serious accident. I could not continue. I felt a lot of frustration and sadness. And even anger. And yet I had walked more than a month and 4 steps represented little ! But this forced stop deprived me of the feeling of satisfaction, euphoria, nostalgia when we reach the end of the project. I had a sense of failure, as the mountaineer who must renounce to go on the summit because the conditions are dangerous.

What did you expect from your journey before you started walking?

Fundamentally, I like the activity of walking in the mountains or elsewhere. I feel pleasure and well-being when I walk. For the people who don't like walking, this sensation is quite difficult to understand. Walking doesn't procure an activity for the muscles, heart and breathing. She constantly biases the senses: sight (most of) hearing. So walk in a nice landscape with a beautiful weather, is very exciting. Personally, I am allways interesting what I see : nature, people, human activities, etc.. Because the walking is a slow progression, it gives time to observe, discover, enjoy.

How did you experience your own body during your journey?

During the hike, the body adapts gradually. It takes a few days to reach optimum fitness.

Initially, fatigue can be very important if the steps are too long or too difficult. We have to be a little unambitious in the early days. Then, we can increase the difficulty (elevation, distance). Of course, there may be problems such as tendonitis, joint pain, irritation (blister?). Personally, I was at the end of the first period of Via Alpina knee tendonitis. Tendonitis are the problems for many hikers that often cause forced stops.

To what extent did you have the chance to engage with locals or other travelers?

You meet during a hike three interlocutors types:

- Hikers: you see the hikers on the trail and in the gites and shelters. We talk and if we walk on the same route for several days, we can walk and spend the evenings together. Links can be created that can persist after the walk.
- Keepers of refuges or shelters. Relationships are often friendly and especially when there are few people. In my crossing of the Alps (GR5) and the Pyrenees, I was often the only customer. I had a great evening to chat with keepers or eat with them.
- We meet locals (shepherds, residents, shopkeepers ...) Brief but friendly dialogs and sometimes essential when we have lost the way. Of the "Sentier Cathare" on group of mushroom pickers invited me on a very gourmet picnic. It was a beautiful moment !

For long trips, I walk alone. When you are alone, the contacts are more frequent because you're more available, more open to other people. When you're in a group, you're less open to others, as you discuss with group members. Also, people (locals or other travelers) you meet speak more easily with an isolated group with a person. When I hike alone, I think it's more rewarding if we walk in group: in, you speaks about many things that are foreign to the hike, and we forget to see, to hear what is around.

Which impressions did you have about the people that you met?

The vast majority of people (locals or other travelers) I meet are friendly, helpful and courteous. For example, motorists took me drive when I had a long walk on the road. Many hikers indicated to me the way and sometimes some hikers accompanied me. I think when we walk, we are appeased and serene. and we have a very positive vision of the people. If we meet these same people when we are stressed (for example at work), relationships will be less cordial.

How did you experience the Alps? (for example places, mountains, villages, vegetation, animals, architecture, condition of landscape, weather)

I don't know if I understand the question exactly. The experiences of different places is a varied succession feeling:

Villages as interesting for architecture of houses and Heritage, locals, human activities that we

can discover . The villages are reassuring points because we can find to sleep, eat , buy pharmacy and food , money , doctor ...

Vegetation: I love discovering species that we see in the mountains. When I come back at home I will inform me to know the plants that I brought photos. I search documentations in books and internet.

Wild animals are rare and unforgettable shows. It is the privilege of hiking (at feet). Wild places like the cols (pass) and sommits where there are no roads for cars are also privileges for hikers.

Hiking is to view wild places, unlike motorized means of transport (car , telepherics , small trains). These areas are " no man's land " that are spectacular , lunar , wonderful, ... and sometimes distressing when they are very far from civilization valleys and the weather is very bad !

How would you describe the Alpine landscapes you walked through? Can you list some adjectives that come to your mind?

Before my first walkings in the mountains, I had in mind the classic pictures found in books and magazines: snowy peaks, meadows with cows which have bells, typical villages with wooden houses. etc.. Of course, these pictures exist and are wonderful, but the montains are not only this . Mountains (the Alps in particular) need to find resources to survive. So I discovered, new villages (as elsewhere), ski resorts, telepheric, market center,etc: a buissness related to winter sports and tourism. This is not that I really like, but I understand that locals need to find activities that allow them to live. Despite this activities, there are still large places dedicated to wild nature that are beautiful. This is the promise of those places that pushes to advance.

There is an exceptional aspect in walking in mountains is the great diversity of views despite the slow progress. In a few hours you can see successively: a village and a forest, then alpine meadows, then minerals and arid landscapes and finally snow. Often my friends ask me if walking is not monotonous. No, it's never monotonous, because the landscapes are always different.

Which moments from your journey can you remember most clearly? Why?

The moments I remember most accurately:

- those who were very exceptional: beautiful lanscapes, splendid weather. A beautiful light combined with a beautiful landscape gives a magical result. In Via Alpina, I had the chance to make some steps in these conditions: In the Dolomites (Italia), in the Triglav (Slovenia), the Aletsch Glacier (Switzerland), etc. These steps creates feelings of euphoria, like a drug (i guess! I'm not drug-addict)

- those were very difficult. All steps are not wonderful or easy and sometimes I was discouraged. For example, the storm in the mountains is very scary. I have been confronted

several times, and each time I am very scared. Steps where we made big mistakes are also memorable moments.

- However, if the steps with a repetitive path and no exceptional views, don't leave in memory except if a significant event occurs.

Can you name some emotions you felt frequently during the walk?

- enthusiasm, excitement, fullness, for the magnificent stages.

- discouragement, fear, anger in difficult stages. I sometimes felt (but rarely) that I don't have the level to face difficulty.

- sense of failure when I can not pass through a pass because too snow or bad weather conditions.

For you personally, what were the biggest challenges during your journey?

Before I begin a great hike, the challenge was:

- prove me my ability to follow a right route without (too) mistake. I precise that I walk alone, and I can not count on the help of a teammate. I was afraid to lose me, or don't understand the markup.

- the distance which appears for me very great.

- trying to get by in an unknown location. For via alpina, the of the language because that I speak little german.

After the hike:

- I had the sense of progrssing in my capacity "orientation." The difficulty to find the way and understand the marup was punctual.

- distance, seemed rather short after the end of my walking.

- I learned that was unsuspected resources to cope in an unfamiliar place, to be understood and understand others. At the end of the walk, I know a lot about myself (capabilities, limitations, weaknesses ...)

What makes walking through the Alps for you different from other means of travel?

By car, I have I feel to be disconnect from the environment. The window of my car is a barrier between him and me. I like a spectator in front of his television screen. When I walk, I am one part of the landscape such as trees, animals, rivers, I am acteur. the relationship is more intimate.

By car, we arrive in one nice place without effort, without waiting, such as if in a restaurant, a

good dish is served before we had time to have an appetite.

To make a bit of effort and take long time to arrive in wonderful place gives an extra dimension to this panorama. However, I understand that everyone can not do long stages to arrive at an admirable site.

How did your journey change you and your life afterwards?

During the hike, I put my daily life in parenthesis. I change my life for a month. I forget daily problems, or I think about it a different way (we say in french "prendre du recul" ie take the problem with distance). I always feel during the time of a great hike that I am transparent or invisible to everyone.

My life does not change after a hike. Except, I have the head full of beautiful memories. When the walk is finish, I return to my normal life, but I'm glad this bracket that allowed me to recharge my batteries. it helps me, like any satisfactory activity, get on with life.

What does this journey mean to you now?

Walking leave unforgettable and beautiful memories. But they also give me the feeling of having enriched my knowledge of the fauna, flora, geography, history, customs, regions or countries visited.

On the human level, seeing other people, other ways of life, it is an opening to other cultures and greater tolerance.

Tristan

What is your general experience with long-distance walking in mountain regions? (for how long, frequency, duration of trips, where)

before 2006, worked a lot and did not do much outdoor activities (just another sheep among others). Age 30 got cancer and thanks to that because it makes me start doing things. Since 2007, hiked and cycled in NON mountain area. Short distance and less than 2 weeks in the French Alps and Pyrénées. Northern Spain and Japan.

came to long distance mountain area hiking recently (summer 2012)

First mountain long distance in 2012 GR10 - Banyuls - Hendaye: Pyrénées crossing 30 days

2013 - Hiked and cycled in mountain area in Taiwan 2 month (Yushan national park)

2013 - Via Alpina : Monaco - Trieste 76 days hiking

Why did you complete a walking journey through the Alps? (in the case of Via Alpina)

during GR10 journey, exchanged with other hikers and heard about a trail that crosses 8 countries in the Alps..that was it. Via Alpina came to me.

Used to get what I call « high » when hiking..non mountain area became to easy..then 30 days in the Pyrénées mountain was too short, wanted something longer and harder to keep this sensation

From the past experienced (non mountain long hiking trip) I had I knew I could do it and I had the condition for it and getting information about it was easy from via-alpina.org

What did you expect from your journey before you started walking?

Expected to be difficult because being scared of the unknown and from family and most people negative attitude towards unknown

How did you experience your own body during your journey?

awesome, endorphine factory was working full speed. Really great feelings all the way. Top condition all the time. Never felt in a better shape in my life that during that journey. Felt so confident about myself that about half way, was thinking about doing the way back from Trieste to Monaco following different trail.

For me, the sensation is close to getting « high » especially when hiking up to reach a pass and not knowing what the trail is like.

The mix between excitement from the unknown and the body natural process : Endorphine

Really think the endorphine are making this and it is a good cocktail:-). Now I am addicted, will want to get back there again and I know what I have to do for that...an important point is that it has to be a never walked before place. Cannot get that sensation if you already know the trail or been there before. Being in somewhere unknown is important

To what extend did you have the chance to engage with locals or other travelers?

engaging with locals and other travelers is the main thing in a long distance hiking (mountain or non mountain or any other journey). Should be like this for anybody in the every day life.

Learned in past trip (in non mountain areas) that exchanging with others is a key thing to a successful long distance hike. especially when hiking alone. You give positive energy to others and others filled you up with positive energy or not. and that is how it work. Anyone can go for a long distance hike when you understand that.

My initial project was called : Meet the locals. My idea was to meet the locals during the Via Alpina before I started the journey. Such journey can I think be done only in giving and receiving things to whatever you see (people, animals, landscapes). Meeting the locals cannot be dissociated from such journey in order to fully enjoy it. When you are self confident about yourself you can give more than others and not expecting anything back in return

Which impressions did you have about the people that you met?

All kind of impressions..in the end with experience you understand and know how to turn bad or negative things into positive one..

Big respect for anonymous sheeperd (especially in Aosta) that live in what could be considered as hard way of life for people who live in the comfort of a home but thoses people represent the Alpine culture to me.

The lonely sheeperd that makes cheese and does not know who will come and do is job if he is sick

The familly, with the chicken, pigs, cows, goats able to live with minimum and being the most generous people.

How did you experience the Alps? (for example places, mountains, villages, vegetation, animals, architecture, condition of landscape, weather)

I am very disapointed about all the skiing facilities that comes and ruin the beauty of thoses mountains, only to satisfy the pleasure of few people during a short period of time

How would you describe the Alpine landscapes you walked through? Can you list some adjectives that come to your mind?

Beautiful, awesome

Which moments from your journey can you remember most clearly? Why?

the day I meet the shepherds Giulio and Mohammed at Grande Alpe, Vallon Saint Grat, Aosta.

Knew such a day will come and it came

These men opened their humble shepherd hut to a stranger without questioning. Listening to their personal stories and daily life was really emotional. When I left, Giulio said that he was happy to talk to someone and really felt that he had a lot to tell and sadly no one to listen what he had to say.

From that moment I realized that my project to Meet the locals on the via alpina was worth doing and had a meaning. From that day I was 100% sure to complete the journey because those men gave more than just a place to stay for the night. From that day, filled up with positive energy it became very easy

Another key moment is when I met Deborah, an Australian girl that is walking the world for love. Exchange with her for about 15-30 minutes but the important is not exchanging long time. It is about the intensity of the exchange and when I heard things coming from her mouth that were exactly what I believed in. I said great

you can hear what she says on the short video I putted online on Youtube (around 4:40s)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RAQJA_Y1yo

but now with experience I know what when I will be hiking somewhere I will meet incredible people like that

Can you name some emotions you felt frequently during the walk?

Happiness all the time, serenity most of the time, fear (when lost, at a high altitude pass with bad visibility for example) and joy within seconds after reaching a pass or getting back on track

the mix of emotions in a short time frame make it something special.

For you personally, what were the biggest challenges during your journey?

that it will come to an end once reached Trieste, wanted to do the way back and extend this awesome journey. Requested financial support but did not get it. Should have done it but it is ok (no regrets), will walk the remaining Via Alpina trails (Red + Blue and purple) another time

What makes walking through the Alps for you different from other means of travel?

Not sure what you mean here... walking in the alps or any other place is just a good way for anyone to get back on earth and realise what is really precious and necessary in life.

How did your journey change you and your life afterwards?

comfort me in the idea that this is what I want in my life, hiking, cycling around the world because the world is big and life is too short. And you think you should stay home and go to work but once you start travelling you see and meet that it is possible to live and do things that really makes you happy and if possible help and share this with others

What does this journey mean to you now?

it is a piece of a giant cake and hope there is more to come. There is no point in doing this kind of trail if your just do it for the performance of hiking a long distance and prove the world your strong, bla bla. This kind of journey only have a sense if it can help/remind the alpine people that what they are doing ion their daily life is part of the alpine culture and it is precious. So if any hikers taking the Via alpina could walk with this in mind. That will be great.

Collin and Lucia

What is your general experience with long-distance walking in mountain regions? (for how long, frequency, duration of trips, where)

Collin and Lucia: We have been practising mountain walking for several years (15-20 years), and Christophe is also a mountain leader since 2009. Before our Via Alpina, our longest walking trip was about 3 weeks, in 2003, in the french Alps. We also did several trips of one-two weeks, always in the Alps, Corsica, Pyrenees. Since several years (7-8), our mountain practise was mostly turned towards mountain running (long distance trail, ~100km).

Lucia: Before running in mountains, I also ran several marathons and a 100km on the road.

Why did you complete a walking journey through the Alps? (in the case of Via Alpina)

Collin and Lucia: This travel was a dream we had since several years. In 2013, a disappointment in Christophe professional project offered us a long period of free time. So we decided to spent this time to complete this project of walking through the Alps.

According to our mountain practise, we decided not to go from refuge to refuge but to carry all the equipment to be autonomous (tent, gas, kitchen, sleeping bag, food, ...).

Also, the length of time (3 months) we had to complete this trek imposed us a physical challenge : travel through all the Alps (2200km and 130 000m D+) in 3 months days means chain 90 days of walk with 25 km and 1500m D+ per day, that is not physically trivial. To success in this time challenge, we limited the weight carried in our rucksack (max 10-11kg for 3 days of autonomy).

What did you expect from your journey before you started walking?

Collin: To realize a dream, to succeed in our timing challenge and guarantee our physical integrity, discover new countries, new landscapes, take good time and profit of each day we spend in mountains.

Lucia: for me, 3 months in mountains would be 3 months of freedom, that is to say doing what I love (being in movement !) in places I love (mountains full of flowers, animals, stones, places far from towns, traffic, people) with just basic constrains like finding water and food and fitting always in good health to walk.

How did you experience your own body during your journey?

Collin: no physical problem during the journey. Only 2 or 3 times a sensation of tiredness for a few hours. Visible body transformation : lost of fat and muscles increases in legs and arms (we had nordic walking sticks). After some weeks, we were impressed by the capabilities of our

body, that transformed itself to become a 'walking machine' !

At the end of the trip, we had only one sensation: if we'd had the possibility (no familial 'constraints'), we'd like to continue this never-ending-walking journey !

Lucia: a muscular problem in front of the tibia after 3 weeks that imposed me to stop my walk while a week. After that, I restarted and walked until Menton without any new problem.

To what extent did you have the chance to engage with locals or other travelers?

Collin and Lucia: I'm not sure to well understand the question, but the only contact we kept after our journey, is with a traveler (from Luxembourg) we met and travel with at the end of our trek (while one week). This guy has the same vision and the same practise of the mountain as us (light equipment and trailer) and naturally we decided to walk together. Unfortunately, after a week of common walk, he had back problem and had to stop his travel.

Which impressions did you have about the people that you met?

Collin: due to our choice to sleep under a tent, we had only shorter exchanges while this journey : from several minutes on a track when we crossed walkers to 2-3 hours while a diner in a refuge.

Most of the time, people were impressed by the walking journey we're making.

I think, in the first weeks (july), people take us for crazy people and didn't think we'd succeed; in august, they were more impressed but still had doubts about our success; and in september, they mostly congratulated us and were more curious (they had more questions about the trip).

Lucia: We didn't see a lot of walkers on the tracks.

The hostess (B&B, refuge, gasthauss) and some inhabitants were very welcoming.

On the other hand, sometimes we had problems with local people, especially when we wanted to put our tent in a land (problem with hunters) : we noticed big difference in mentality and mountain approach between german (austrian, swiss) and latin (italian, french) people.

How did you experience the Alps? (for example places, mountains, villages, vegetation, animals, architecture, condition of landscape, weather)

Collin:

Mountains, landscapes : we crossed very different kinds of mountains : in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, mountains are (or were) all occupied by humans and cows ! We saw also plenty of signs of the first world wide war between italians and austrians. In Italia, mountains are less occupied, more savage. And the Via Alpina trails (red and blue) also cross various mountains in term of geology, so very different landscapes.

Villages, architecture : the Via Alpina allows walker to discover different kinds of habitat. We still keep in mind the story of the Walser people, who developed a very typical structure of houses

vegetation, animals : in fact, we found the same vegetation and animals we can find in the French Alps. And we were surprised by the few animals we saw (however, we started to walk very early, around 6'oclock, the best hour to see animals). In 2013, the snow has been present until the beginning of july, so we had the chance to walk with flowers most of the time, because the flora had one month of late ! We started with the colors of the spring, quickly crossed summer colors and finished with autumn's ones !

Weather : on this point, we can say that we were more than lucky : in 90 days, we walked only 2 days under the rain ! July in the central Alps (Austria) was exceptionally hot and dry. August was a classic month of summer, and september in Italia was also very nice. Starting in july (the 9th) allows us not to walk into the snow (remember that we walked with running shoes !), and we had the chance that the snow didn't appear before our arrival the 9th of october, even over 2500m : we reach the top of Monte Bego (2850m) in Mercantour the 7th of october without any snow. I think that walking always with the sun (or at least with no rain !) was a main key in our success.

Lucia: It was various (climate, houses, trees, geology) and also the same from east to west. It depends !

How would you describe the Alpine landscapes you walked through? Can you list some adjectives that come to your mind?

Collin: as we have been walking in the alps for many years, we were not surprised by the landscapes we crossed in while this journey : we often used this sentence : "oh, it's look like ... (a place we had already walked in)". I was more surprised by the relics of the past : 1st and 2d war remains, remains of human mountain farming ...

But, in all cases, most of the times, we walked in wonderful and appeasing landscapes, except when we crossed ski resorts !

Lucia: Wonderful of course & Savage or cultivated, stony or luxurious,

Which moments from your journey can you remember most clearly? Why ?

Collin: the days we walked in high mountains, alone, under the sun. These moments were often on Via Alpina variant tracks. Personnally, the moments I prefer when I'm in mountain, is the sunrise. As we used to start our walking day before the sunrise (even in september and october), and when we slept in our tent, each day and each sunrise has been a privileged moment in this journey !

And of course, I clearly remember the first and last days of this journey.

After 2 months, I did also a game, often at the beginning of the night, before falling asleep : I remember in my mind all the days of walk we already did, where we started the day, what happened in this day and where we stopped. At the end of the journey, we play together with Laetitia to this game, and we discover that sometimes, we didn't have the same look back on certain days.

Lucia: to feel his body adapted to the mountain, and to be able to provide high and continuous physical effort without feeling this effort .

The moments of walk face to a high summit all this under the sun and warmth.

A sunset or a sunrise, a whole moon that illuminates all the snowed rounding peaks.

A meal in a Trattoria in an isolate village (San Lorenzo, Italia).

Can you name some emotions you felt frequently during the walk?

Collin: gladness to be here, on the Via Alpina; pleasure to discover new alps countries, landscapes, surprise to never feel tired (physically and mentally),

Lucia: well being, gladness to be at his right place, to be aware of the luck we had to be able to realize this project.

For you personally, what were the biggest challenges during your journey?

Collin: the main challenge we had to face to, was to preserve our body integrity, that was the main key to our success in completing this journey;

An another main challenge was to find, each nigh we slept in our tent, a place with water.

We can add, at the end (last month) of the trip, the challenge for finding food for 2 reasons : first one was that most of the refuges or small shops we crossed were closed, and the second was the physical needs we had to eat (envy of sweets !)

Lucia: to find food and water ☹ and to avoid the accident.

What makes walking through the Alps for you different from other means of travel?

Collin: for me, travel means walking or cycling. So, the only other mean I'd be able to use to do this journey would be the bicycle ! When you walk, you have all the time to observe your

environment, to think about your life, you're fully disconnected to the high speed occidental life ! In fact, walk, eat and sleep are enough to spend a good and well filled life !

Lucia: to travel at reduced speed, without pollute environment, having time to observe a natural environment we love. To feel emotions, share them while doing sport in the same time !

How did your journey change you and your life afterwards?

Collin: first, this journey shows me that our body has unsuspected physical and mental capabilities, that is fitten to achieve hard and long mountain walk. And now that we know that, we have new dreams, new projects of long walking treks !

As said before, this trek also showed me that we can live with more simplicity, less materialism, only health and food are mandatory !

We live only once so we have to enjoy this life, a principle we try to inculcate in our children while our journey around the mediteranean see.

Lucia: loss of occidental life constrains (materialism), better adaptation to changes, better understanding of my husband, abandonment of some principles like 'never take a motorized transport while a walking trip' !

What does this journey mean to you now?

Collin: a great satisfaction, a great moment shared with my wife, and, perhap's, a door opened on other similar treks.

Lucia: a great present, a privileged moment in my life.

I hope that this long crossing over the Alps will be the first of a long list of similar crossing !

Appendix 2 – Telephone interview transcripts

Alex

Researcher: Nun komme ich schon zu meiner ersten Frage: Und zwar wüsste ich gerne, wieviel Wandererfahrung Sie denn generell haben. Also wie lange Sie das schon machen, das Weitwandern, wie oft Sie das in etwa machen, wo es hingehet und mit wem Sie unterwegs sind. Also dass Sie mir einfach einen kleinen Überblick geben, wieviel Wandererfahrung Sie generell schon haben.

Alex: Also ich habe eigentlich schon seit meiner Kindheit Wandererfahrung, allerdings nur so Tageswanderungen damals...

R: Ja.

A: Und hab dann später, also sagen wir mal als ich vielleicht dreißig war angefangen so mehrtägige Wanderungen zu machen, vielleicht ein Wochenende oder ein verlängertes Wochenende, aber das waren dann maximal so vier Tage am Stück.

R: OK.

A: Ja, jetzt bin ich fünfzig, also einundfünfzig, das heißt ich hab relativ.. ja schon vieles gemacht. Aber natürlich die Via Alpina, das ist eine ganz neue Dimension, also diese ... diese wirkliche zwei, drei Wochen lang am Stück gehen, das ist jetzt für mich neu.

R: OK. Sind Sie denn, wenn Sie unterwegs sind, immer in den Alpen unterwegs? Also jetzt mal abgesehen von der Via Alpina.

A: Ja, eigentlich schon, ja.

R: Ja, OK. Und wie sind Sie darauf gekommen, die Wanderreise zu machen auf der Via Alpina? Also, ich glaube Sie haben Ihre erste in 2012 gemacht.

A: Richtig, ja.

R: Warum haben Sie die unternommen?

A: Wir haben ein Jahr vorher in einer Berghütte übernachtet und haben da zwei Franzosen getroffen. Die waren auch auf der Via Alpina unterwegs, und sie haben so einen kleinen Abstecher noch gemacht zu der Hütte hin und die haben uns davon erzählt, und ich kannte das damals nicht. Und es war wirklich sehr unterhaltsam, es war ein schöner Abend. Nachher hab ich zu meiner Frau gesagt, 'das wäre eigentlich was für uns' und Sie war dann auch gleich begeistert. Ja, und so haben wir dann ein Buch gekauft, es gibt da von Markt Sahel ein Buch mit schönen Bildern drin über die Via Alpina. Und das haben wir gekauft und dann haben wir befunden, ja jetzt ... wir wohnen ja quasi in der Nähe der Via Alpina und wir fangen dort mal irgendwo von uns aus an.

R: Ja, wo genau wohnen Sie?

A: Also wir wohnen in Wiegau, das ist in der Schweiz, ja ... also bei uns geht die Via Alpina bei Sargans durch. Sargans geht der grüne Weg durch und auch bei Feldkirch, was ja auch noch relativ nahe ist bei uns, geht der rote Weg durch. Also wir haben da eine sehr gute Anbindung an die Via Alpina.

R: Ja, da mussten Sie gar nicht lange anreisen, stimmt.

A: Richtig. Also das ist ... sind vielleicht, was sind das.. zwanzig, fünfundzwanzig Kilometer so. Und die erste Wanderung, die haben wir dann tatsächlich auch von uns vor der Haustüre angefangen, also der grüne Weg. Wir haben dann noch drei Zusatztage gemacht, bis Sargans und sind dann eingebogen in die offizielle Route.

R: Ja, und Sie waren mit Ihrer Frau unterwegs, richtig?

A: Richtig, ja. Beide Male, ja.

R: OK. Es ist ja schon eine Weile her, aber vielleicht erinnern Sie sich noch: Welche Erwartungen hatten Sie denn vorab an die Reise?

A: Ja, also die Erwartung war eigentlich die... viele einzelne Orte, die ich vielleicht schonmal gesehen habe, über die letzten zwanzig, dreißig Jahre hinweg, die ein bisschen in Verbindung zu bringen, also ich glaub das ist so die ... die Erwartung, mal den Weg wirklich zu gehen und nicht nur einzelne ... einzelne Berge daraus heraus zu machen. Also sonst hier ... wir sind ja in der ... wir wohnen ja in der Nähe von wirklich schönen Bergen und wir machen sehr viel so Tageswanderungen, fahren mit dem Auto da hin und fahren am Abend wieder zurück. Und die Erwartung war eigentlich, mal so richtig einzutauchen. Also für zwei, drei Wochen unterwegs zu sein und alles am Stück machen und dann auch, ja... so die geographische Verbindung irgendwie mit zu bekommen. Das war wirklich eigentlich das Reizvolle. Und natürlich die schöne Landschaft auf jeden Fall.

R: Ja, hatten Sie denn das Gefühl, dass Ihre Erwartungen erfüllt wurden von der Reise?

A: Absolut ja. Wir sind ja ein Jahr später nochmals gegangen.

R: Ich kann mir vorstellen, dass man eher wiederholt, wenn man das Gefühl hat, dass es wirklich was tolles war.

A: Ja.

R: Haben Sie denn vor, diesen Sommer wieder zu gehen?

A: Ja, haben wir, ja.

R: Schön.

A: Also, wir haben uns entschlossen, weiter zu machen, also da wo wir letzten aufgehört hatten, da machen wir weiter.

R: Ach da knüpfen Sie dann an, schön. Ja, das nächste Thema ist die körperliche Erfahrung, Sie haben gesagt, Sie haben viel Wandererfahrung, Sie sind wahrscheinlich auch sehr fit, wenn Sie Tagestouren machen. Wie haben Sie denn die physischen Aspekte während der Reise wahrgenommen?

A: Also, es ist eigentlich so, dass wir beim ersten mal, als wir gegangen sind, da haben wir noch so einen kleinen Vorspann gemacht, diese drei Tage, die ich schon erwähnt habe. Und dann, während die Via Alpina sehr gut dokumentiert ist, war natürlich dieser Vorspann ein bisschen ... mussten wir selber einschätzen. Und ich hab den ersten Tag ein bisschen sehr intensiv geplant. Das war fast schon, wie sagt man, zuviel des Guten, also meine Frau hat dann gesagt, wenn das weiter so geht, dann werde ich das nicht überstehen diese ganze Wanderung. Aber es ist nachher besser geworden. Und ich würde sagen, es wird wirklich mit jedem Tag besser und so nach fünf, sechs Tagen ist man... da läuft man eigentlich, also zumindest uns ist es so gegangen, wir sind dann richtig problemlos gelaufen, also dann geht es von selbst, dann muss man sich keine großen Sorgen machen ... Also am Anfang braucht es immer ein bisschen, bis man sich daran gewöhnt hat, aber dann nachher geht es von selbst.

R: Was würden Sie denn sagen, waren die größten körperlichen Herausforderungen für Sie? Also haben Sie irgendwie eine bestimmte Erinnerung, wo Sie sagen 'Das fand ich persönlich am herausfordensten'?

A: Also körperlich?

R: Ja.

A: Ja, also letztes Jahr auf dieser roten Strecke, da sind wir vom Madlene-Haus zur Riamtal-Hütte gegangen und das war so richtig hochalpin, und da gibt es so die sogenannte Gletschener-Scharte. Das ist so der höchste Punkt der ganzen roten Via Alpina und das war schon anstrengend, da hoch und danach wieder... da gings nachher extrem steil runter. Das war ein sehr anstrengender Tag.

R: Ja, das kann ich mir vorstellen. War das nur vom Steigen, oder einfach auch weil es ein schwieriger, technisch anspruchsvoller Weg war, oder...?

A: Ja, ich glaube, es war schon die Kombination an sich. Ja, die Höhe, das wäre noch machbar gewesen, aber einfach diese... ja, man muss immer ein bisschen konzentriert sein und das ist dann anstrengend. Natürlich auch, wie ich gesagt habe, dann auch vorher, da war es eigentlich der allererste Tag, der überhaupt nicht auf der Via Alpina war, das war auch weil es so heiß war und viele Höhenmeter, das war auch anstrengend.

R: Ja, Sie waren mitten im Sommer unterwegs...

A: Ja, beide Mal eigentlich.

R: Ja, ich habe gesehen, Sie haben wunderschöne Fotos gemacht. Ich habe ein bisschen auf Ihrem Blog gestöbert.

A: Ja...

R: Da sind schon schöne Bilder dabei, auch im Nebel so.. Das nächste Thema wären dann die sozialen Interaktionen auf der Reise. Und meine erste Frage dazu ist, wen Sie denn alles getroffen haben... Einheimische, andere Reisende, also wen haben Sie den allgemein so getroffen auf Ihrem Weg?

A: Also ja, eigentlich waren es unterschiedliche Kontakte... also natürlich immer, wenn

man in Hütten übernachtet hat, die Hüttenwarte, die dann ja... immer sehr freundlich waren, geplaudert haben, gefragt wo man hin geht und so weiter. Ich hab da so eine Erinnerung, also wir mal in einem ... bei Schlechtwetter, also einen Nachmittag da hat es richtig geregnet, da sind wir den ganzen Nachmittag in einer Hütte geblieben. Also wir haben die Etappe früher abgebrochen, sind in die Hütte und haben eigentlich den ganzen Nachmittag geplaudert mit dem Hüttenwart und das war wirklich ganz nett. Und dann haben wir sonst Gespräche halt beim Abendessen gehabt mit anderen Wanderern, verschiedenen. Das war immer spannend. Ja.

R: Und in wie weit hatten Sie denn die Möglichkeit, mit der lokalen Bevölkerung in Kontakt zu kommen?

A: Also die Leute...

R: Mal von den Hüttenwarten abgesehen, haben Sie noch irgendwie andere Menschen getroffen, die in den Regionen gewohnt haben?

A: Also es hat... das sind zum Teil natürlich lokale, also sagen wir mal ... die Bewohner in den Dörfern dort, mit denen spricht mal vielleicht auch. Üblicherweise kurz, also da gab es auch nicht die Hauptgespräche. Ja, ich erinnere mich da ... da gab es das eine oder andere Gespräch, aber das sind meistens Leute, die sich interessieren, 'wer geht da vorbei, wo geht er hin?'. Und sonst sind es eigentlich eher... ist es halt... natürlich, man hat dann mehr Gelegenheit am Abend beim Essen zu sprechen und dann sind es meistens andere Berggänger, die da sind.

R: Ja... Welche Eindrücke hatten Sie denn von den anderen Reisenden, die Sie getroffen haben?

A: Unterschiedlich... also es gibt... das Interessante ist ja an der Via Alpina, man kommt durch Gegenden, die sehr touristisch sind und dann kommt man wieder durch Gegenden, die eher ein bisschen ruhig und einsam sind. Und entsprechend unterschiedlich sind auch die Leute... also sagen wir mal im Berner Oberland, da ist ein Riesenrummel, da hat es Leute, ja, die wirklich vo (?) da hin geflogen sind und da machen Sie einen kleinen Ausflug, die halt nicht so wie typische Bergtouristen sind, sondern irgendwo mit einer Bahn hochgefahren sind und dann laufen Sie ein bisschen rum. Und dann gibt es natürlich wieder ... also an anderen Orten trifft man dann wieder gut ausgerüstete, sehr ortskundige oder sehr berggewandte Berggänger, ja, die einem doch Tipps geben können und ... ja, also alles mögliche.

R: Ja, sehr verschieden...

A: Ja, auch verschiedene Nationen waren da unterwegs, sowohl auf der Via Alpina als auch sonst. Also da hat es Engländer, da hat es Kanadier, Amerikaner, alles mögliche.

R: Und waren die auch länger unterwegs gewesen, oder waren das auch manchmal so Etappen-Reisende? Also haben Sie auch Leute getroffen, so wie Sie, die wirklich mehrere ... Ich glaube, die waren zwei Wochen oder sogar drei Wochen unterwegs?

A: Ja, zweieinhalb Wochen waren wir unterwegs... also ja, haben wir auch. Es gab allerdings wenige, die wir dann mehrfach getroffen haben, also ich erinnere mich jetzt an eine Frau aus Deutschland, die haben wir ein paar Tage lang immer wieder gesehen. Und dann war noch irgendjemand... da war nochmal einer, den haben wir zweimal gesehen. Also es gibt ... es ist nicht so, dass man ständig da in einer Gruppe rumläuft, sondern das verstreut sich wirklich.

Und es ist auch so, dass man, vor allem bei der grünen Strecke, da gab es öfter noch die Möglichkeit, zu verkürzen oder länger zu gehen, also zwei Etappen zusammen zu nehmen. Und dann ist auch das Marschtempo der Leute verschieden, also plötzlich verliert man nicht.

R: Ja, gut. Also wenn Sie nochmal so ein bisschen an die Landschaft und die Umgebung zurück denken, die Sie auf der Reise gesehen haben oder durch die Sie gewandert sind...

A: Ja.

R: ... wie haben Sie denn die Alpen als Wandergebiet wahrgenommen? Also ich denke an die Bergwelt an sich, Dörfer, Vegetation, Tiere, Architektur, Wetter ... also alle diese Dinge, die man wahrnimmt, wenn man durch die Alpen wandert, wie haben Sie das erlebt? Also Sie müssen nicht auf alles Bezug nehmen, aber vielleicht auf das, was Sie besonders beeindruckt hat oder woran Sie sich sehr gut erinnern.

A: Also grundsätzlich bin ich eigentlich immer fasziniert von den Alpen, von den Bergen, von den schönen Landschaften. Ja, was hat mich beeindruckt? Also ganz besonders beeindruckt hat mich etwas ganz in der Nähe von uns wo wir wohnen, und zwar in Liechtenstein. Diese Wanderung über die drei Schwestern, das war so ein Highlight. Und die Wanderung dann im Silvretta-Gebiet, das war auch wunderschön. Dann die unbekanntes Landschaften in Richtung Italien, das ist was, was wir hier nicht so kennen, das war auch faszinierend. Natürlich im Jahr vorher, das Berner Oberland, das ist wirklich, wirklich eindrücklich. Aber es gibt, ich würde mal behaupten, es gibt eigentlich jeden Tag was zu staunen. Aber es gibt natürlich schon gewisse Highlights, die halt unvergesslich sind.

R: Haben Sie viele Tiere gesehen auf Ihrem Weg?

A: Ja, man sieht regelmäßig Tiere. Auf dem grünen Weg da hab ich ein bisschen mehr noch gesehen, als jetzt letztes Jahr auf dem roten Weg. Aber man sieht immer was, also es gibt Hirsche, verschiedene Vögel, alles mögliche ... Murmeltiere natürlich, ja, alles mögliche.

R: Sie sind auf Ihrem Weg ja sicher durch viele Dörfer gekommen, oder zumindest daran vorbei gelaufen. Welchen Eindruck hatten Sie denn von den kleinen Dörfern, die Sie gesehen haben auf der Reise.

A: Ja, also zum Teil sehr idyllische Dörfer, wenn Sie jetzt die kleinen Dörfer ansprechen... ja, zum Teil auch abgelegen, also ich hab jetzt gestaunt, vor allem so in Italien, von (?) her Richtung Tirano, das ist so was von abgelegen alles und, ja, man fragt sich dann 'wovon leben die Leute, die da sind?', also... das ist wirklich sehr einsam. Ja, also es gibt schöne Dörfer, sehr ruhige Dörfer. Im Gegensatz dann zu den... man kommt ja auch durch größere Orte durch, die sind dann oft ein bisschen touristisch.

R: Ja. Was hat Ihnen denn besser gefallen: die einsamen Abschnitte, oder da wo so ein bisschen mehr los war?

A: Grundsätzlich die schönen einsamen Orte... also das gefällt mir eigentlich gut. Es kommt jetzt aber noch der praktische Aspekt dazu, also man muss ja nicht wochenlang in der Höhe bleiben, man braucht ja auch mal wieder sagen wir mal ... man will einkaufen, oder irgendwas ist kaputt gegangen und man muss jetzt Ersatz kaufen. Ich denke jetzt ... man braucht irgendwie mal Batterien oder muss vom Fotoapparat wieder die Batterie aufladen, also ...

R: Was aus der Zivilisation.

A: Irgendetwas aus der Zivilisation und in den ganz einsamen Gebieten ist es dann schwierig, einen Bankomat oder so etwas ähnliches wo man wieder an Bargeld kommt. Und das heißt zwischendurch schätzt man das auch, in einen größeren Ort zu gehen und man schätzt es dann auch, mal in einem richtig schönen Hotel übernachten, wo man Platz hat und nicht ... sonst in diesen Berghütten, da ist es ja eben oft sehr einfach und eng. Was eigentlich OK ist, aber irgendwann braucht man einfach zwischendurch wieder mal Zivilisation.

R: Ja, ich kann es mir gut vorstellen. Wie haben Sie denn die Wanderwege wahrgenommen, von der Via Alpina an sich?

A: Also, die waren gut, ich finde sinnvoll angelegt größtenteils. Wir haben so ein paar kleine Abstecher noch gemacht, aber eigentlich sind die schön angelegt, also die führen durch schöne Gegenden. Ist auch, ich sag jetzt mal zum großen Teil recht gut beschriftet. Ist aber nicht überall gut beschriftet, also wenn man jetzt die Schweiz und Österreich verlässt und nach Italien kommt, da gabs Abschnitte, da haben wir den Weg fast nicht mehr gefunden. Ich hatte noch so ein kleines GPS Gerät dabei zum Glück und dann haben wir mit viel Suchen, haben wir dann die Wege gefunden. Und da war also die Wegmarkierung ganz schlecht oder ich weiß nicht, verwittert oder keine Ahnung. Man hat also keinen Weg gesehen, keine Markierung mehr, nichts ...

R: Das ist bestimmt recht anstrengend, wenn man dann noch suchen muss?

A: Ja, man wird dann schon nervös, sind wir da richtig ... und man verliert natürlich Zeit mit dem Suchen.

R: Ja. Das nächste Thema sind so ein paar persönliche Erfahrung, Sie hatten schon gesagt, es gibt so ein paar Momente, an die man sich besonders erinnert. An welche Momente der Reise erinnern Sie sich denn am besten? Also gibt es Sachen, die rausstechen?

A: Also es gibt schöne Momente, an die man sich erinnert, die rausstechen, und es gibt auch die Schreckmomente, die ein bisschen in der Erinnerung herausstechen, oder die besonderen Erlebnisse. Also die schönen Momente sind einfach wirklich die prachtvollen Landschaften, die es auf gewissen Etappen gab.. ja, also ich denk so, was mir ganz gut gefallen hat war zum Beispiel im Berner Oberland auf der Engslinger Alp. Das war so richtig idyllisch da oben und ruhig und schön. Ja, und natürlich noch ... es gibt auch noch andere Sachen. Oder im .. bei der roten Etappe war es eben dieser Drei-Schwestern-Steig oder auch das Silvrettagebiet, das war sehr eindrücklich. Oder auch der Weg zum Stilzer Joch hoch, das war auch sehr eindrücklich. Ja, und auf der anderen Seite, was mir so in Erinnerung geblieben ist, sind die Gewitter. Also wir haben da Gewitter erlebt, da hatte man wirklich Schiss, also da kracht es und man versucht da wirklich schnell in die Hütte zu kommen. Das ist auch eindrücklich.

R: Waren Sie mal unterwegs bei Gewitter, hat es Sie mal erwischt?

A: Ja, also in den beiden Jahren hatten wir ja einen Tag, wo wir wirklich Blitz und Donner hatten und da ist ... ja, also das ist furchteinflößend.

R: Und Sie konnten sich aber dann in die Hütte retten oder mussten Sie draußen ausharren, bis es vorbei war?

A: Ja, also... wir hatten eigentlich keine große Möglichkeit, irgendwo unter zu stellen, sondern wir mussten einfach so schnell wie möglich zur Hütte und rundherum hat es gekracht. Und es dann auch noch geregnet, also das war... ja, furchteinflößend.

R: Ja, das kann ich mir vorstellen. Ich hab schon immer Schiss vor Gewitter, wenn ich drin sitz und kann mir nicht vorstellen, wie das ist, wenn man unterwegs ist.

H: Ja... ja, also es ist nicht lustig. Man ist ja dann immer ein bisschen im Zwiespalt, soll man ... wenn jetzt der Wetterbereich voraussagt, also es gibt Gewitterneigung. Also erstmal kommt es natürlich nicht immer, wenn der Wetterbericht das sagt, oder vielleicht ist man dann schon dort. Aber andererseits ist es auch so, man will ja vorwärts kommen und man denkt sich, wenn man jetzt nur wegen dem Gewitter am Abend die Wanderung nicht macht, das ist auch nicht gut. Also versucht man es und dann gegen Abend kommt es dann plötzlich. Ja, das ist manchmal schwierig zu entscheiden, ob man ... was man machen soll. Vor allem, wenn es längere Etappen sind, kann man ja nicht einfach nichts machen, sondern man versucht es doch noch.

R: Ja, das stimmt ...

A: Aber im großen und ganzen hatten wir eigentlich beide Male viel Wetterglück, also wenig Schlechtwetter. Es könnte natürlich jetzt auch anders sein, dass es die ganze Woche dann regnet.

R: Ja, das ist natürlich für so eine lange Reise zu Fuß schade, wenn dann richtig schlechtes Wetter ist.

A: Ja, ja. Wir hatten uns dann auch überlegt, was machen wir, wenn jetzt eine längere Schlechtwetterperiode kommt. Und da gibt es in den Alpen natürlich immer die Möglichkeit, ein Alternativprogramm im Süden zu machen. Also wenn es an der Nordseite regnet, ist dann auf der Südseite ja meistens dann – also nicht immer – aber meistens ist es auf der Südseite noch schön. Da haben wir gesagt, dann fahren wir einfach ins Tessin und machen da was improvisiereres.

R: Mussten Sie aber nicht...

A: Ja, also, ich hab es nicht bewusst vorbereitet, aber es wäre uns dann schon was in den Sinn gekommen.

R: Ja, OK. Wenn Sie heute zurückschauen auf die beiden Reisen, die Sie schon gemacht haben, wie sehen Sie die Wanderreisen aus der heutigen Perspektive?

A: Also ich find die toll, ich empfehle die auch weiter den Leuten. Also mir haben beide gut gefallen. Sie waren vom Charakter her ein bisschen unterschiedlich, aber .. ja, also ich denke gerne zurück. Darum habe ich auch vor, da nächstes Jahr wieder weiter zu machen.

R: Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass das so eine Art ... ja, wie soll ich sagen... wenn Sie einmal damit angefangen haben, dass Sie immer wieder gehen wollen? Oder wollen Sie einfach gern einen Weg fertig machen?

A: Ja ... also es ist natürlich enorm viel, also der ganze rote Weg, der ist ja riesig eigentlich. Und ich weiß jetzt nicht, ob wir das wirklich machen werden. Aber einfach ... es ist schon eine

große Lust da, weiter zu machen, weil es eben... also immer ein neues Erleben ist. Also ich schätze eigentlich dran, dass man eben nicht immer am Ort bleibt und von da aus was macht, sondern dass immer wieder neues kommt. Jeden Tag; man steht auf, und man weiß zwar ein bisschen vom ... also von diesem Reiseprogramm, das man sich aus dem Internet geladen hat, was einen ungefähr erwartet, aber es ist doch etwas neues, es ist doch spannend. Es ist viel spannender, als irgendwie die ganzen Ferien an einem gleichen Ort zu bleiben. Das ist eigentlich der Reiz an der Sache, dieses Erleben.

R: Wenn Sie mal zurückdenken und sich überlegen, welche Gefühle und Emotionen Sie unterwegs so hatten, können Sie einige Emotionen beschreiben, die auf der Reise immer wieder kamen?

A: Emotionen ... also einfach das Staunen über schöne Landschaften, auch die Freude, wenn man irgendwas schönes gesehen hat. Das war schon ... ist eigentlich immer da, jeden Tag. Auch die Freude, wenn man dann sein Tagesziel erreicht hat und die Spannung, wie sieht es da nun aus. Wenn man dann so langsamen hinkommt und man sieht die Unterkunft – das Berggasthaus oder die Hütte – das war das eigentlich immer ... ja, ist es so, wie man es sich vorgestellt hat? Also das ist spannend und dann natürlich, was auch immer schön ist, also man hat am Abend immer großen Appetit und freut sich aufs Essen und ist dann gespannt, was es da wohl gibt... ja.

R: Ja.. wie ging es Ihnen denn am Ende der Reise, als sie dann quasi zu Ende war?

A: Ja, also ich war sicher ein bisschen traurig, dass jetzt wieder fertig ist. Man freut sich natürlich auch, wieder mal zu Hause im eigenen Bett zu schlafen und alle zu waschen und zum trocknen aufhängen... das waschen ist ja auch immer so ein Thema unterwegs. Also das ist positiv und negativ. Eigentlich ... das erstaunlich ist eben, man wandert da so zwei oder drei Wochen und nachher kann man dann mit öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln in ein paar Stunden die ganze Strecke wieder zurückfahren. Also das erstaunt mich jedes Mal. Nach siebzehn, achtzehn Tagen Wanderung ist man nach ein paar Stunden wieder zu Hause.

R: Das ist bestimmt ein ganz merkwürdiges Erlebnis, wenn man dann quasi – also nicht die Strecke wieder abfährt, aber entlang der selben Richtung wieder zurückfährt und es braucht nur einige Stunden.

A: Ja ja, genau! Was mich auch erstaunt hat, jetzt vor allem beim grünen Weg war das so: die Wanderung, die geht dann eigentlich relativ – wie soll ich sagen – relativ gerade durch querfeld ein, also über die ganzen Berge, währenddem die ganzen Hauptverkehrswege, die machen alle so einen Bogen.

R: ... ja ...

A: Wenn man jetzt als Schweizer, also wenn man schon viel in der Schweiz unterwegs war, dann ist irgendwie die Geographie im Gehirn so eingebrannt. Man macht immer diesen Bogen über Zürich nach Bern hinein. Und plötzlich entdeckt man, man kann ja gerade aus – also wenn man zu Fuß geht – man geht eigentlich wirklich in einer geraden Linie über das ganze drüber. Und das ist auch mal spannend.

R: Ja, die ganzen Hindernisse, die man sonst mit anderen Verkehrsmitteln gar nicht

überwinden kann.

A: Ja, genau.

R: An was haben Sie denn während der Reise oft gedacht? Also haben Sie das Gefühl gehabt, dass Ihr Kopf leer war oder kamen immer so Gedanken immer wieder? Oder, ja, wie war das, an was haben Sie oft gedacht während des Laufens?

A: Also grundsätzlich war ich eigentlich immer eher entspannt. Also ich hab mich wirklich in das ganze Wanderszenario so eingelebt, also habe eigentlich nur dran gedacht, wie wird das Wetter heute, wo gehen wir hin, wieviel Stunden sind wir unterwegs und so, also das war wirklich im Zentrum der Gedanken und nicht irgendwelche anderen Sachen. Das ist eigentlich das schöne. Und natürlich man kann dann, sagen wir mal wenn man so ein paar Stunden geht, kann man schon über gewisse Themen nachdenken, die einen beschäftigen. Aber es ist nicht so, dass ich jetzt die ganze Zeit über irgendwelchen Themen gebrütet habe, sondern es war ... für mich war es ein entspanntes Erlebnis... war es.

R: Sie haben gerade schon gesagt, also es war eine ganz andere geografische Idee im Kopf, als Sie gelaufen sind. Was macht Weitwandern in den Alpen für Sie denn so anders als andere Reiseformen? ...

... also gibt es da noch was, außer dieses Gefühl quer durchzulaufen, wo man sonst mit dem Auto nicht langfahren kann oder gibt es da noch etwas anderes, wo Sie sagen, ja, weitwandern – das macht es für mich so speziell?

A: Also es ist wie gesagt diese Abwechslung, also jeden Tag was neues und man entdeckt ja vor allem so viele Kleinigkeiten, die man, wenn man schneller reist, übersieht. Also man sieht sehr viel, also man kann die Berge wirklich in Ruhe anschauen, man sieht jeden Gipfel, man sieht jedes Haus, man achtet darauf, wie sehen die Bauernhäuser aus, wenn man vorbei geht, man sieht eben die Tiere, alles mögliche. Also es ist ein bewussteres Reisen, oder auch ein ruhigeres Reisen.

R: Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Sie sich gerade für den Aspekt bewusst entschieden haben oder war das doch eher so die Herausforderung, das einfach mal auszuprobieren?

A: Also es war schon die Herausforderung, einfach mal eine längere Wanderung zu machen, länger als jetzt nur vier Tage, das was wir vorher höchstens gemacht hatten. Das war eigentlich die Herausforderung. Und das haben die beiden Franzosen, die uns da das überhaupt erzählt haben, die haben das wirklich geschafft, uns dafür zu begeistern, also das ich hab das eine gute Idee gefunden. Die haben übrigens ... die gehen bewusst, also den Weg von Anfang, also von Monte Carlo, bis nach Slowenien. Jedes Jahr machen die wieder einen Abschnitt. Also die gehen die Strecke vom Anfang bis zum Schluss durch. Und ja, ich hab das dann spannend gefunden, aber ich hab gesagt: Wir müssen ja nicht gleich die ganze Strecke machen, wir können einfach mal ein bisschen anfangen und schauen wie es ist.

R: Ja, ja... das macht glaube ich auch Sinn, wenn man keine richtige Vorstellung hat, wie es werden würde ... ja.

Ja, ich komme eigentlich schon zum letzten Thema, und zwar – ja ich habe das jetzt genannt 'Das Leben danach'. Aber ich habe halt von vielen Leuten gehört, dass sich nach der Reise so ein

bisschen Sachen verändert haben. Bei Ihnen bestimmt einfach, dass Sie das jetzt wiederholt schon gemacht haben, aber hat sich denn Ihr Leben in irgendeiner Weise nach dieser ersten Tour, die Sie gemacht haben, verändert?

A: Ja also, das Leben verändert, das ist natürlich eine ...

R: Ja, ist jetzt ein großes Thema...

A: Also was sich verändert hat, ich hab wirklich Spaß dran gefunden, einfach öfter mal auch was neues zu machen. Also ich mach ja neben den Wanderungen im Winter zum Beispiel auch Skitouren und solche Sachen. Ich hab einfach Spaß daran, neues auszuprobieren, nicht immer die gleichen Sachen. Früher, da sind wir oft... ja, da gab es einfach ein paar so Standardgipfel, da ist man immer wieder hin und jetzt gehe ich eigentlich bewusster auch mal wieder an andere Orte, einfach weil mir das Spaß macht. Die Lust an diesem Entdecken, das hab ich eigentlich mitgenommen.

R: Wie würden Sie jetzt für jemanden anders Ihre Reise beschreiben, der noch nie auf der Via Alpina unterwegs war? Also würden Sie bestimmte Ratschläge oder so etwas mitgeben?

A: Ja die Ratschläge... also es gibt schon ein paar Ratschläge, es kommt wie gut er schon... also wieviel Erfahrung er schon im Wandern hat. Wenn es natürlich einer ist, der nicht viel geht, dann würde ich sagen, möglichst nichts in den Rucksack nehmen, nur wenig Gepäck. Also jedes Gramm das man trägt muss man überlegen. Also mit einem leichten Rucksack geht es sich einfach besser und länger. Dann die Dokumentation auf der Website von Via Alpina, die ist wirklich toll. Außer die GPS-Daten, die sind in einigen Gebieten nicht ganz so über alle Zweifel erhaben. Aber es kommt darauf an, wo. In vielen Bereichen sind sie sehr gut und dann gibt es so gewisse Gebiete, da sind sie eher schlecht.

R: OK. Ich würde noch eine Frage stellen, eigentlich ist es gar keine richtige Frage, sondern ich würde Sie bitten, einen Satz zu vervollständigen. Und zwar geht der los mit – es ist ziemlich allgemein eigentlich: Wenn ich an die Alpen denke, dann fällt mir ein ... Und jetzt würde ich gern hören, was Ihnen sofort einfällt.

A: Wenn ich an die Alpen denke, dann fällt mir ... also ich sehe dann einfach wunderschöne Berggipfel vor mir und Landschaften. Die Landschaft ist für mich immer wieder überwältigend.

R: Für Sie ist das ja bestimmt auch nochmal ein Stück Heimat als Schweizer, ist das ja auch nochmal ein anderer Bezug könnte ich mir vorstellen, als für jemanden jetzt aus ... ich hab zum Beispiel auch mit jemandem Email-Kontakt, der kommt aus Finnland. Und der meinte dann, der hat natürlich einen ganz anderen Bezug zu den Alpen als Landschaft, weil bei ihm zu Hause alles so flach ist.

A: Das kann ich mir vorstellen.

R: Und das war ganz interessant, was der dann gesagt hat. Haben Sie denn noch Anmerkungen oder Fragen zum Ende?

A: Ja, also meine Anmerkung ist, ich werde diese Via Alpina allen empfehlen, also für mich ist es wirklich ... ich bin sehr glücklich, dass ich darauf gestoßen bin und werde das weiterhin

genießen. Darum hab ich es auch in meinen Blog reingenommen, weil ich denke, dass ... ja, es soll auch eine Anregung sein für andere, die das gern machen wollen.

R: Wieso haben Sie mit dem Blog angefangen? Gab es da ein bestimmtes Erlebnis wo Sie gesagt haben, ja, ich will es unbedingt aufschreiben und teilen?

A: Ich bin also.. ich hab ... ich bin eigentlich ein bisschen interessiert, was ein Blog überhaupt ist und wie das funktioniert und da hab ich dann gedacht, eigentlich könnte ich auch einen machen und zwar über meine Erlebnisse. Also die Bergtouren, Skitouren, all das, Mountainbike. Wir sind ja hier nun so ein bisschen an der Quelle und ich hab dann einfach mal versucht, das zu machen und die Via Alpina, das war noch ziemlich am Anfang. Das hab ich dann gleich hineingenommen. Und das hat ziemlich viel Platz eingenommen, aber ... es macht Spaß, also ich finde es auch gut, wenn man im Nachhinein das nochmal ganze nochmal Revue passieren lässt. Also diese Etappen, die man gegangen ist. Natürlich hat man nicht immer die Zeit, also manchmal, wenn man so von einem Bergwochenende oder so zurück kommt und denkt ... ist man zu müde um da noch viel in klein zu schreiben, aber dann stell ich einfach die Fotos rein und dann noch ein kurzer Satz oder so.

Carl and Lena

Carl: Wir mussten nicht nach Nizza, weil wir dachten der Kontrast zu einer Großstadt nach wochenlangem Durch-die-Gegend-rennen ist vielleicht ein bisschen zu stark. Und wir dachten, Menton, ja, da wird schon nichts lossein. Das ist so ein kleines verschlafenes Städtchen. Wir wurden dann eines besseren belehrt, als wir da ankamen in der Haupturlaubszeit. Das war schon einiges los. War jetzt nicht so schlimm, aber ja, wir hatten uns das zumindest anders vorgestellt.

Researcher: Seid ihr wirklich acht Wochen lang gewandert, oder habt ihr dazwischen mal einen Stop eingelegt.

Lena: Also ich glaub der längste Stop waren mal zwei Tage.

R: Ihr meintet ihr habt Wandererfahrung von etwa 6 Jahren. Seid ihr auch schon woanders unterwegs gewesen als in den Alpen.

C: Ja, also meine Wandererfahrung ist ein bisschen länger. Also schon als Kind hat mich mein Opa da immer mitgenommen auf kleinere Touren im Allgäu, im Harz. Also ganz am Anfang im Harz. Tageswanderungen. Später im Allgäu Hüttentouren. Und ja, der Heilbronner Höhenweg war einer von den Highlights an die ich mich noch erinnere als Kind. Und irgendwann hab ich dann auch selbst angefangen mit Klettersteigen, irgendwie so im Allgäu in der Gegend. Und als Student hab ich dann mit einigen Kumpels... bin ich mal hoch zum (...) geflogen. Und den wollten wir eigentlich besteigen, und ja. Es war eine tolle Tour, aber wir haben ihn leider nicht erreicht, weil es noch komplett voll mit Schnee war. Das war in Schweden.

L: Ja und sonst im Winter sind wir manchmal noch auf den Kanarischen Inseln. Da kann man auch schön wandern.

R: Oja das kann ich mir vorstellen. Ich war mal auf Madeira im Winter, da sind wir auch viel gewandert.

L: Für Tagestouren ist es da auch ganz schön im Winter.

R: So dann komm ich mal zur Via Alpina an sich. Wie kamt ihr denn gerade darauf? Also warum habt ihr denn gerade die Reise auf der Via Alpina gemacht, wie seid ihr darauf gekommen?

C: Also eigentlich würd ich jetzt mal fast sagen, war es gar nicht geplant unbedingt jetzt die Via Alpina zu gehen. Wir haben hier so eine Karte hier irgendwo gehabt von der Via Alpina. Da gabs dann so verschiedene Wege und dann wussten wir schonmal, ok, da gibts also irgendwas. Das war ja recht weit vom Genfer See zum Mittelmeer und wir haben uns ziemlich erschrocken, als wir dann so die Karten kauften und da dachten wir, wir legen die mal soeben aneinander. Im Maßstab 1:50000 und das Wohnzimmer war, ja, ein bisschen zu klein dafür. Und ja, da haben wir auch gedacht, naja irgendwie ist es schwierig da jetzt von Anfang an komplett zu planen wo es genau langgeht. Und auch die Karten: ja, wir kannten halt ... wir haben uns bisher immer auf Karten verlassen, muss man dazu sagen. Und irgendwann unterwegs haben wir dann festgestellt, dass die Karten in bestimmten Regionen gar nicht mehr aktuell sind. Das heißt da waren Wege drauf, die gabs einfach nicht mehr. Und irgendwann war dann der Punkt,

ja, wo wir gedacht hatten, wir müssen mal schauen was für Wege eigentlich noch ok sind und welche nicht. Und der Via Alpina war halt ein Weg der war relativ, ja, aktuell, dafür gabs Informationen. Und da haben wir gedacht, wenn das als Via Alpina eingezeichnet ist, dann können wir relativ sicher sein, dass man den gehen kann.

R: Hat das denn funktioniert bei euch mit den Auszeichnungen und den Wegen.

L: Ja, also das hat ziemlich gut funktioniert. Was auch gut war: bevor wir los sind haben wir auf der Via Alpina Internetseite die ganzen Etappen anschauen können mit Höhenmetern und Unterkünften und das war schon ziemlich hilfreich.

C: Ja, das stimmt.

L: Höhenmeter, Zeitangaben und Infos zu den Unterkünften. Weil sonst hat man im Internet gar nichts dazu gefunden. Zu Unterkünften in bestimmten Orten. Also da war die Via Alpina Seite teilweise die einzige Seite.

C: Ja, in der Region auf jeden Fall. Also wir haben da gesessen mit der Karte und dachten, es war sehr schwer abzuschätzen wie lange man denn nun jetzt von da nach da braucht. Schafft man das denn überhaupt oder soll man da jetzt zwei Tage einplanen, oder nur nen halben. Das war manchmal schwierig, weil auf der Karte, auch wenn man die Höhenlinien zählt, das ist, naja, nicht immer so genau. Und das hat uns echt geholfen, zu sehen ok da schafft – da steht irgendwas von sechs Stunden, da wusste man, das ist ne Tagesetappe und da geht das in Ordnung. Und das war gut.

R: Welche Erwartungen hattet ihr denn vorab ab die Reise?

C: Erzählt du mal.

L: Also, meine Erwartung war es, vor allem mal raus zu kommen aus dem Alltag, aus dem Job. Also wir haben sonst einen Bürojob und den ganzen Tag vorm Computer sitzen, und meine Erwartungen waren einfach zwei Monate mal in der Natur, keinen Computer, jeden Tag sich bewegen, jeden Tag draußen sein und das einfach genießen.

R: Und das hat sich erfüllt, oder ...?

L: Ja, auf jeden Fall.

R: Ja, das kann ich mir vorstellen. War da noch irgendwie einen andere Motivation dahinter als nur rauszukommen? Oder war das so schon das wichtigste?

C: Ja. Mann muss vielleicht dazu sagen, wir haben bis jetzt oft, ja, so Urlaube gemacht. Mal so eine Woche oder zwei am Stück maximal und haben uns öfter schon gedacht, eigentlich wärs doch mal ganz spannend, wenn man mal länger weg is. Weil wir haben oft eben das Phenomen gehabt, wenn man dann so, man fliegt irgendwo hin oder man geht irgendwo los, und dann ist die erste Woche rum und man hats grad so geschafft irgendwie raus aus dem Alltag. Und das ging meistens ganz schnell, aber nach ner Woche war dann gleich schon wieder, ok und nach nen paar Tagen geht es hier wieder zurück. Das heißt also, da war man grad dabei, irgendwie das alles zu vergessen und dann musste man wieder zurück. Und ja, das war ne Motivation, also, das kann man im Prinzip ja mit allen Sachen machen, man kann ja auch einfach nur an den

Strand fahren, aber von der Zeitdauer her war es mal interessant ... Wir wollten mal wissen, wie ist das eigentlich, wenn man mal lange von dem ganzen Computerkram weg ist.

R: Ich würde mal zum nächsten Thema übergehen. Und zwar, ein bisschen was zur körperlichen Erfahrung. Ich kann mir schon vorstellen, dass acht Wochen wandern schon sehr anstrengend ist. Kommt natürlich drauf an, wie trainiert man ist (lachen). Aber meine Frage dazu: Wie habt ihr denn eure Körper und eure Leistungsfähigkeit während der Wanderung wahrgenommen? Also, gabs da irgendwie ein ganz ... wie soll man sagen ... ein herausstechendes Erlebnis, bezüglich eurer eigenen körperlichen Fähigkeiten?

C: Also ich würd sagen, wir sind eigentlich nie an die Grenze gegangen. Also, nie komplett an die Grenze. Es gab ein paar Tage, woe es wirklich mal... wo wir weiter laufen mussten als eigentlich geplant, weil die Hütte voll war oder so, und wo wir dann dachten eigentlich haben wir jetzt keine Lust mehr, es reicht einfach nach acht Stunden, und dann mussten wir halt nochmal zwei, drei Stunden länger gehen. Aber es war trotzdem nie an der Grenze wo wir beide gesagt hätten, oh jetzt geht's gar nicht mehr. Interessanter Weise, also ich kann nur für mich sprechen jetzt so, nach eineinhalb zwei Wochen bin ich in so ein Loch gefallen. Und ich hab eigentlich gedacht, dass müsste, ja man wird immer besser, man trainiert, oder ja, man... der Körper gewöhnt sich dran.

R: Habt ihr denn irgendwie was wo ihr sagt, das war so die größte physische Herausforderung? An der Reise an sich?

L: Also körperlich lief es eigentlich immer ziemlich gut. Oder? Ja... ich...

C: Also ich hab ja, schon schon, es war jetzt Ja wir machen sonst auch recht viel Sport und waren nicht total überrascht, dass es jetzt vielleicht anstrengend wird. War nicht so. Es fühlte sich grundsätzlich einfach super an, ja... auch wenn man eigentlich schlageskaputt war nach manchen Tagen. Oder nach fast jedem Tag eigentlich. War es trotzdem eine unglaubliche Zufriedenheit, die wir da irgendwie hatten, rein körperlich, weil man einfach sich bewegt hat. Ja, man hat was hinter sich gebracht. Man hat was geschafft, was man einfach gesehen hat. Und ja, auch wenn das wie gesagt anstrengend war, es war eine unglaubliche Zufriedenheit, die man so nach so nem Tag hatte. Man konnte essen ohne Ende... das ist auch noch ein wichtiger Punkt. Also, ja..., das Essen... ja, wir haben halt schon viel gegessen. Viel mehr als sonst würd ich mal sagen und als wir dann wiederkamen, da musste mal sich erst mal wieder umstellen. Da mussten wir echt aufpassen, dass wir nicht irgendwie ... weil ich hab mir manchmal... wir haben ja so ne Kantine hier und ehm, da gibt's dann so Tablett, und ich hab das Tablett komplett voll gestellt mit mehreren Tellern und war dann immer noch nicht satt. Und einige Kollegen guckten mich dann schon etwas komisch an, so geht's noch, du isst für drei Leute.

R: Ja, man gewöhnt sich da bestimmt dran. Und an der frischen Luft isst es sich ja sowieso besser.

L: Ja, genau.

R: Ich würde jetzt mal zu dem Thema soziale Interaktion auf dem Weg kommen. Ihr seid ja zu zweit gewandert, habe ich das richtig verstanden, also nicht in einer Gruppe oder so?

L: Genau.

R: Wen hab ihr denn auf eurer Reise getroffen? Also, vielleicht könnt ihr euch an irgendjemanden spezielles erinnern, also andere Reisende oder lokale Bewohner?

C: Ja, das ... die Lisa lacht gerade. Also für zwei Abschnitte hatten wir einen Bergführer dabei. Den haben wir uns quasi organisiert dafür. Einmal für das Mont Blanc Massiv, über den Gletscher, weil wir da halt nicht alleine rübergehen wollten. Und einmal für den Grand Paradiso. Und das war der gleiche Bergführer, ein Italiener und ja, der kam halt aus der Region. Und der sprach eben auch Englisch. Und ja, mir dem haben wir viel erzählt und der war total witzig. Und mit dem haben wir uns gut verstanden, der war einfach, ja, ziemlich verrückter Typ. Immer wenn ich an den denke, muss ich in mich reingrinsen. Das war so, ja mit dem haben wir am meisten erzählt, einfach aufgrund der sprachlichen Barriere, weil da konnten wir mit dem einfach viel reden. Und ansonsten hatten wir leider das Problem der Sprache, also ganz oft unterwegs, wir hatten nur selten den Fall, dass jemand auch mal Englisch sprach. Also wir haben uns da mit Französisch oder Italienisch gebrochen durchgeschlagen. Also, bestellen und so und irgendwie nach dem Weg fragen klappte auch mit Französisch oder Italienisch irgendwie. Die Leute waren hilfsbereit grundsätzlich, aber so eine richtige Konversation war leider nicht möglich.

L: Und andere Wanderer haben wir auch sehr selten getroffen. In der Unterkunft waren oft so zwei bis vier vielleicht manchmal noch. In einigen Unterkünften, aber richtig viele waren halt nicht da. Also, man ist auch oft komplett alleine den Weg gegangen tagsüber.

R: Fandet ihr das gut, oder hättet ihr es lieber anders gewollt?

L: Nee, wir fanden das sehr gut und wir haben uns auch extra deshalb für die Westalpen entschieden. Unter anderem, weil da nicht so viel los ist.

R: Ok. Mal abgesehen von dem Reiseführer, habt ihr schon gesagt es war eher schwierig, also, lokale Einwohner zu treffen oder mit denen in Kontakt zu kommen. Welche Eindrücke habt ihr denn von den Menschen vor Ort so mitgenommen? Also vor Ort ist gut gesagt, das ist ja ein Riesenabschnitt, aber so generell von den Leuten, die ihr getroffen habt?

C: Also grundsätzlich war es schon ganz also wir können schon ein bisschen differenzieren denke ich. Also, in Italien fanden wir die Leute sehr hilfsbereit grundsätzlich, weil das so eine, ja, ganz tolle Atmosphäre oft, die Leute waren so ... ja ... offenherzig. Oft waren dann auch, ja, die ganze Familie war irgendwie da, das ist also nicht nur wie im Film, sondern das war tatsächlich noch teilweise so, dann saß vor dem, vor der Hütte saß der ältere Italiener und der hat ständig erzählt mit irgendwelchen Leuten. Also es war nicht so, dass da irgendwie jemand vereinsamt und mürrisch saß, sondern da war immer irgendwie Leben in der Bude. Das war toll. Und ja, auch wenn die Italiener nicht viel Englisch sprachen, oder Deutsch, hat man uns irgendwie immer geholfen da, also wir wollten da mal telefonieren und da war das aber kompliziert an dem Abend und dann musste das dreimal hin und her, es war also typisch italienisch chaotisch würde ich jetzt mal sagen manchmal, aber so trotzdem das war toll, das hab ich echt so in Erinnerung behalten. Und in Frankreich war das eher so durchwachsen. Da gab es auch nette, wirklich nette Leute, aber manchmal haben wir uns da so ein bisschen unwillkommen gefühlt. Manchmal, also da hatten wir einmal so ein Erlebnis, also auch im Blog, da hab ich beschrieben, wo man uns dann partout nicht übernachten lassen wollte. Man wollte uns da weiterschicken und das war ...

R: Ich glaub das hab ich gelesen. Habt ihr dann noch was gefunden dann?

L: Nee wir sind dann weitergelaufen, bis zum nächsten Ort einfach. Das war dann schon ziemlich lang insgesamt, aber ... Ja, also in Italien hat man sich immer willkommener gefühlt als in Frankreich irgendwie.

C: Ja. Also nicht grundsätzlich, also wir hatten auch dann in Frankreich mal noch die eine Hütte und der war super nett. Wie gesagt, da hängt dann einfach am einzelnen, wenn jemand da einfach, ... oder an bestimmten Hütten vielleicht einfach dann, diese Einstellung vorherrscht, gerade dann in den Seealpen, da ist dann glaub ich schon mehr Tourismus wieder, als weiter nördlich. Und ja, da die waren dort schon Wochen vorher ausgebucht. Und ja, wenn man dann als Weitwanderer kommt wie wir, dann, ja .. und dann sagt, wir hatten aber kein Internet und wir können ja nicht schon drei Wochen im Voraus buchen, dann ist... das war ein bisschen blöd. Das ist aber auch nicht da, wo der Via Alpina lang geht, sondern wir sind da ein bisschen weiter rechts glaub ich, wenn man auf die Karte draufschaut, gegangen. Aber grundsätzlich war das so, ja, in Frankreich.

R: OK. Habt ihr denn auch Dörfer besucht? Ihr seid doch nicht nur in Hütten untergekommen, oder? Ihr seid doch bestimmt auch in manchen Dörfern vorbei gekommen?

L: Ja genau.

R: Welche Eindrücke habt ihr denn davon mitgenommen?

L: Sehr klein. Was uns teilweise ... also einmal wollten wir so ein Stück mit dem Bus fahren und wir haben... in dem Dorf gab es Bushaltestellen und es gab aber einfach keinen Busfahrplan da dran. Ja, sowas zum Beispiel... und ... genau das mit dem, mit der Sprache halt. In den kleinen Dörfern hat halt so gut wie niemand eigentlich Englisch gesprochen.

C: Niemand.

L: Nee, niemand.

C: Niemand.

C: Ja wir waren in einer ziemlich komisch blöden Situation: das Gewitter kam quasi schon angerollt und es war kurz davor, dass es anfing zu regnen. Und ja dann kam dann irgendwie, haben wir gedacht wir müssen uns doch jetzt hier irgendwo unterstellen mal, ja, dann, wir waren in so einem kleinen Ort. Aber der Ort war eigentlich tot und an den zwei, drei Stellen, wo wir jemanden gesehen hatten, die waren sehr ... ja... zum Teil scheu, die haben uns einfach quasi nicht gesehen, oder wollten uns nicht sehen und die anderen, die wir auf der Straße fragen wollten, die haben wir gefragt irgendwie mit Händen und Füßen wo wir uns denn jetzt unterstellen können. Und dann wollten wir wissen, wann der Bus kommt. Ja, und das diskutierte man dann irgendwas, aber man konnte uns eben einfach auch nicht helfen. Man wollte, glaube ich, man konnte aber nicht. Und da kam so, wie ein kleines Wunder, da kam plötzlich der Bus angefahren – sah aus wie ein Bus – wir dann hinterhergerannt und da hat der auch angehalten und hat uns quasi kostenlos dann einfach mitgenommen. Also ja, das war halt einfach ...

R: War das dann auch der richtige Bus?

L: Ja, es hab nur einen. Also was uns auch aufgefallen ist, dass es vor allem alte Leute gab in den ganzen Dörfern wo wir vorbeigekommen sind. Es gab kaum jüngere Leute, fast nur alte. Und das halt viele Dörfer auch schon recht verlassen waren... einige Häuser.

C: Ja, also manchmal hat die Menschen einfach gar nicht gesehen. Also, wir waren in einem Ort, in der Nähe von Celle, da gabs ein Gasthaus... ja, ich weiß nicht wie ich es nennen soll, aber der hieß Otto und der hatte so ein kleines Zimmer, das konnte der uns vermieten. Und dann hat der dann auch für uns gekocht und so. Das war halt ein, ja das war kein typisches „hostotapa“(?), sondern das war einfach nur so ein Bauer, Privatmensch, der da was vermietet hat. Und der sprach dann aber auch Englisch... ja und

L: Naja, nicht viel...

C: Ja nicht viel, aber so guten Tag und aud Wiedersehen ging schon. Ich würde jetzt nicht sagen, dass das in dem Fall sehr herzlich war, aber es war ok, war eine Unterkunft und ja... als wir dann fertig gegessen hatten, meinte er dann so, könnt ihr jetzt vielleicht bitte mal in euer Zimmer gehen, weil jetzt kommen die richtigen Gäste und ... war ein bisschen komisch, aber ...

R: Dann würde ich mal weitergehen zum Thema Umgebung und Landschaft. Wie habt ihr denn generell die Alpen so als Landschaft erlebt. Also, das ist jetzt sehr weit gefasst, so ein paar Stichworte vielleicht: die Berge, Tiere, Architektur, solche Sachen.

L: Sehr schön, sehr abwechslungsreich. Also wir sind ja am Genfer See losgegangen, da war es erst noch sehr flach. Wurde dann langsam hügeliger, bis wir dann das erste Mal freien Blick hatten auf das Mont Blanc Massiv. Das war echt beeindruckend mit den ganzen Gletschern. Dann sind wir da durch. Was wir auch gesehen haben, wie die Gletscher zurückgegangen sind in den letzten Jahren, das war auch, ja, irgendwie beeindruckend zu sehen, wenn auch nicht gut, dass die so stark zurückgehen. Aber das hat man halt auch gesehen. Und dann ging es eher immer von einem Tal ins nächste. Und dann wie sich die Berge dann verändert haben so Richtung Mittelmeer, das war auch toll. Weil man war ja zwei Tage vor dem Mittelmeer noch richtig hoch in den Bergen und dann wie es immer flacher wurde fand ich ... also sehr abwechslungsreich. Auch die Tiere waren ... also ich fand wir haben auf dieser Tour mehr Tiere gesehen, als wenn wir hier wandern gehen im Allgäu.

R: Was habt ihr denn gesehen?

L: Also wir haben viele Steinböcke gesehen, viele Murmeltiere, die man sonst nicht, also so nah hab ich vorher noch keine Murmeltiere gesehen.

C: Ja auch kleine Tiere, Schmetterlinge...

L: Ja viele Schmetterlinge, Vögel, sehr viel ... irgendwie mehr Tiere als hier in der Gegend.

C: Ja, was mir noch dazu eingefallen ist... was halt auch Teil der Landschaft war, waren halt diese Grenzposten. Irgendwelche alten Häuser, Bunker, solche Geschichten, zum Teil jedenfalls, also.. Ich hab jetzt nicht so die Ahnung von den genauen geschichtlichen Ereignissen da, aber das muss ziemlich übel gewesen sein, was da zwischen Italien und Frankreich so passiert ist. Das sieht man immer noch ganz gut an den Grenzposten. Und ein weiterer Punkt, genau, was man jetzt fast wieder vergessen hat: Aber es war zum Teil wirklich viel Grünzeugs auf diesen Wegen, gerade auf der GTA. Wir sind ja auch ein Stück von der GTA gelaufen. Und da hab ich mir

zum Teil, anstatt vom Eispickel hab ich mir ne Machete gewünscht und hab echt gedacht, es geht doch gar nicht. Wir mussten manchmal da wirklich durchschleichen durch dieses Grünzeugs und... und da hat ich schon manchmal den Eindruck, dass wahrscheinlich schon lange keiner mehr diesen Weg so richtig irgendwie in Stand hält oder gegangen ist und und das war manchmal einfach unangenehm, wenn die Sonne dann drauf schien und, ja, man wusste nicht mehr so genau, wo geht denn der Weg. Oder sind wir noch auf dem richtigen Weg überhaupt, und ... Ja, das war halt meistens am Aufstieg und weil wir ja in Richtung Süden gegangen sind, und da, auf der anderen... auf dem Abstieg gings dann meistens. Das war noch ein Punkt von der Landschaft. Also das wurde dann später etwas besser, aber in der Mitte ungefähr war viel Grün.

R: Ihr habt schon gesagt, abwechslungsreich. Wenn ihr jetzt die Alpenlandschaft beschreiben wolltet mit so ein paar Adjektive, was würden ihr da nennen? Also ganz subjektiv.

C: Also ich fand vielseitig. Find ich ganz gut ... ja.... du hast ja schon ein paar gesagt vorhin. Vielseitig, schön, einsam ...

L: Unberührt noch. Unberührte Natur.

C: Stimmt ja.

L: Ja

R: OK. Ihr habt schon gesagt, die Wanderwege waren eigentlich ganz ok. Hin und wieder habt ihr ein Problem gehabt, den Weg zu finden. Wie habt ihr denn insgesamt die Via Alpina als Weg wahrgenommen? Also ihr habt ja gesagt, ihr seid auch andere Wege zwischendrin gegangen. Also wie war denn die Wegerfahrung insgesamt?

L: Also auf der Via Alpina eigentlich ziemlich gut, bis auf ein paar Abschnitte wo es zugewachsen war. Das war glaub ich ein Teil, eine Etappe, aber da hatten wir auch schonmal eine Mail hingeschickt und ich glaube danach wurde der Weg auch neu ausgeschildert oder so. Oder, hatten wir ne Mail geschickt?

C: Jaja, das war eine Etappe, da war der Weg weggebrochen und ja, das war. Das hat sich dann mal irgendjemand nicht gekümmert für eine Zeit und aufgrund unseres Berichts dann hat wohl mal jemand nachgefragt und dann wird's wohl, oder wurde es wohl ausgebessert. Weiß ich nicht, obs stimmt, aber das hat man uns zumindest mal geschrieben.

L: Aber ansonsten war der Via Alpina Weg glaub ich gut...

C: Ja der war gut...

L: sehr gut beschildert und ich glaub wir sind den auch schon in anderen Teilen der Alpen gegangen und... also wir kannten den Weg auch vorher schon. Die Via Alpina, aus anderen Teilen.

R: OK. Dann geh ich nochmal zum nächsten Thema, das geht so ein bisschen um die Erfahrungen generell und auch so ein bisschen um die Emotionen. Gibt es denn Momente auf der Reise, an die ihr euch besonders gut erinnert? Ihr habt ja schon einige genannt ... der Bergführer und die Erlebnisse in den Orten und so weiter ... Gibts da bestimmte Momente die sehr prägend

waren?

C: Ja, auf jeden Fall. Emotionen würde ich mal sagen hatten wir grundsätzlich fast alle. Von Selbsthass über ... wie konnten wir uns das eigentlich antun, dass wir hier langgehen. Kurzzeitig natürlich nur. Über ja,... bis wirklich zu totaler Freude, als wir dann ja, als wir es geschafft hatten zum Beispiel. Wobei das nicht mal der Höhepunkt war, sondern ja, wenn man dann ja, oft wenn man einfach ankam, wenn es ein toller Tag war, wenn das Wetter toll war oder einfach wenn man dann mitten im Nichts saß und man wusste, man hat jetzt einfach Zeit und man kann einfach hier sitzen und kann sich das in Ruhe anschauen und das waren schöne Momente. Der Bergführer klar, also der Grand Paradiso war ein Höhepunkt fand ich.

L: Ja...

C: Und der Ort Charmonix hat mir persönlich sehr gut gefallen, das ist so ein schöner kleiner Ort, also gar nicht so klein halt, aber irgendwie schön gemacht. Ja das waren so meine beiden Höhepunkte.

R: Ja...

L: Ja, meine auch ... Und kurz vor dem Ende war es auch sehr schön nochmal ...

C: Stimmt. Genau, also kurz vorm Ende, also kurz vor dem Meer gibt es so einen kleinen Ort der heißt Sospel und ja, da gibt es im Prinzip auch schon alles so zu kaufen, ein paar kleine Hotels. Und ich glaub, das war vor allem daher, weil wir eigentlich wussten jetzt haben wir es geschafft. Wir hatten noch genug Zeit und wir wussten ok jetzt noch eine Etappe, dann sind wir eigentlich am Meer. Und ja, das ist ein ziemlich unbeschreibliches Gefühl zu wissen, man hat es eigentlich geschafft, aber man ist noch nicht ganz da. Es ist noch nicht vorbei, das war so ...

R: Ja ich stell mir das auch ganz schön vor... auf der Meer so zuzugehen am Ende.

L: Ja genau.

R: Solche Momente, die ihr gerade beschrieben habt, was bedeuten die für euch persönlich?

L: Also, sehr viel. Gerade wenn man auch die Fotos nochmal anschaut und man sich daran zurück erinnert, dann ist man... fühlt man sich gleich irgendwie viel besser. Ja, also schwer zu beschreiben, aber irgendwie bedeutet mir das ...

R: Ja ich kann es mir vorstellen. Ist bestimmt schwer zu fassen, aber ich kann es mir ganz gut vorstellen.

C: Man sagt doch auch, wenn man einen Fernseher kauft, dann hat man in dem Moment wo man ihn gekauft hat sehr viel davon und drei Tage später findet man ihn langweilig. Und ja, es ist quasi der Standard, dass man ihn hat. Und bei der Reise ist es ja umgekehrt, man quält sich, man schwitzt, man fragt sich warum mach ich das eigentlich. Und wenn man eine Woche später die Bilder anguckt dann ja, also die Erlebnisse nehmen quasi über die Zeit zu, anstatt ab. Und ja, ist tatsächlich. Ich hab heute auch nochmal ein paar Fotos geguckt und dachte einfach, ja, man kann da schon ganz gut einfach so den Arbeitsalltag für ein paar Minuten so vergessen und sich da zurückträumen in die Zeit wie es da so war. Und ... ja doch.

R: Wenn ihr heute zurückschaut, ihr habt es gerade schon ein bisschen angeschnitten, wenn

ihr heute zurückschaut, wie seht ihr eure Reise aus heutiger Perspektive.

L: Also eine sehr gute Entscheidung das zu machen wars, find ich.

C: Ja. Genau, für mich war das ein wichtiger Schritt auch in die ... im Sinne der Selbstgestaltung meines eigenen Lebens und die Möglichkeiten, die ich habe zu nutzen und das zu tun, was ich gern möchte. Ja, so könnte man es vielleicht zusammenfassen.... Jeder steckt ja in seinem Leben irgendwo in Situationen, wo es halt ja, keine Ahnung, Familie, Haus gekauft vielleicht, vielleicht Kinder, was auch immer, irgendwelche gesellschaftlichen Zwänge und muss dann entscheiden, wie geht er damit um, macht da ... ja, nutzt man die Freiheiten, die man eben noch hat oder eben nicht. Und ja, in dem Fall haben wir uns entschieden, das so zu machen, weil das eben, weils gepasst hat.

L: Man würde es am liebsten gleich wieder machen, dieses Jahr, wenn es ginge.

C: Genau, richtig, ja.

R: Geht es denn?

L: Nein, nein das macht der Arbeitgeber nicht mit.

C: Aber vielleicht nächstes Jahr.

L: Vielleicht nächstes Jahr.

R: Naja, man hat ja immer wieder einen neuen Sommer, den man vielleicht freischaufeln kann. Wie gings euch denn am Ende der Reise? Also jetzt ganz am Ende. Als ihr angekommen seid.

L: Also erst haben wir uns immer drauf gefreut, auf das Mittelmeer und dann kamen wir an, und es war ... es waren viele Autos unterwegs, viele Motorräder, viele Urlauber... und man wollte eigentlich nur wieder zurück in die Berge. Es war so viel Lärm, Hektik, und ganz anders als man das eigentlich erwartet hätte. Fand ich.

C: Naja, schon. Ich hatte eigentlich das Plan, ich wollte ... den ganzen Scheißweg hab ich eine Badehose mitgeschleppt, und dann hab ich die angezogen am vorletzten Tag und dachte, wenn wir jetzt ankommen, dann zieh ich mich aus und dann renn ich ins Meer mit dem Eispickel in der Hand. Und dann kamen wir da an, und da waren tausende von Urlaubern und ich hab mich nicht getraut. Ich dachte, das kann ich jetzt nicht machen, vor all den Leuten da. Und dann hab ich es gelassen. Ja deswegen... also wir haben uns die Ankunft irgendwie anders, ... also den Zielort irgendwie anders vorgestellt. Nicht so völlig überfüllt mit Leuten. Und naja, deswegen würde ich sagen was jetzt die Ankunft, das Ende zwar toll zu wissen, wir habens geschafft, aber es war nicht, ja, nicht mal so der tollste Zeitpunkt in der gesamten Tour. Der lag irgendwo mittendrin, würde ich mal sagen.

L: Ja.

C: Ja.

R: OK.

C: Und ja, jetzt komplett danach... ja, als wir dann zurück im Büro waren, war es dann ja, die ersten zwei Tage mal ganz schön, sich nicht zu bewegen , aber das hat sich sehr schnell

gedreht muss ich sagen. Ja, also das war wirklich so, nach zwei Tagen konnte ich nicht mehr still sitzen und ich glaub der Lisa ging es genau so. Wir dachten, wir müßens uns doch hier bewegen. Wir können doch jetzt hier nicht acht Stunden am Tag sitzen und diese Maus bewegen. Das geht doch irgendwie nicht. Und, das war ... ja, das schwierig irgendwie diesen, ja, ... acht Wochen lang jeden Tag was neues zu sehen, was neues zu erleben. Zu sehen, was kann man eigentlich mit seiner Lebenszeit machen. Plötzlich wieder acht Stunden lang den Ort nicht mal mehr zu wechseln. Das war schon der Kontrast.

R: An was habt ihr denn während der Reise besonders oft gedacht, also gabs so bestimmte Gedanken, die immer wieder gekommen sind?

L: Also während der Reise hab ich persönlich eigentlich nur an die Reise an sich gedacht. An den nächsten Tag, was noch vor uns liegt oder auch, was wir schon geschafft haben. Man hat noch nicht an die Zeit danach gedacht, was dann ist, wenn man wieder zurück ist. Da hab ich erst so die letzte Woche mal drüber nachgedacht und den Gedanken dann ganz schnell wieder weggeschoben.

R: Und nach der Reise?

L: Nach der Reise denkt man ganz oft an die Reise zurück und würde am liebsten gleich wieder verreisen, also... gerade nach den zwei Monaten hab ich noch mehr Lust bekommen nochmal für eine längere Zeit irgendwas zu machen.

C: Also ein Großteil meiner Gedanken, und das war auch sehr angenehm muss ich sagen, drehte sich um sehr essentielle Dinge während dieser Zeit. Also die drei Grundbedürfnisse, wo schlafen wir heute Nacht, wo kriegen wir was zu essen, und wie wird das Wetter. Das waren wirklich so, ja, die drei Hauptdinge, und wenn diese drei Bedürfnisse, wenn diese drei Sachen, wenn die klar waren, dann ja, dann war ich eigentlich sehr zufrieden. Da hab ich mich ganz gut gefühlt, und... Dann gab es natürlich Tage, wo ich dann auchmal darüber nachgedacht hab, wie es denn eigentlich weitergeht. Ob das jetzt so gut war, das zu machen, und ja, ob mit der Erkenntnis, dass es gut ist, jetzt unterwegs zu sein, naja, dass irgendwann natürlich der Tag wiederkommt, wo man dann zurück ins Büro geht. Und da hab ich mich gefragt, wie das wohl sein wird, ob ich das überhaupt noch mal will, oder ob ich vielleicht was ganz anderes mache. So... darum kreisten manchmal so die Gedanken, nicht ständig natürlich, aber es gab so ein paar Tage, wo ich dann manchmal dachte, komm, eigentlich ... hast du gar keine Lust mehr, zurück ins Büro zu gehen. Eigentlich willst du irgendwas anderes machen.

R: Aber ihr seid beide zurück gegangen, oder?

L: Ja.

C: Ja, noch. Also einfach weil wir, ja, wir haben ja den Arbeitsvertrag entsprechend. Klar kann man den kündigen, ja, aber, wir haben auch ... wir haben den Mut bis jetzt nicht gefasst, zu sagen, komm jetzt ... ohne zu wissen, was wir danach machen gehen wir einfach. Soweit sind wir noch nicht. Vielleicht kommt das noch, aber ja ich würd jetzt einfach mal sagen, die, diese Geschichte mit der Tour ehm, war vielleicht doch erst der Anfang, also wir ... das hat sicherlich noch einige Nachwirkungen.

R: Was macht denn Weitwandern, also nicht nur in den Alpen (für euch jetzt die Alpen), für

euch als Reiseform denn so anders als andere Reiseformen? Also man kann ja sagen, was weiß ich, man fährt mit dem Motorrad, oder ist einfach nur drei Wochen am Strand oder sowas. Also was, was unterscheidet das denn für euch?

L: Auf jeden Fall die Bewegung, und die, aber auch die Abgeschlossenheit. Dass man nicht da ist wo Lärm ist, wo Verkehr ist, sondern die Ruhe.

C: Das hast du auch im Flugzeug... also ich, ja, zum einen auf jeden Fall ja. Würde ich dir auf jeden Fall zustimmen. Aber ich glaube, es ist noch mehr. Man sagt ja, wo man zu Fuß war, war man wirklich und deswegen haben wir am Anfang auch gedacht, wir gehen den ganzen Weg auf jeden Fall zu Fuß. Haben wir dann nicht gemacht, wir mussten an zwei Stellen... irgendwie haben wir uns dann umentschieden, und haben gesagt, komm jetzt, das bringt jetzt einfach nichts, wir müssen den Bus nehmen oder so. Aber, ja, trotzdem war es einfach ja, zu wissen, man kann das aus eigener Kraft schaffen, ohne Hilfsmittel. Mit dem Fahrrad wäre vielleicht auch noch so eine Sache, aber solange man nicht irgendwie technische oder motorisierte Dinge nutzt, hat das so einen ganz besonderen Reiz, da lang zu gehen – selbst, aus eigener Kraft.

R: Was bedeuten euch die Alpen nun als Ort, den ihr eben wir gesagt nur zu Fuß kennengelernt habt? Also hat das eine andere Art Bedeutung als eine anderer Reiseform?

L: Also man erinnert sich irgendwie mehr an die Urlaube in den Alpen, als zum Beispiel Strandurlaube, oder Städtereisen, finde ich.

C: Ja schon, also wenn man in einer Stadt war, dann ... ja weiß auch nicht. Viele Städte sind zwar in einer gewissen Weise unterschiedlich, aber irgendwie sind sie auch wieder alle gleich. Und in den Alpen würde ich sagen, ja, ist es einfach, ja ... für mich persönlich, ich kann nur aus meiner eigenen Sicht jetzt sprechen, ist das so ein bisschen so ein Ort der Geborgenheit, vielleicht auch aufgrund meiner Kindheit, wo ich mich wohlfühle, und wo ich auch, ja, ein gewisses Gefühl der Unerreichbarkeit verspüre. Ja, dann kann ich mein Handy ausmachen und keiner weiß, wo ich dann unterwegs bin. Da kann ich quasi für mich sein, und da weiß ich der Chef ... es ruft keiner an, da hab ich meine Ruhe. Und ja, das ist es was die Alpen für mich, neben dem landschaftlichen Erlebnis, was die Alpen für mich so besonders macht.

R: OK. Ihr habt es gerade schon gesagt, ihr seid wieder zurück ins Büro. Es hat sich aber sicher was verändert nach der Reise. Also, wie hat sich denn eurer Leben nach der Reise verändert, wie würdet ihr das beschreiben?

C: Gute Frage. Wenn ich das schon so genau wüsste! Also, ja, das darf natürlich mein aktueller Arbeitgeber nicht hören.... . Nee, ich seh den Job nicht mehr so eng persönlich, ja... also es gab schon Zeiten früher da war, ja, drehte sich alles um den Job. Eh, es war einfach wichtig, dass man dies oder jenes gemacht hat. Und wenn dann der Chef kam und gesagt hat, das muss aber bis morgen, da hat man sich dann hingesezt und hat das dann gemacht und eh, auch noch ne Überstunde drangehängt, jetzt mal übertrieben gesagt und ... ja, mittlerweile bin ich da persönlich sehr gelassen geworden und dann denke ich mir halt, wenn es nicht fertig wird, dann wird es halt morgen fertig, und wenn es übermorgen nicht fertig ist, dann dauert es halt noch eine Woche, das ist egal. Es gibt ein paar wenige Dinge, die tatsächlich gemacht werden müssen, aber bei weitem nicht so viel, wie man immer glaubt. Ja, also ... also, der eigene... ich glaub ich hab für mich gelernt, ein bisschen genauer zu trennen, was ist wirklich wichtig und was kann

ich auch nach hinten schieben, was ist nicht so dringend. Das ist zumindest eine Sache... ja.

R: Und wie ist das bei dir, Lisa?

L: Gute Frage. Ich hab erstmal den Job gewechselt, als ich zurück kam, aber im gleichen Unternehmen. Quasi in der ersten Woche. Wir sind Montag zurück gekommen, und am Freitag hatte ich eine Art Vorstellungsgespräch in einem anderen Bereich. Das hing sicherlich auch mit der Reise zusammen, weil ich danach gemerkt habe, das will ich auf keinen Fall weitermachen, was ich davor gemacht habe und bin dann zum Anfang des Jahres jetzt in einen anderen Bereich gewechselt, habe aber immer noch die Tätigkeit, dass ich acht Stunden am Computer sitze. Auch das wird sich in Zukunft eigentlich noch ändern, weil ich gemerkt habe, dass es nicht so gut ist ... so lange am Rechner zu sitzen. Und gerade durch die Reise ist mir das nochmal mehr bewusst geworden.

C: Für unsere Beziehung hat das halt auch noch ... also find ich zumindest ... so ein gemeinsames Erlebnis in so einem langen Zeitraum. Ja, man könnte ja auch sagen, wenn es ... ja, wenn man so was zusammen erlebt, kann es ja auch sein, dass die Beziehung da irgendwann scheitert oder dass man dann merkt, man passt vielleicht doch nicht so zusammen, oder ja... das sind auch Belastungen. Man hängt ja auch aufeinander acht Stunden am Tag, zehn Stunden am Tag...

L: Vierundzwanzig Stunden...

R: Ja eigentlich schon ne, vierundzwanzig Stunden.

C: Vierundzwanzig, ja, ich hab jetzt man den Schlaf abgezogen! Also mir persönlich hat das schon gezeigt, dass wir da ganz gut zusammenpassen und das hat die Beziehung in einer gewissen Hinsicht schon gestärkt und es gibt ... das war sicherlich auch ne positive Phase, es gibt auch ja manchmal schwierige Phasen im Leben, ja ... aber ja ich finde, das hat die Beziehung gestärkt.

R: Gut damit ist jetzt sozusagen der Hauptteil vorbei, ich hätte noch zwei Fragen, so als Abschluss. Und zwar, also wenn ihr eure Reise in wenigen Sätzen für jemanden beschreiben müsstet, der noch nicht auf der Via Alpina oder generell weit gewandert ist, was würdet ihr als was würdet ihr so richtig rausstellen in der Beschreibung? Also nur so zwei drei Sätze.

C: Also ganz grundsätzlich sozusagen, wenn ich jetzt jemandem das erzählen möchte?

R: Ja, genau.

C: Tja... ich würde vielleicht so etwas sagen, wie „eine ganz großartige Reise, eine sportliche Herausforderung, durch die verschiedensten Teile der Alpen ...“

L: Herausforderung?

C: Ja, ist eine sportliche Herausforderung, würde ich schon so sagen. Und ehm, „so man viele verschiedene Bereiche ...“

L: Eindrücke!

C: „... Eindrücke bekommt im Bereich, ja, landschaftliche Eindrücke ...“

L: Aber auch kulturelle.....

C: „... kulturelle Eindrücke...“ eh, ja auch das Essen war ja sehr unterschiedlich.

L: Ja.

C: Und eigentlich immer gut... Ja, und bezüglich des Zeitraums würde ich wahrscheinlich sagen „dass es sich auf jeden Fall lohnt, das mal zu machen.“

L: Ja.

R: *Gut!*

C: Ja es ist schwierig, das jetzt so zusammen zu packen, aber das...

R: Ja, das reicht schon. Ich wollte nur wissen, ob es überhaupt möglich ist, sowas in Worte zusammen zu fassen und was man dann für Worte wählen soll, das war eigentlich der Hintergrund der Frage. Und das eigentlich schon ganz interessant. Die letzte Frage ist noch, würdet ihr etwas anders machen, wenn ihr die Wanderung nochmal machen würdet?

C/L: Ja!

R: *Was denn genau?*

L: Wir würden uns mehr Zeit nehmen. Also wir hatten das alles sehr eng geplant, so dass kaum Zeit war, mal länger an einem Ort zu bleiben und da den etwas genauer anzuschauen. Wenn wir das nochmal machen würden, würden wir darauf achten, dass wir uns länger Zeit nehmen und dass wir auch mal an einem Ort bleiben können und uns den genauer anschauen.

R: *OK...*

L: Und uns auch ein bisschen länger erholen vielleicht.

C: Ja genau ... schon. Also, wir sind ja später, hin und wieder, also zwei dreimal mit dem Bus gefahren und diese Entscheidung zu treffen, wir gehen jetzt halt nicht weiter, sondern wir nehmen halt mal ein Stück den Bus, das war eine sehr wich... also eigentlich von außen würde ich sagen, eine triviale Entscheidung, aber für uns eine sehr wichtige grundsätzliche Entscheidung, da einfach mal den eigenen Plan in Frage zu stellen und zu sagen, ok komm jetzt ist es aber auch mal gut. Wir machen es ja nicht, um unseren eigenen Plan zu befriedigen, sondern wir machen es für uns. Und es ist eigentlich völlig egal, wir müssen uns nicht beweisen, sondern wir machen das jetzt so wie es für uns gut ist und nicht wie wir uns das am Anfang überlegt haben. Und als wir das einmal entschieden hatten, war das auch ok. Trotzdem hatten wir ja acht Wochen und ja, wir haben gedacht, sieben Tage Pause reicht, wenn man das mal hochrechnet, ja, mein Gott, also wenn man dann sieben Tage gelaufen ist, und, ja, wir hatten das schlechte Wetter nicht mal so richtig mit eingerechnet, das ist schon alles sehr eng. Einen Tag Pause, sieben Tage laufen, ein Tag Pause ... das war einfach zu knapp geplant. Also ich würde mittlerweile sagen, fifty fifty ist eigentlich gut. Da kann man auch mal zwei drei Tage irgendwo bleiben. Kann einfach mal gucken, man kann umplanen vielleicht, das nimmt den Druck raus. Und ja, das war... entweder man verkürzt die Strecke oder man verlängert den Zeitraum, was für uns dann leider nicht möglich war, den Zeitraum zu verlängern.

R: Wann ist euch das eigentlich aufgefallen, also das es so ein bisschen mit Druck verbunden war, also dass ihr auch mal abweisen musstest von eurer Planung?

L: Nach der Hälfte ungefähr?

C: Ja...

L: Am Anfang noch nicht gleich.

C: Schon, also wir haben schon am Anfang auch gerechnet, haben gedacht, ja jetzt müssen wir heute die Tour machen und wenn es jetzt drei Tage regnet, dann fehlt schonmal wir haben immer so Puffertage, haben wir immer gerechnet. Und wenn wir jetzt hier bleiben, dann fehlt einer, dann sind es nur noch neun. Irgendwie so in der Richtung. Und am Anfang war das halt noch, ja ... sieben Wochen Zeit, oder acht Wochen, da war das noch nicht so kritisch. Aber je näher das dann kam, so nach der Hälfte haben wir gedacht, scheiße, so jetzt, drei Tage schlechtes Wetter hatten wir einmal, und das waren dann plötzlich drei Tage schon weg und wir dachten, nochmal so ein Ding und wir können es eigentlich vergessen. Und das Wetter wird natürlich irgendwann auch mal schlecht, und irgendwann haben wir gedacht, jetzt, ja, es macht einfach keinen Sinn so, wir haben das zu knapp geplant. Und ich bin froh, dass wir den Plan nicht einfach dumm verfolgt haben, sondern dass wir das geändert haben.

R: Noch Fragen, Anmerkungen...?

C: Das einzige, was ich noch sagen kann ist, dass wenn jemand in einer ähnlichen Situation ist wie wir, sprich kann eher so was machen, als Student, oder wenn er als Arbeitnehmer in der Lage ist und körperlich in der Lage ist, sowas zu tun, dann würde ich jedem empfehlen.

L: Wenn er es möchte ...

C: Wenn er es möchte natürlich nur, oder mit dem Gedanken spielt, mal so was zu machen, dann kann ich ihm nur ans Herz legen, dass unbedingt zu machen. Weil er sonst vielleicht das später bereut, das nicht genutzt zu haben die Chance. Ich bin sehr froh, dass ich die Chance genutzt hab, das zu machen.

L: Ja. Geht mir genauso.

Evelin

Researcher: Ja über Ihre Wandererfahrung generell: Ich frage am Anfang immer nach wie lange Sie schon wandern, und für wieviele Jahre und so weiter, aber ich denke, das ist bei Ihnen eher überflüssig. Sind Sie denn auch noch in anderen Regionen unterwegs, als nur in den Alpen?

Evelin: Eigentlich nicht, mit einer Einschränkung: Also bei mir ist es ... ich gehe natürlich Bergsteigen seit meiner Kindheit und mit Begeisterung, und auch Hochtouren und Skitouren und alles mögliche. Beruflich mach ich aber jetzt eben dieses Wanderthema und dadurch hat sich das jetzt in den letzten Jahren bei mir, meine Bergaktivität ausschließlich aufs Wandern verlegt. Und zwar nur auf die Wanderbereiche, wo ich einen Vertrag über ein Buch habe. Und ich hab im letzten Jahr ein Buch herausgebracht über Slowenien, und zwar über das Wandern, 50 – 53 Touren verteilt über das ganze Land Slowenien. Und da sind natürlich Bereiche mit dabei, die jetzt nicht unbedingt zu den Alpen gehören. Aber das ist eine Ausnahme wegen diesem Buchprojekt. Ansonsten bin ich also wirklich nur in den Alpen unterwegs, und derzeit schwerpunktmäßig eben unsere Ostalpen.

R: Ok gut, weiß ich Bescheid. Ja, Sie sagen Sie wandern schon seit Ihrer Kindheit. Wie sind Sie denn darauf gekommen, Langstreckenwanderreisen zu unternehmen?

E: Nur durch das Buch.

R: Durch das Buch...

E: ... ich hab das Angebot gekriegt, ein Buch über die Via Alpina zu machen und deswegen bin ich die Via Alpina gegangen. Aber jetzt muss ich vielleicht noch einmal was dazu sagen, wenn man ein Buch schreibt, dann geht man so eine Route nicht am Stück. Weil ich muss ja die Route beschreiben und ich muss gute Fotos machen, das heißt ich bin darauf angewiesen, im Gegensatz zu anderen Wanderern, dass ich nur an Schön-Wetter-Tagen unterwegs bin. Das heißt, ich bin die Via Alpina nicht am Stück gegangen, sondern ich hab die Via Alpina auf zwei Jahre verteilt und bin immer wieder mehrere Etappen während einem Hochdruckgebiet gegangen.

R: Ja...

E: Und dann ist die Via Alpina, also vor allem die gelbe Via Alpina, die ist also in dem italienischen Teil, dem Frioul, also da zwischen den Dolomiten und dem Meer sozusagen, teilweise extrem schlecht beschildert und auch ganz schlecht durchdacht. Und da sind Etappen dabei, da mussten wir vier fünfmal hin, bis wir eine Etappe für das Buch komplett beeinander hatten. Also dadurch bin ich jetzt vielleicht nicht so der representative Landstreckenwanderer.

R: Ach, aber darum geht es eigentlich auch gar nicht. Also, wenn Sie mehrere Etappen gelaufen sind ... also es geht mir mehr so um Landschaftserleben und persönliche Eindrücke.

E: Ja, OK...

R: Also ich denke, da können Sie mir schon sehr gut weiterhelfen. Sie hatten den Buchvertrag bekommen: Hatten Sie denn vorab bestimmte Erwartungen an die Reise auf der Via Alpina?

E: Ich habe es mir viel einfacher vorgestellt. Ich hab gedacht, das ist überhaupt kein Problem, da entsprechende Quartiere zu finden, entsprechende Beschilderungen zu finden... das heißt ja auch im Vorfeld – es gibt ja eigentlich so eine Vorgabe von damals wie die Via Alpina ins Leben gerufen wurde, ich will jetzt nicht sagen konstruiert, aber sie ist natürlich schon ein bisschen konstruiert, es sind zwar ... die ganze Via Alpina verläuft über bereits vorhandene Wanderwege, aber dass man die Wanderwege jetzt auf einem Themenweg verbunden hat, dass ist natürlich ein neues Konstrukt. Das man dieser Verbindung von Wanderwegen den Namen Via Alpina gegeben hat. Und eigentlich war ja die Maßgabe, dass also eine Tagesetappe nicht, ich glaube nicht mehr als tausend Höhenmeter hat und nicht mehr als fünf bis sechs Stunden Wanderzeit. Und das sah halt in der Realität völlig anders aus. Also wir hatten eine Etappe auf der gelben Via Alpina, da hat man – wäre man – wenn man die eine Etappe am Tag geht, 23 Stunden unterwegs.

R: Ach herrje, wieviele Kilometer sind das denn ...?

E: Und eine andere Etappe, das ist aber eine Taletappe, da ist man, wenn man sehr schnell geht ... es sind 48 Kilometer... und 48 Kilometer, wenn man es mit einem Schnitt von 4 Kilometern in der Stunde rechnet, sind es 12 Stunden, aber da sind ja noch die Höhenunterschiede nicht mit berücksichtigt. Und da war ich dann schon sehr überrascht, wie ich mich intensiv damit beschäftigt habe, dass ich festgestellt hab, diese Etappen sind so, wie sie auf der Internetseite von der Via Alpina Organisation drin stehen, überhaupt nicht zu schaffen, überhaupt nicht zu machen. Und dann wurde es sehr schwierig, das dann aufzudröseln und logistisch aufzuarbeiten und sagen, ja, wo kann ich dann da zwischendrin übernachten und wo ... dann sind die Wege so schlecht beschildert, dass wir uns auch laufend verlaufen haben und irgendwann schafft man das ja dann körperlich nicht mehr, wenn man wieder zurückgeht und dann wieder weitergehen muss. Und dann haben wir einfach aufgegeben und sind die Strecke mit dem Auto abgefahren und haben immer geschaut, wo steigt man ein, wo gibt es Übernachtungsquartiere. Wir waren in einem Gebiet eine Woche nur damit beschäftigt, überhaupt diesen Weg zu finden, Übernachtungsquartiere und dann sind wir es gelaufen.

R: Oje, das klingt ja ... da muss man sich ja wirklich sehr gut vorbereiten als Reisender, wenn man das machen will ja...

E: Ja das stimmt. Wobei es auf der violetten Via Alpina nicht so schlimm war, ich denke da war die Vorarbeit ... also meines Wissens war es so, dass das Sekretariat den Gemeinden und den Alpenvereinen vor Ort sozusagen den Auftrag gegeben hat, die Route festzulegen. Und da haben manche Bereiche das sehr ernst genommen, so zum Beispiel die österreichischen Etappen auf der violetten Via Alpina ... das war fast perfekt. Also da muss ich wirklich sagen, die Christina Schwann, die dafür verantwortlich ist, die sitzt in Innsbruck, die hat das excellent gut gemacht und bei den Italienern zum Beispiel in den Dolomiten, ebenfalls perfekt, auch perfekt ausgedeutet. Teilweise im Trentino, also die haben ganz liebevolle eigene Via Alpina gestaltet, also ganz super. Also da unten im Frioul, da hat man das Gefühl gehabt, da hat sich kein Mensch dafür interessiert. Also das ist sehr unterschiedlich gewesen.

R: Ja, das ist natürlich nicht so schön, wenn man dann länger unterwegs ist auch. Vielleicht sogar mehrere Wochen.

E: Ja und mir ist auch aufgefallen, dass ganz viele Leute, die versucht haben, die Via Alpina

in dem Bereich durchzugehen, auch zum Beispiel auf der roten Via Alpina, wo die Beschilderung in Slowenien einfach auch sehr schlecht ist im südlichen Teil, dass die Leute einfach aufgegeben haben. Wir haben unterwegs Zettel gefunden: „Hallo liebe Mitwanderer – also wo sich halt Leute kennengelernt haben – wir haben jetzt aufgegeben, wir finden einfach den Weg nicht mehr weiter. Wir fahren jetzt mit dem Bus runter ans Meer, tschüss.“

R: Ach oje...

E: Schade, oder?

R: Ja wirklich, das stimmt. Das ist wirklich schade.

E: Oder auch im Internet, ich hab auch sehr viel im Internet bevor wir gegangen sind, also auch teilweise Internet-Einträge gefunden, wo die Leute wirklich geschimpft haben und gesagt haben, sie finden es einfach nicht mehr. Dann gibt es teilweise die Übernachtungsquartiere gar nicht mehr, die eben auf der Via Alpina Seite stehen. Oder es sind Übernachtungsquartiere angegeben, da gibt es bei der violetten Via Alpina einen Ort, der heißt Trucitsche (?), da soll man übernachten. Es gibt in T. kein einziges Gästebett. Also man kann dort nicht übernachten. Und wir haben uns darauf verlassen und sind in T. hinein und sind in die Touristeninformation hinein gekommen gerade noch kurz bevor die geschlossen haben und gefragt, ob sie uns ein Quartier sagen können: Sie haben keine Gästebetten, sie haben keine Vermietungsmöglichkeiten. Dann hat die in einem Gasthaus angerufen, das fünf Kilometer weiter ist. Dann ist die Köchin mit dem Auto nach T. gefahren, hat uns abgeholt, hat uns in das Hotel gebracht, wir haben dort übernachtet, am nächsten Tag hat sie uns wieder zurück gefahren nach T., damit wir weiter gehen konnten.

R: Das klingt ja...

E: Also wir haben tolle Erlebnisse mit Menschen gehabt, aber ... ja, es ist teilweise ein bisschen sehr schlecht aufgearbeitet.

R: Wenn Sie nochmal auf das Weitwandern an sich zurückkommen, also selbst wenn Sie nur ein paar Etappen am Stück unterwegs waren, was sind denn die größten physischen Herausforderungen für Sie gewesen? Mal abgesehen davon, dass die Etappen teilweise zu lang waren.

E: Also bei uns war es so, dass also wenn man mehrere Etappen am Stück geht, dass man ja einen relativ schweren Rucksack mitnehmen muss. Wir haben teilweise auch wieder kehren müssen, weil die Etappen so lang waren, und es war teilweise im Friaul und in Slowenien, war es teilweise wahnsinnig heiß. Man ist ja da doch relativ nah am Meer unten, man ist in den Südalpen und die Wege waren teilweise sehr schlecht. Und das ganze hat sich dann als ziemlich anstrengend einfach entwickelt. Schwerer Rucksack, schlechte Wege und eine ziemlich große Hitze.

R: Ja, ich kann es mir vorstellen.

E: Wir haben teilweise Wegetappen gehabt, also in Slowenien ist es so, dass die dann teilweise, wenn die Saison beginnt – auch nein im Friaul war das, Entschuldigung, ist es so, wenn die Saison beginnt, die beginnt so ungefähr Mitte/Ende Juli, dann fangen die an, die Wege zu mähen, weil die dort in sehr hohen Regionen einen sehr üppigen Graswuchs haben und es

wird dort wenig geweidet, also die haben wenig Schafe, wenig Kühe, die dort das Gras anfressen, so wie man das von unseren Weiden gewohnt ist. Wir sind teilweise durch Gras gegangen, das ist uns bis zur Brust gereicht.

R: Und dann noch bei Hitze...

E: Insgesamt macht es die Sache einfach anstrengend, ich weiß nicht, Sie gehen wahrscheinlich selbst auch Bergwandern oder Wandern?

R: Ja doch, regelmäßig. Also hier in Holland natürlich nicht, aber wenn ich mal die Chance hab nach Hause zu fahren oder in die Alpen oder so, dann auch.

E: Also das was man an Wegen gewöhnt ist, jetzt haben wir um Beispiel in den bayerischen Alpen, in den Tiroler Alpen, in den Dolomiten, solche Wege hatten wir auf manchen Abschnitten der Via Alpina überhaupt nicht vorgefunden, sondern die Wege werden teilweise so wenig gegangen, es sind keine Trampelpuren im Gras, es sind teilweise sehr wenig Markierungen, sehr wenig Beschilderungen, man muss rumsuchen. Man ist sehr viel auf den Beinen. Und was auch anstrengend ist, und das bei einem Weitwanderweg: man geht hinauf, man geht hinunter, man geht hinauf, man geht hinunter und der Körper muss sich immer wieder auf Aufstieg, auf Abstieg, auf Aufstieg, auf Abstieg umstellen. Ich persönlich finde es leichter, wenn ich eine normale Bergtour mache, ich fang unten im Tal an, ich geh hinauf auf den Berg, ich bin oben am Gipfel, ich stelle mich ein auf 900 Höhenmeter, auf 1200 Höhenmeter, auf 600 Höhenmeter, je nach dem. Dann bin ich am Gipfel, dann man ich eine lange Rast und dann gehe ich wieder runter.

R: Ja.

E: Und da hab ich ... also mir persönlich fällt dieses auf einer Ebene, oder rauf, runter, rauf, runter, das fällt mir schwer.

R: Wenn Sie nochmal überlegen, wen Sie so alles getroffen haben... Sie hatten ja schon gesagt, Sie hatten recht abenteuerliche Begegnungen - Wen haben Sie denn auf Ihrer Reise oder den verschiedenen Etappen getroffen? Also, es geht mir um Einheimische und auch um andere Reisende.

E: Also wir haben sehr wenig Gleichgesinnte getroffen, also wir haben... wir waren sehr oft ganz alleine unterwegs. In den klassischen Berggebieten, wir jetzt Dolomiten, Allgäuer Alpen oder so, da hat man hin und wieder ganz normal andere Bergsteiger getroffen, die halt eine Tagesetappe mitgegangen sind, weil sie noch irgendeine andere Durchquerung gemacht haben. Wir hatten wesentlich interessantere Begegnungen eigentlich mit Einheimischen, mit sehr netten Hüttenwirten und dann das, wa sich gerade mit der Köchin erzählt habe, die uns da rumkutschert hat. Wir haben in Slowenien ganz tolle alte Hüttenwirte getroffen, die teilweise noch den zweiten Weltkrieg miterlebt hatten, die unter ... im Hitler-Deutschland deutsch noch gelernt haben, die seit 50 Jahren kein Deutsch mehr gesprochen haben, außer ab und zu eben mit ihren Gästen, die so ein bisschen aus ihrem Leben haben. Das waren ganz interessante Begegnungen und also gerade auch eine unglaublich Gastfreundschaft. Also wir sind teilweise bewirtet worden, in Slowenien haben sie uns Frühstück hingestellt, dass sich die Tische gebogen haben, es war teilweise unglaublich. Also sehr positives, sehr nette Erfahrungen mit den Einheimischen. Also, wir haben keine einzige schlechte Erfahrung gemacht.

R: Das ist ja sehr schön. Wie haben Sie denn die Dörfer wahrgenommen, durch die Sie gekommen sind?

E: Teilweise sehr sehr arm, also es ist ja auch der Gedanke, der bei der Via Alpina mit dahinter steckt ist ja auch teilweise, in einsamen Gebieten den Tourismus ein bisschen anzukurbeln. Das ist meines Erachtens nicht gelungen, weil eben wie gesagt die Leute selbst wenn sie es probieren aufgeben. Und weil teilweise halt auch die Leute dort teilweise Ihre Gästezimmer aufgeben, ihre Gasthäuser aufgeben und abwandern, weil es eben teilweise so arme Gebiete sind. Wir haben Dörfer gesehen, diese einfachen Dörfer, es war – also für mich war es etwas faszinierendes: Wir sind dann auch in diesem Erdbeben-Gebiet unterwegs gewesen, wo 1976 im Frioul so ein schweres Erdbeben war, wo ganze Dörfer kaputt gegangen sind und die dann eben teilweise noch gar nicht wieder aufgebaut sind, teilweise wieder aufgebaut wurden. Und da waren wir in einem Dorf und die hatten gerade den zehnjährigen Wiederaufbau Ihrer Kirche gefeiert. Das war eine Michaeliskirche und da waren wir am 29. September, das ist der Michaelstag, und da sind wir in diese Dorffeier hineingekommen, wo uns dann der Bürgermeister von diesem kleinen Dorf extra die Würste noch gebraten hat, wo wir dann – also ich kann ganz schlecht italienisch, da sprechen ja alle italienisch – wir haben uns eigentlich nur mit Händen und Füßen verständigen können, aber wir waren auf einmal die Ehrengäste in dem Dorf. Also das war toll, war faszinierend. Und wenn man das dann sieht, also diese Ruinen aus diesem 76er Jahr, wie die teilweise auch schon überwuchert sind, wo dann wirklich Dörfer aufgegeben worden sind und vielleicht noch ein paar alte Leute mit Ihren Hunden leben... also es ist faszinierend, es ist beklemmend, es ist traurig und es ist schön, also es ist eine Mischung aus allem.

R: Ja... was haben Sie denn aus diesen Begegnungen persönlich für sich mitgenommen?

E: Dass die Menschen je weniger sie haben, umso freundlicher werden sie.

R: OK...

E: Umso eher sind sie auch bereit, es mit jemandem zu teilen, umso eher sind sie auch bereit, zusammenzuhalten. Also überall, wo wir hingekommen sind, nach irgendwas gefragt haben oder um irgendwas gebeten haben, wir haben sofort Hilfe bekommen. Sofort. Obwohl die Leute wirklich nicht, nicht sehr viel hatten. Das war ... ja also diese Freundlichkeit der Menschen, vor allem auch ... wir sind da durch Gebiete gewandert, wo die sowohl ja sehr stark unter dem ersten als auch unter dem zweiten Weltkrieg gelitten haben. Und wir sind Deutsche. Und wir sind im slowenischen Grenzgebiet gewesen, wo die Menschen wirklich in die KZs abgeholt worden sind, die Slowenen, die eine andere politische Einstellung gehabt hatten, als Nazi-Deutschland gehabt hat. Das sind ... wir haben auf einem Bauernhof ein paar Tage übernachtet und da haben wir einen Gedenkstein gefunden an den Opa, der – ich weiß nicht wieviele Jahre – in einem deutschen KZ verbracht hat. Und die Leute waren freundlich zu uns. Das hat mich sehr beeindruckt. Wir sind an sehr vielen Gedenkstätten vorbei gekommen, Gedenkstätten an Judenverfolgung, Gedenkstätten an den ersten Weltkrieg, an gefallene italienische Soldaten, gefallene deutsche Soldaten, die haben teilweise gemeinsame Gedenkstätten für die Soldaten, die sich im ersten Weltkrieg als Feinde gegenüber gestanden sind. Also das hat mich beeindruckt. Also diese Achtung eigentlich des Menschen, des menschlichen Leidens und der menschlichen Würde unabhängig von Nationen.

R: Ja.

E: Hat mich sehr beeindruckt. Also dass da kein Hass gegen die Deutschen da ist, dass da also ... genauso die Gräber von deutschen Soldaten gepflegt werden wie die Gräber von italienischen oder slowenischen Soldaten.

R: An welche Momente der Reise erinnern Sie sich denn am besten? Also gibt es Momente, die besonders herausstehen?

E: Also das sind natürlich besondere bergsteigerische Highlights, wo wir also ganz besonders schöne Etappen gehabt haben bei ganz besonders schönem Wetter, das ist natürlich ganz klar. Aber ansonsten waren es eben auch so diese ganz ungewöhnlichen Momente, eben durch so verfallene Dörfer zu kommen, eine völlig ungewohnte Landschaft zu sehen. Die Dörfer schauen anders aus, als wie die Dörfer, die man jetzt bei uns in Bayern oder in Tirol gewöhnt ist. Und dann eben ganz besondere Begegnungen, also Erlebnisse. Ein Erlebnis, das ist auf der gelben Via Alpina, da ist eine Übernachtungsetappe in einem Kloster. Das ist so in einem Pilgerhospiz...

R: Oh, OK...

E: Das ist also eine Wallfahrtsstätte, eine ganz große Kirche, Castell Monte heißt das, das ist im Friaul, und da gibt es ein Pilgerhospiz und wir haben in diesem Pilgerhospiz übernachtet. Und das war außerhalb irgendwelcher spezieller Feiertage, wir waren dann die einzigen Übernachtungsgäste. Und dann haben die uns in diesem Restaurant – also haben sie gesagt, wir müssen um 19 Uhr in diesem Restaurant angekommen. Und da ist im Erdgeschoss, ist also ein Barbereich – Sie kennen das ja wahrscheinlich in Italien, dass man da diese Bar hat wo man Kaffee kriegt und wo man ein Glas Wein trinkt, und wo dann halt so Tische sind wo sich die Einheimischen treffen. Und da haben wir gedacht, dass wir halt da einen kleinen Tisch kriegen. Und dann haben die uns durch den Keller geführt, und da war in dem Keller ein Riesen-Speisesaal. Und in der Mitte von diesem Speisesaal war ein Tisch gedeckt. Und an diesem Tisch saßen wir, da konnten wir dann auswählen zwischen drei Menüs. Wir haben ein klassisches Pilgermenü gekriegt, wir hatten Vorspeise, Hauptspeise, Nachspeise, und wir hatten einen Viertel Liter Wein und eine Flasche Mineralwasser kostenlos mit drin – also das war in dem Halbpensionspreis inbegriffen. Wir sind freundlichst bedient worden, es hat uns niemand gedrängt, dass wir aufbrechen sollen und wir haben sehr gut gespeist und die Frau hat uns ganz freundlich und liebevoll bedient. Und dann wollten wir noch einen Kaffee oder einen Schnaps trinken, und dann hat sie gesagt, da möchten wir bitte hinaufgehen in die Bar. Und in der Bar war dann ihr Mann oder ... also ein Mann und der hat uns dann einen Grappa geschenkt, doppelte Menge, also alles sehr großzügig und wir haben uns dann noch gemütlich in die Sonne gesetzt und haben diesen Sonnenuntergang noch auf uns wirken lassen.... haben uns Zeit gelassen auch mit unserem Grappa. Und ich glaube um halb zehn oder dreiviertel zehn sind wir dann gegangen, um ins Bett zu gehen. Und wir sind aus dem, aus dieser Bar hinausgegangen und buchstäblich hinter unseren Fersen ist der Rollladen runtergegangen, die zwei sind rausgesaust, sind ins Auto gehüpft und sind weggefahren. Und dann ist uns erst gekommen: die haben ihren ganzen Abend diesen zwei Gästen geopfert.

R: Das ist ja wirklich beeindruckend.

E: Also absolute Freundlichkeit und Service. Das war ein Erlebnis, also das hat mich

fasziniert.

R: Ja, das kann ich mit vorstellen. Man kann sich dann auch gut vorstellen, wie es da in der Hauptsaison aussieht in den großen Pilgerzeiten.

E: Ja, ja. Und ich denke, die haben viele Gäste in der Hauptsaison, also die hätten es nicht nötig gehabt, uns so freundlich zu bewirten. Das haben sie umsonst getan. Also das ist so eine Mischung aus, ich denke das ist bei der Via Alpina, auch die Kultur wahrzunehmen. Auch wenn man die ganze Via Alpina mit den ganz unterschiedlichen Kulturen, wenn man da über den gesamten Alpenbogen geht. Und die Erlebnisse, das sind wirklich eine Mischung aus menschlichen Begegnungen und ganz besonders schönen landschaftlichen Eindrücken.

R: Ja... Wenn Sie die Landschaft, die Sie auf Ihren Etappen jetzt gesehen haben, beschreiben müssten, welche Adjektive würden Sie dafür verwenden? Sie haben schon gesagt, das waren teilweise sehr unterschiedliche Landschaften und auch, wie sie sie teilweise nicht gewöhnt waren, wie würden Sie das beschreiben?

E: Es war teilweise sehr wild, es war eine sehr wilde Landschaft. Es war... gut ich mein, wenn ich in die Dolomiten gehe oder man durchquert dann noch die Lechtaler Alpen, man durchquert die Ötztaler Alpen, das ist eine Landschaft, die mir vertraut ist, und dieses Hochgebirge ist natürlich auch immer wild, aber da hat man teilweise recht gute und breite Wanderwege. Aber auch dort unten, wo die Berge sehr niedrig sind, in Slowenien und im Friaul sind die Berge teilweise nur 1500, 2000 m hoch, aber es ist eine extrem wilde Landschaft, es sind extrem steile Berge. Es sind sehr felsige Berge, die sehr stark bewachsen sind, aber so zum Beispiel überhaupt kein Vieh weiden kann, weil es ist überwiegend Wald, es ist überhaupt kein Gras da, da ist nichts gerodet, also da ist wenig bäuerliche Bergkultur vorhanden in diesen Gebieten. Es ist eigentlich durchgehend wild. Es waren sehr wenig Etappen dabei, wo ich sagen würde, das ist jetzt sanfte Landschaft gewesen oder das waren gemütliche Wanderungen. Das waren nur einzelne Etappen.

R: Wenn Sie heute zurückschauen auf die Via Alpina, wie sehen Sie die Reise aus heutiger Perspektive? Es ist ja schon eine Weile her soweit ich das mitbekommen habe.

E: Jetzt weiß ich nicht ganz genau, worauf Sie hinaus wollen. Also ich tu mich wirklich schwer, das zu beantworten. Können Sie vielleicht irgendwie noch ein bisschen anders formulieren oder...

R: Ja, also was Sie generell von der Reise mitgenommen haben, vielleicht auch für spätere Jahre, für spätere Touren.

E: Ich würde Sie nicht noch einmal machen, aber ich bin froh, dass ich sie gemacht hab.

R: Ja, OK...

E: Also es waren sehr erlebnisreiche Jahre, es war total faszinierend. Ich möchte keinen einzigen Tag auf der Via Alpina missen, aber ich würde sie nicht noch einmal machen. Das ist mir zu strapaziös und... ja zu strapaziös ist es.

R: An was haben Sie denn auf der Reise oft gedacht, also während Sie direkt unterwegs waren auf der Etappe? Was da an Gedanken immer wieder kam.

E: Bist du ein Glückspilz, dass du das machen darfst. Also auch wenn es teilweise strapaziös war, aber der Gesamteindruck war, dass ich sage, ich hatte einfach Glück, dass ich diesen Auftrag für diese zwei Bücher bekommen habe und dass das in mein Leben so gut hineingepasst hat und dass ich das machen konnte. Auch wenn ich sage, ich würde es nicht mehr machen. Es war trotzdem... es war ein Geschenk. Es war ein Geschenk und eine Bereicherung für mein Leben.

R: Was macht denn Weitwandern in den Alpen für Sie jetzt anders als andere Reiseformen?

E: Dass man es sich zu Fuß erarbeitet.

R: Ja ...

E: Dass ich wirklich jeden Meter zu Fuß gehe. Und durch die langsame Reisegeschwindigkeit des Wanderns ich alles ganz anders aufnehmen kann. Ich bin direkt ... ich bin ja ganz hautnah an der Landschaft, an den Menschen, an der ganzen Umgebung. Wenn ich mit dem Auto irgendwo durchfahre, mit dem Zug, mit einem Bus, das geht viel zu schnell. Ich höre die ganzen Geräusche, ich höre die Vögel, ich nehme die Gerüche wahr, es riecht überall ganz anders. Ich höre die Stille, oder ich höre menschliche Geräusche, ich höre die Tiere, ich sehe teilweise ganz andere Blumen. Es wachsen andere Bäume. Es gibt teilweise, gerade im Friaul, in Slowenien, gibt es ganz viele endemische Blumen, die es nur in diesen Gebieten gibt und sonst nirgends. Wir hatten das Glück, dass wir sehr viel in diesen Gebieten während der Hauptblütezeit unterwegs waren. Das sind einfach Bereicherungen.

R: Ja.

E: Und das ist auch das schöne, wenn man eben zu Fuß geht. Selbst wenn ich mit dem Radel durch die Landschaft fahre, bin ich schneller.

R: Das stimmt, ja.

E: Und ich spüre auch, ich spüre die Erde. Ich kriege das hautnah mit, wenn ein Weg überwuchert ist. Ich sehe die Blumen die an den Borten wachsen... ja, wir haben Geier gesehen, die über uns gekreist haben, wir haben Adler gesehen, wir haben Steinböcke gesehen. Das ist einfach ganz was tolles. Auch Schlangen. Also es ist teilweise auch nicht ganz ungefährlich mit so Vipern, mit so Giftschlangen muss man teilweise auch aufpassen.

R: Haben Sie viele Tiere gesehen? Also Sie haben schon gesagt, viele Vögel. Haben Sie das Gefühl, dass Sie mehr Tiere gesehen haben, wenn Sie in den einsamen Gegenden unterwegs waren, als in den anderen Wandergebieten?

E: Also ich würde jetzt nicht sagen, mehr Tiere, weil gerade in dem Insektenbereich, im Kleintierbereich sieht man bei uns auch sehr viele Tiere, aber man hat teilweise andere Tiere gesehen. Wir haben zum Beispiel so ganz kleine Skorpione gesehen, die es bei uns nicht gibt. Es sind Skorpione, die sind so zwei Zentimeter groß. Also für mich war das was total faszinierendes, ich habe das erste mal in meinem Leben einen Skorpion gesehen. Es gibt dort bedingt durch die Hitze wahrscheinlich wesentlich mehr Schlangen dort unten. Gerade eben auch in diesen verfallenen Dörfern gibt es also ganz viel Schlangen... muss man schon ein bisschen aufpassen. Das ist dann ... wenn einem dann auf einmal so eine schwarze Schlange vor die Füße fällt, das ist schon ein Erlebnis. Allerdings erschrickt die Schlange mehr noch als der

Mensch, die haut sofort ab. Dann gibt es sehr viele Hunde dort unten, ganz viele ich denke auch wild lebende Hunde und Katzen, was man bei uns wieder weniger sieht. Was man weniger sieht, das ist Vieh, also Nutztvieh: Kühe, Pferde und Schafe sieht man weniger. Aber dass es jetzt sehr viel mehr Wildtiere sind, würde ich jetzt auch nicht sagen.

R: Wenn Sie nochmal so zurückdenken: Für eine typische Tagesetappe, die Sie gewandert sind, können Sie einige Emotionen beschreiben, die Sie während dieser Tour immer wieder hatten? Also dominante Emotionen.

E: Ja, also das geht von Begeisterung bis zum 'Ich mag nicht mehr'. Also das ist bei ganz vielen von diesen Etappen so gewesen, dass man in der Früh angefangen hat und dann ist es ganz oft so gewesen: Oh Gott, und wo geht es denn nun lang? Und dass man am Anfang eigentlich oft ein bisschen geschimpft hat und gesagt hat 'Ich finde mich überhaupt nicht zurecht'. Dann ist es meistens sehr schön geworden, also so über die ... ja, der Mittelteil der Etappen, wenn man also meistens etwas weiter hinauf gekommen ist und eben auch die Wege etwas besser geworden sind, weil nicht mehr so viel Gras wächst. Weil man auch freiere Ausblicke hat, dann ist es totale Begeisterung, und gegen nachmittag ist es meistens so gewesen, dass man einfach müde, lustlos, fertig gewesen ist. Das war auf ganz vielen Etappen so, dass es also immer dieses gleiche Schema war. In der Früh ein bisschen mühsam, sich zurecht zu finden. Dann ganz toll. Und am Abend einfach: man mag nicht mehr.

R: Ja...

E: Das war eigentlich auf sehr vielen Etappen. Und auf den reinen Bergetappen, das hat eigentlich die Begeisterung in der Regel komplett überwogen, aber das liegt denke ich daran, dass ich eben auch primär Bergsteigerung bin und eben primär auch gern im Hochgebirge unterwegs bin. Also ich sage mal, die Dolomiten-Durchquerungen, die Durchquerung der Öztaler Alpen, die Durchquerung der Lechtaler Alpen, das war einfach, das war schön vom Aufstehen bis zum abends im Quartier ankommen. Aber bei den anderen Etappen da waren immer wieder so zähe Abschnitte mit dabei.

R: Ja, das macht dann auch wahrscheinlich sehr müde kann ich mir vorstellen.

E: Ja. Genau. Und es sind eben auch sehr viele Abschnitte, die man auf Straßen zurücklegen muss, einfach um die Strecke zu überwinden. Und das macht einfach keinen Spaß.

R: Ja das kann ich mir gut vorstellen. Wir kommen schon so langsam zum Ende des Interviews, ich hab noch ein paar Fragen. Und zwar, Sie haben ja nun die Alpen sehr viel zu Fuß kennengelernt. Was bedeuten denn nun die Alpen als Landschaftsraum für Sie persönlich? Als ein Ort, den Sie immer wieder zu Fuß erkunden.

E: Es ist Teil meines Lebens. Ich könnte mir ein Leben ohne Alpen oder ohne Berge nicht vorstellen.

R: Sie verdienen ja auch, soweit ich das gesehen habe, Ihren Lebensunterhalt damit...

E: Genau. Ich wohne ja auch hier.

R: Haben Sie denn das Gefühl, dass mit jeder Tour, die Sie machen, sich Ihr Verhältnis zu den Alpen verändert oder ist das eigentlich immer gleich?

E: Nein, man kann da vielleicht nicht sagen nach jeder Tour, weil es gibt da auch viele Touren, die sich ähneln, es ist aber ein Unterschied, ob ich jetzt hier in meinen Bergen unterwegs bin, wo ich mich gut auskenne, wo ich manche Touren schon zig-mal gegangen bin, wobei jede Tour schon immer wieder ein bisschen andere Reize hat, oder ob ich in ein völlig fremdes Gebiet komme. Es ist auch ein Unterschied, ob ich jetzt im Gletscher unterwegs bin, im Eis, oder ob ich im Fels unterwegs bin, oder ob ich wirklich in bäuerlichem Kulturland oder im Almgebiet unterwegs bin, das ist ganz anders. Aber diese anderen Lebensweise, wenn man von den gewohnten Berggebieten ein bisschen wegkommt, da kommt man schon, komm ich jedes Mal mit anderen Eindrücken und mit anderen Einstellungen heim. Also gerade, wenn ich so in Gebieten bin, wo so Bergbauern sich ihren Lebensunterhalt damit verdienen, dass sie so steile Almwiesen bewirtschaften und eine kleine Kuhherde oder eine Schafherde haben, also da ... das beeindruckt mich immer schon sehr, und das ändert dann auch immer ein bisschen meine Lebenseinstellung, wenn ich dann wieder... also ich wohn ja in der Nähe von Rosenheim und wenn ich dann nach München komme und mir dann diese Münchner Hektik anschau, und mir dann ... dann denk ich mir ... nah... also ich ertrage es dort immer weniger. Und je mehr ich in so einsame Gebiete komme und so einen ruhigen Lebensrhythmus mitkriege von so Bergwohnern, umso schwieriger wird für mich der Aufenthalt in einer Großstadt. Insofern ändert... verändern die Berge mein Leben schon ein bisschen.

R: Hatten Sie jemals darüber nachgedacht, weiter in den Süden zu ziehen, also noch weiter in die Alpen rein zu ziehen?

E: Nee, also da bin ich zu sehr heimatverbunden mit dem Gebiet wo ich herkomme, auch familiär bedingt.

R: Ja.

E: Nein, was ich nochmal überlegt hab, das ist vielleicht mal eine längere Zeit in einem Gebiet mal zu bleiben. Was weiß ich, vielleicht einmal ein viertel Jahr oder mal einen Sommer, aber auch davon bin ich inzwischen wieder weggekommen, weil es einfach viel zu viele interessante Gebiete gibt.

R: OK, ja. Meine letzte Frage noch: Sie haben ja nun diese zwei Bücher geschrieben und ich muss zugeben, ich habe sie nicht gelesen, ich habe die Zusammenfassungen gelesen. Da stehen bestimmt jede Menge sehr guter Ratschläge drin, aber das würden Sie denn den Wanderern mit auf den Weg geben an Ratschlägen, die jetzt gerne so eine Tour auf der Via Alpina machen würden?

E: Keinen zu schweren Rucksack!

R: OK!

E: Den größten Fehler, den ganz viele Wanderer machen, ist das sie sich von ganz vielen Dingen des alltäglichen Lebens nicht trennen können und einfach viel zu viel in ihren Rucksack hineinpacken. Also es reicht zum Beispiel, wenn ich zwei T-Shirts mitnehme, ich kann das ja jeden Abend irgendwo wieder ein bisschen durchs Wasser ziehen und wenn ich einmal ein bisschen nach Schweiß stinke ist das auch nicht so tragisch. Und in unserer heutigen zivilisierten Zeit meinen alle Menschen, sie müssen sich jeden Abend duschen, sie müssen ihr Duschgel mitnehmen und sie müssen jede Menge Reservewäsche haben, damit sie ja keine

Gerüche von sich geben und damit immer alles klinisch sauber und steril ist und das ist eigentlich so das größte, was ich den Menschen mitgeben möchte: Spart euch das Gewicht, ihr genießt eine Weitwanderung viel mehr, wenn ich nicht zwanzig Kilo auf dem Rücken mit euch herumschleppen müsst. Und man kann sich von ganz vielen Dingen unserer Zivilisation verabschieden.

R: OK.

E: Man muss... wie gesagt, wir haben dann auf Etappen wo wir kein Übernachtungsquartier gefunden haben, wir haben wirklich direkt campiert. Und wir hatten keine Lust einen Kocher oder so etwas mitzunehmen. Wir haben halt am Abend wirklich nur ein Stück Brot dabei gehabt, wir haben ein Stück Käse dabei gehabt, wir haben ein Stück Wurst dabei gehabt und Wasserflaschen, die wir uns dann .. teilweise haben wir auch Brunnen gefunden bei den Hütten... Es reicht, man muss nicht so viel dabei haben. Es reicht, wenn man ein Wasser zum trinken hat und wenn man ein Brot und einen Käse zum Essen hat, dass man nicht mit knurrendem Magen ins Bett gehen muss. Es reicht.

Joseph

Researcher: I already read a little bit around on your blog, but I would just like to know what your experience with long-distance walking is in general. So maybe you could just say how long you are doing that already, in which frequency, where you went, and so on. That I have a little bit of an idea what is your experience with this stuff.

Joseph: Okay. I retired from full-time work three years ago now I think, coming up on three years ago. So, all off a sudden I have plenty of time. And time is obviously the most important requirement, if you go and spend a lot of time away from home. And, I was lucky to be retired quite early, I am in my late fifties now, but still sort of fit and healthy. And, so it was always ... I wanted to do a big walk, for six months long, to sort of make a break from work and ... since, but not such great long-distance one. I tend to be away from home, about, I guess about ninety days a year now... and I do probably three or four trips a year. I am also writing a guide to one of the, one of the walks in Spain. I did quite a lot of research on that. So that is, that is how it works, and I tend to be away for probably up to a month now, and so, and get back again... my wife usually comes with me, she is, she works part-time. She tries to plan her time around that as well... yes, that is, that is the sort of the dynamics of it.

R: Okay. Are you at home right now?

J: Yes, I am in Brighton.

R: I just want to make sure, I don't interrupt you on a trip or something.

J: No, no, no...

R: Okay, to look to the topic motivation, why did you complete the walking journey through the alps?

J: Well, I was already quite familiar with walking in the Alps, and I ... I think the alps is probably in many ways best place to walk in the world, because it is It is not just the scenery, which is very good, it is also incredibly well resourced, with the accommodation system, the hut system, the accommodation, which is the skiing accommodation, which is there available in the summers, it is extremely easy to organize yourself, to plan your own walks, I get a lot of pleasure out of planning the walk as well as actually doing it. The anticipation of a walk (...) as afterward, if I have actually done all the planning myself. So it is ... it is so, it is stunning scenery, but it is also well organized and accessible from the ... from the UK. So that is – I mean, it is just, I call it – I mean, other people call the same as well – it is, though it is quite dramatic walking, it is easy walking ... yeah, you don't have to camp. I am not sure you can camp in the alps actually, when I walk on the Appalachian trail, the (...) trail in the States, it is much easier than that, you can get a beer at the end of the day, food is (...), but that is an advantage of German food again, but it is... it is just, ... so it is very, very easy to organize your own walk and to have a really great experience in the alps, but that is... it got a long history of walking of course. The alpinist movement and that sort of stuff is very interesting. So yes, well organized is as of a big thing as beautiful scenery.

R: Okay. Why did you choose the Via Alpina for your journey?

J: Well, that is partly because the information was there. I mean it is a good website, you can, from my point of view to plan the walk I want, the key issue is knowing how long it is going to take to get to an accommodation. And the Via Alpina website tells you that. You know, you can download the trail, you can calibrate the altitude to your own sort of, capability, the accommodation is listed against the trail, so it is really important that... how well organized, I mean, the walking in Spain is a lot more difficult, because it is not so well organized.

R: Yeah, I can imagine.

J: Yeah ... it is precisely about the history, that is the main reason it is not so well organized. They have been doing this long, they have been doing some serious walking and climbing in the alps, you know, for over a hundred years, so ah... well over a hundred years, a hundred and fifty years, so you know, the Alpinist movement started in the late 1890's, so yes.

R: Yes, I see... What did you expect from your journey before you started walking?

J: Well, I knew the particular walk, he, I knew what walking in, Austria, and Switzerland, and Italy is like. I knew what it is like to sleep in a hut. I knew to try to avoid sleeping in a dorm if I possibly could and get my own room, and that sort of stuff. Yes, so I knew it was going to be social, I knew it was going to, you know, I am pretty experienced I guess, to be honest, in terms of that sort of thing. The main issue always is whether I can be lucky with the weather, because it is, the scenery is so much nicer if the weather is good.

R: (laughing) Yes that is true, if it is raining all the time it is probably horrible.

J: Well, I am at home in England, where it is raining all the time, so...

R: Alright. To move on to the topic of the physical experience. You already have a lot of walking experience so that is probably something you are used to, it is not the first time that you did that, but how did you experience your own body during your journey, or how do you experience your body in general, when you are on such long walks?

J: I do not know, it is a difficult question. I am just used to it and I am very lucky if my, ... I walk a lot with my wife and she has got... she can do the same thing. And so we are quite happy to walk eight or nine hours a day and that is how we want to do it. And we know we like to hang out in the afternoon, we like to get away early, because the lights are so nice, if we can get away early. And so I... I find it fine if I am walking on my own, ... I tend, this is a terrible thing to admit, but I tend to, take my iphone, and I listen to books and podcasts and all that sort of stuff, just to keep me, ... just to don't get too bored frankly. If I am distracted with a good book, I can walk literally as long as it is light. I do not have a problem like that, so... I think it is an interesting thing about what makes you tired and I think what makes you tired is quite often boredom, and thinking about your body rather than the actual capability of your body. I think people are capable of doing an awful lot more than they think they are, and that is why everyone is so fat, because bodies are designed for huge amounts of exercise and if you... we used to walk everywhere and now nobody walks anywhere, so... that's why everyone is fat.

R: I know what you mean, I do that when I run. I listen to something that distracts me and then I can run much longer...

J: Yes, it is quite interesting. What you can do ... you cannot physically read a book when you are walking long, but you can listen to something. There are so many things to listen to now. And, yes, that changes things a bit.

R: Which are the main physical challenges for you. I mean, you said it is easy, but what would you recall as a physical challenge?

J: Well...

R: Also if you think about the alps in particular.

J: The alps in particular... what is exciting about the alps is partly the history of the place and how well organized it is, you can do ... on all of my walks, I am not a technical climber or anything like that, but a normal walker can go to very extreme places. The routes are laid out, you know, there is fixed ropes and all that sort of stuff in some places, so... a lot of people and friends I go walking with find that intimidating, but clearly not the Austrians, and they love their walking. And the challenge of the alps, the excitement of the alps is that the ordinary walker standard walks take you to some really exciting places. Much more exciting for example than... I walked quite a lot in the Himalayas and the standard walk in the Himalayas is not anything quite as exciting as a standard walk ... you know in terms of where you go, as it is in the alps. It is just the history of walking, climbing, which is so well developed.

R: That is really interesting, I would never have imagined that you would see it so differently. I would think the Himalayas are much more spectacular and everything...

J: Yes, well they are. And you are seeing great iconic mountains and all the rest of it, but you tend to spend most of your time in the Himalayas walking long very well established paths where people carry bags and huge amounts of stuff on their backs, the porters and everything ... so the porters would not be able to go to many places, like a few of the places you can walk to in the alps. It is just more developed you see, and that is the point.

R: OK, I would move on to the next topic which is social interaction along the way. And let me start with the question: Who did you meet during your journey? I am referring to locals as well as other travelers.

J: (...) You meet locals who are providing services in the hotels or huts. The people I met were other travelers, and people who walk in the huts in the evening, you meet the. And Austrians in particular, they speak English like you do. So that is the sorts of people I met.

R: To what extent did you have the chance to engage with any locals that were not providing services?

J: To be honest I do not think I really did. I guess I occasionally had a chance, it's mainly... the alps ... if you are walking high in the alps there is not a lot going on in terms of local people...

R: Yes, it is mostly other travelers I think...

J: Yes, because one of the interesting things about different places... in the alps you get above the tree line quite quickly. My wife often regards the landscape high up as some sort giant slanky, because you know, there is not much growing. It is not like the Himalayas actually, in the

Himalayas you spend a lot of your time walking through agriculture, and ... because the snow line is so much higher there. And you are walking through villages and large numbers of people who are still farming out there. That is a different sort of situation, but in the alps, no it is quite quiet and so you only meet essentially ... people who I meet are essentially travelers. Of course, I mean the interesting thing... long-distance walkers are very, very rare. So the number of people who are doing long-distance trips compared to the numbers of people who are in the huts, the long-distance walkers are a small proportion. So that vast majority of people who walk are local people. So you know, as soon as there is a good weather forecast when you are in the alps, everyone goes out walking and if the weather forecast is poor, then there is nobody there. When it is on your doorstep you chose your moments and... it is not always the case when there are some... (...) when it is not particularly sort of iconic as a trip doing the Munich to Venice walk in the summer, and I am expecting to see a lot more people doing that walk. There are not many people interested in ... it has not established itself as one of the great long-distance routes I think, despite the fact that it is so well organized. I did the ... the first long-distance trip I did was the Holt(?) -route from Chamonix to Zermatt, and because it is more iconic there are lots of people on the same route and you tend to be bumping into them...

R: Also the long-distance... more long-distance hikers...

J: Yes, yes, because it is an iconic route. I mean obviously, you know, you get on anything to do with the St. Jacob's way and sort of that has it's (...) all over Europe now. And it is the same, the same people are following the iconic route. The Via Alpina is not, has not established itself like that apart from the... I was on... the Höhenweg, which goes along the border between Austria and Italy. That is a very popular walk for Germans I think and you met a lot of people several times on that walk, and you're going on the same schedule with them, and you would see them every night.

R: Okay ...

J: Do you follow my meaning?

R: Yes, I get an idea. .. because everyone is probably choosing a similar itinerary...

J: And the same guidebook!

R: And they end up in the same huts in the end...

J: Yeah, yeah...

R: For the people that you met, which impressions did you have of the other travelers that you met?

J: Well... it is interesting for me, Austria I am very impressed with as a walking country. You know, the Austrians just get out and carry their children high up and... walking in the UK is very much a grey-haired persons sport. And there are lots of grey-haired people out walking, and that are the sorts of people you expect to see, but in Austria all ages are walking and it is very nice to see that. So, they were very interested to find out you are from England, because the vast majority of people are not. And you were a bit different to everybody else you bump into, so there was always the chance to have a conversation. Is that answering your question, I am not sure?

R: Yes, I think so. It is... I do not really go much into this... what I intend with these questions is basically to find out if there is a lot of engagement with others or not, and what kind of engagement it is, so I think it answers the questions quite well...

J: There is more engagement in Austria than there is in most places, Austria and Italy, because people speak English. In Spain...

R: Yes, I heard that one before. I talked to a German couple last week and they were in the west alps, in France and went down to the Mediterranean Sea. And they said it was quite complicated sometimes... the communication, because not all of the people... basically, yes, not many people spoke English.

J: Yes, must have been the GR5...

R: OK, I will move on to the physical environment, so what I mean with this is basically nature and culture, everything that comprises the landscape. And I will just ask the general question: How did you experience the alps as a landscape? So that can include everything: mountains, villages, vegetation, animals, architecture, the landscape condition... and you can just elaborate on what you found most important and what stroke you the most... so to say.

J: Well, it is quite varied and so you go from the sort of... the Dolomites for example are completely different to the mountains on the Northern side of the Austrian border. Completely different. It is very sort of ... particularly as you go and get into the valleys, if you are lucky not to be in trees it is very clean and brisk to English eyes, you know, everything is manicured, the villages in particular, are incredibly tidy, it is as if, as if some sort of tidy police is going around and making everybody clean up all the time. It is just extremely well looked after. The huts are good fun, you know, beer drinking culture. Drinking beer is terrible, but never mind... compared to other countries. I am not sure... I love walking the alps. I mean I love walking the Dolomites in particular, they are absolutely amazing, but the (...) of the alps ... it is nice to get high, it is nice to get above the treeline which you can do quite well in the alps. You get great views, great place to be, that is...

R: You already started a little but, but if you would use some adjectives, how would you describe the alpine landscape that you walked through. You already said, it was very varied...

J: I do not know, it seems to be a standard sort of thing, you have three days up high and then you drop down into the valley. And then you go up again, three days up high after crossing that valley. And high up you get, particularly as you are approaching these huge valleys, the views are just amazing. And trying to work out what you are seeing is such a challenge in terms of which mountains you are looking at and all the rest of it. It is very important for me to be out of the trees, to get above the treeline and you get lots and lots of that, in the alps. Much more than you do walking in the (Francis something?), it is all in the trees... In the alps it is just ... I love long views and to get long views is what I am really looking for. I might not be very illuminating I do not think, but I just like to be out and see a long way in nice crisp lovely air, and setting myself a physical challenge. That is what I do it for.

R: Yes, I can relate to this, I always hiked with my parents when I was little and I liked it best when we were up high and not in the trees, because there are no bugs.

J: Oh I hate walking through the trees.

R: Yes I never liked that as well, so I definitely know what you mean. One more question about landscape: How did you experience the trails of the Via Alpina?

J: They are pretty good, I ... Yes, I would say they are very good actually. The way marking is fantastic and you got, you know, you got the route on your ... I always had the route on my phone. I cannot get ... very difficult to get lost. When I did the really long distance, and tried to cross into the eastern Austria, the way marking just collapsed and you lose the trail very quickly, so Austrians do not walk in areas which are not beautiful. It is not like in the UK where I have to walk in areas which are not beautiful, because there is not enough of it. They only go into the good parts, and in those good parts it is fantastic. It is easy to follow, there are so many huts, so you know, you have got plenty of time, you can stop for lunch and all that sort of stuff. It is just like walking in a massive park really. It is very good... as long as you expect the weather, you know, the weather turns bad...

R: Did you ever have that... that you were on the road and the weather was really really bad?

J: Yes, I had that... I got a lot better getting myself organized in those situations and ... on some of my early trips, I did not have GPS and you just get lost so quickly, because you know, you lose all sense of direction in the mist and it is very very dangerous. You do ... we have been around mountains several times and got back to where we started from, so all that sort of stuff in the mist and actually... it is dangerous in the mist and you have got to respect that and take sensible decisions. Yes, I had that a few times... but the weather generally is pretty good in the alps, you know, if you go late... September is the best month I think and it is not so crowded then, so late August, September is usually pretty good.

R: OK. I will move on to the topic of more personal experiences along the journey and my first question is: which moments of your journey can you remember most clearly?

J: Well ... the most clearly meeting people, I guess the most extreme bits, the scary bits, the challenging bits, are the bits that you remember most. The best thing about blogging and ... it forces you to think about what you are doing, because you actually have to talk to somebody else about it. So if I concentrate, I can just about link every single day ... I have to concentrate, but I can just about remember what I was doing each day, what each day was like without having to go back to the blog, because you know it is that sort of activity like fixing your mind, unlike work when you cannot remember one year from the other. So I mean there are special days when things went very wrong and slightly legendary, you know with friends in particular you remember, you obviously remember more when you are walking with friends and you got adventure you can relate after ... relate many many times. The things that stand out, tend to be the things which did not go so well in the reversal way, but that is yes...

R: Did you have a moment that was really extraordinary for you?

J: Lots of funny things happened if that is extraordinary... I was walking with a couple of friends, it was on the E4, and the weather was not good, and we were getting late for the hut and we knew that there were a lot of people staying in the hut. It was in the most popular part of Austria... so they... disputed, if that is how it happened, I went on ahead and they managed to get lost going up the mountain and had an altercation with a group of animals, and we continue

to argue about what group of animals they are, but they claim that one of them was a bull... I went past the same group and I did not see a bull, but they have been walking for three days and I did not have his phone number, which was terrible, so I had to ring some people in England, so they could ring him to find out what happened. And many other things, he actually twisted his ankle and all sorts of stuff. So he was a good friend, but we still argue about what happened on that particular event. He ended up going back down the hill and I stayed in the hut on my own, but ... I guess they would not go past the bull... there is a lot of stuff like that.

R: If you look back after some time, how do you see your journey through the alps from today's perspective?

J: Well I mean I just ... I do not know, it is something I just want to keep doing, so it is not looking back, it is planning the next one. And every trip we do, we come across another one we want to do. For different reasons ... I have not done one ... I particularly like the Höhenweg, I might do that one again. You know, the Austrian/Italian border walk. But by large there is such a list of other walks I want to do, that I am too busy looking forward to the next one, than spending an awful lot of time ... I mean you could spend a lifetime walking the Via Alpina, couldn't you really?

R: Yes probably, all these different trails and ...

J: Yeah yeah, but so I got ... we are going back in late September to walk the Munich to Venice walk. I quite like to go the GR5, which probably the people you were talking to if they walked down to the Mediterranean in the west side of France, might have done that one. So it is the (Albert?)weg, which is a really lovely walk and very well resourced, which is one I would like to do as well. So it is just so many, I mean it sounds a bit tedious, but I definitely would want to go back to the alps at least once a year, for one big walk every year. I mean I love Spain as well, I am getting quite good at handling the complex walks of Spain, so I am tending to focus more on Spain and the alps, rather than other places, so ...

R: OK. To look a little bit at how you feel during these walks, sometimes it is complicated to describe, but could you name some emotions that you frequently feel during walking? During this particular journey.

J: Well you go through several each day of feeling fantastic in the morning when you get going, and if you get going nicely, when the light is really good. And the wonderful thing about walking is you could be absolutely exhausted at the end of the day, but proving you had just a few hours sleep, and you know huts are not actually conclusive to good sleeping... But I think if you got just a few hours of sleep, you are great the next day. So that sense of feeling strong and feeling ready to go with all that lovely scenery early in the morning in one you experience so often. And then depending if you brought ... I do not always stop for lunch which is bad, but you know, you start to run out of sugar and in the afternoon you start feeling a bit tired and then by four o'clock for some reason you start to feel good again and it is cooling down and the lights start to improve again. Light is really good, it is important and if you get a lovely... Austria at times, when you get a North wind, and it is particularly dry with the North wind, you get absolutely amazing views because the light is so perfect and clean. Lots of the time the light is not quite so good, because of a bit of a ... particularly in the middle of the day, you get a moisture air and the lights are not so good in the moisture... so you know, the best days are the days when

the lights are fantastic and it is clean and you get those long views.

R: Do you take many photographs?

J: Oh yes, yes, I take lots of photographs, partly for the blog, but also ... you know, I am trying to get better at that all the time. So it is a frustration when you are out walking and the light is not good. Particularly if it is raining, because you have to record it partly for the blog, but ... I think it is easy to take a good picture, if the light is perfect and ... anybody can do it I think. Maybe not anybody, some people take fantastic picture, but it is easy to take an adequate picture if the light is really good. So it is frustrating when the light is not good.

R: I really liked the photos in your blogs posts. I am just having it open and trying to recap your trail. I think the third one is my favorite. I do not know, you probably cannot see it right now, it is like high alpine meadow between Feldernjochl and Gatternpass... It says on the capture, but that is a wonderful picture.

J: The big problem is spelling everything correctly, it is hard work spelling things if you do not speak the language, because they do not make any sense.

R: Even for me, because it is a bit of a different German... To come back to the emotions one more time, how do you usually feel at the end of your journey?

J: Well, depends how long the journey is, depends whether I am doing it on my own or not, you know, the 613 was special and ... by the time I got to the end of that I was desperate to get home. So it is ... you know ... I spend a long time on my own on that trip, so it is ... yes, if I am with friends and the rest of it, there is a satisfaction of getting to the end of the plan. You know, it is always a little bit of anxiety, if things are going to work out, so it is nice to have completed what you have set out to do. Sounds a bit sort of (...) as we say, yes but ... it is good to finish, it is good to have done it, you know. It is satisfaction I guess, of completing something.

R: Is it ... do you feel sad, or is it just like you are already looking forward to the next trip?

J: I am already looking forward to the next trip. Each trip you get some new ideas, and every trip I do I have .. always have trip lined up. I mean, I know ... I know what I am doing for most of the summer, into the autumn, and a good part of next year as well, so ... I am very very lucky you know ...

R: It is really nice.

J: Yes, it is. It is what I always wanted to do, it is to retire and do something else, so I have actually... I am living the dream, as I say.

R: Yes, definitely, I would say. You are definitely living the dream. You always say that students have a lot of time, but that is not true, so... I should have done it, but I did not... no, I would come to my last topic, actually. That is, personal meaning and also life after the walk, which for you is not really life after the walk I guess, because you are already doing the next one, but let us say life between the walls. And first of all, I would like to know what makes walking through the alps for you different from other means of traveling? Like, for example traditional tourism, like staying two weeks in a hotel or something...

J: I just do not do that and... I am very lucky in the sense of ... my wife enjoys the same sort of thing. Not everybody has that, so it is ... it is not me, a lot of friends ... are going off doing bits in between what I call a more standard sort of holiday. But we both like this sort of physical... sort of holiday. You know, we like food and went to city breaks and all that sort of separate ... we do that usually at the beginning or in the end of a trip to Spain or something like that, but we... so, it is not just, it is not quite just for me really... you got walking in the alps, you got walking in the Himalayas. I tend when I am in the Himalayas to go in organized groups and, you know, it is a different sort of experience. Walking in Spain is completely different from walking in the alps. That is another sort of holiday. I have started, I have been on a cycling trip recently, and I am quite interested in doing an organized cycling trip. My wife is keen on cycling as well, so, you know, we want to do it in Spain. So we might be planning that for October. I mean the common, the unifying thing about all of them is that they are all very physical. We are always trying to push ourselves a little bit. Keen to keep fit as long as we can, you know. The difference between somebody who is... keeps going... I can, you can keep going well into your seventies with no trouble. Or even longer. And if you do not keep going ... you cannot ... like there is plenty of people in their twenties and thirties, you cannot... (...) our children, well our children's partners, all of them for some bizarre reason (...) cannot dream about doing anything like this. And it is a great shock to us, but ... we try to keep quiet about it, but you know...

R: I can imagine ... What do the alps mean to you as a place that you discovered on foot and not for example by car? Is it a different meaning of landscape?

J: Well...

R: Or would you say you relate different to it as a place?

J: I do not think I them as a car to be honest. I have been skiing a lot, when I was younger I went skiing until quite recently. We do not ski anymore because we found we preserve our knees if we are walking, but I think alpine scenery in the winter is just amazing as well. But I think I would... yes, I would rather drive through the alps than drive through... a longer motorway in the UK that is definitely true. But I have always ... my experience of the alps is either skiing or walking or getting to the beginning of a walk. I thought about driving through the alps. I do not ... we are slightly anti-car to be honest. So I would go by train if I could. And I have got a part of the blog, which I am trying to develop, is walks in Brighton, which is where I spend the time in between, and the rule is you have to get everywhere, you have to get everywhere by public transport. That is just a sort of rule and... It just seems to me a slight contradiction driving somewhere and then going for a walk.... if you can avoid it.

R: Would you say that you have a special relationship that you discovered walking?

J: Yes, I do. It is when you discover something I think, and I am developing more of a special relationship to be honest with Spain, because it is so interesting. You know the whole history... the whole history of Spain, the population, all that sort of stuff... you discover things which you... which as a consequence of walking, you would not have appreciated if you would not have walked. You do not quite get that in the alps, it is just – it sounds a bit.. it is not culturally as obvious... it is not as culturally rich as walking in Spain I think. The scenery is more dramatic and it is better organized and in some way it is easier, because you have got the hut system, and it is in some ways more fun, but in some ways it is not quite as interesting as

walking in Spain.

R: Alright ... It is maybe hard to just relate this to Via Alpina, so maybe more in general: how did your journey change you and your life afterward?

J: Well, you become, as you do it, you become more confident about doing it. So you, do to something like the Via Alpina opens up further opportunities to do more. I mean, that is the main thing to be honest. I enjoyed it and I wanted to do more of it. And having done it, I was able to do more of it. And that is true for all the walks you do, I mean that is... we were lucky that we divided to really start, we did not really come to walking until our forties, but we started with (...) routes, and you know, got more and more ambitious, so the (...) route was the first one we did and that gave us the confidence to do more. And I think that is amazing. You obviously enjoy it, but unless you do it, you do not get the confidence to try even more interesting things.

R: OK.

J: So, making it as accessible, and as I said the Via Alpina website is particularly good, makes it easier for people to get that experience and then to try out more things.

R: Yes, and probably also when you do it the first time, maybe it is a good start...

J: Yes.

R: ... to do something like this...

J: Yes!

R: How would you describe your journey to somebody who never hiked in his life before? Would you give some special recommendations, like...

J: I would the main thing, this sounds terribly superior and ... but the main thing is to be reasonably fit and not ... it is hard work if you are very ... it is hard work if you are carrying a lot of weight. And if you carry a lot of weight, either on the back or around your stomach, it is a lot harder work. And it is (...) not to be too heavy, not to carry too much, and then it is easy you know, it is not rocket science. Walking uphill is sort of weightlifting, and if you got less weight to lift it is easier.

R: I can imagine. I have got two more questions, even though we are a little bit over time. One of the questions would be: If you would do the hike on the Via Alpina again, would you do anything differently?

J: No, I do not think I would. I think... no, I think I would not...

R: OK!

J: Yes, I think, it is always ... the time of the year is important. So you have to get the best weather, the weather is slightly better on the Southern side of the alps than on the Northern side of the alps, and to go later... as late as the huts are there. It gets a bit quieter, but the weather is really really nice in September. The huts start to shut towards the end of the month, it is a really good month for walking... sounds a bit boring, but that is it, yes.

R: Alright. No, no it is not. It is not boring. Yes, my last question for now: Oh what did I want to ask, I am confused... Yes, when I see your blog and also what you told me about your journeys, your walking journeys take up a huge part of your life I think, or have a prominent role in your life...

J: Yes.

R: ... what does long-distance walking as a practice that you do mean to you in general?

J: Well, it is... it is that walking and the planning of the walking and the writing about it as well... it is nothing spiritual, it combines sort of a bit of intellectual with a lot of physical with something I really like which is being out of doors. You know, out of doors in beautiful places. Those are the things... I have managed to go with the, sort of, the guilt of not working, so that is an issue for lots of people that you have to do something, but ... I avoid that sort of guilt and it is something I enjoy doing. It is nice to take friends with me and I meet people, but I would do it to be honest if... I like doing it completely on my own, as that is what I physically like doing.

R: Alright, that was my last question.

Martin

Researcher: Zum Einstieg würde ich mal fragen, wieviel Wandererfahrung du generell schon hast, also wie lange du schon wanderst, vielleicht auch Langstrecke, wie oft du das etwa machst und für wieviele Jahre. Und ob du dann immer am selben Ort unterwegs bist oder auch verschiedene andere Orte besuchst. Also dass du einfach mal einen kurzen Überblick gibst, wieviel Erfahrung du schon hast.

Martin: OK. Ja, Wandererfahrung hab ich eigentlich von Kindesalter an, weil meine Eltern sind viel gewandert. Hier in der Schweiz in den Bergen. Sie haben mich auch immer mitgenommen. Urlaub das war meistens halt ... im Sommer sind wir dann irgendwie in die Berge gefahren und ein oder zwei Wochen haben wir dann Wanderurlaub gemacht. Und von daher habe ich meine Wandererfahrung würde ich mal sagen, auch über die Berge, auch über das Verhalten in den Bergen, Sicherheitsaspekt und so, da habe ich viel von meinem Vater gelernt.

R: OK.

M: Hab dann nach der Lehre, so mit zwanzig ... bin ich dann nicht mehr so viel gewandert, eigentlich gar nicht mehr für so fünf, zehn... fünf bis zehn Jahre. Und hab dann aber wieder Lust gekriegt, einfach wieder in die Berge zu gehen. Und ja, hab es auch vermisst, die Berge, und hab so dann das Wandern wieder angefangen. Mit fünfundzwanzig Kilo mehr auf den Rippen und das war dann ... am Anfang ging es dann recht in die Knie, aber ja ich hab ... ja, man gewöhnt sich daran und man baut auch Muskeln auf und so. Und dann bin ich einfach regelmäßig, hab ich so Tageswanderungen gemacht und in dem Stil. Fernwanderungen – das war meine erste Fernwanderung, Langzeit quasi.

R: Bist du immer in den Alpen unterwegs, wenn du wanderst?

M: Nee, nicht. Ich bin auch Photograph noch neben meinem Beruf als (?) und bin zweimal in Australien gewesen, in Südafrika, Namibia und dort bin ich auch immer mal wandern gegangen, also vor allem in Australien, da gibt es sehr schöne Nationalparks und sehr schöne Wanderwege, die ich dann auch begangen habe. Aber es ist nicht vergleichbar mit den Alpen hier, also da ist halt alles eher flach... ja, man macht nicht so viele Höhenmeter würde ich sagen.

R: OK. Gut, dann komme ich kurz zur Motivation und auch ein bisschen zur Erwartungshaltung an die Reise. Du hast gesagt, das war deine erste Langstreckenwanderreise – warum hast du die Reise auf der Via Alpina unternommen? Ich hab ja gesehen, du hattest dieses spezielle Projekt, dass du nur bei Bewohnern und, ja, quasi nur bei Leuten, die du triffst, übernachtetest und nicht in den Hütten. Stimmt das denn?

M: Jain... ich bin einfach mit dem Zelt unterwegs gewesen und ja, aufgrund der großen Kälte habe ich dann auch ab und zu mal ein Zimmer genommen. Weil es war eben, letztes Jahr war es sehr lange noch sehr kalt und hat auch sehr lange noch Schnee gehabt. Und wenn man dann dauernd nur im Zelt schläft, dann ist das ein bisschen sehr kalt. Ich war dann auch gezwungen, eher den Tälern nachzugehen, weil es halt einfach ab, ja, ab zweitausend Metern hat es noch ordentlich Schnee gehabt. Aus diesem Grund ist es halt eher schwierig... also

generell zum Teil schwierig, wild zu campieren. Vor allem also in Südtirol, Italien, ist es ja eigentlich verboten. Und aus diesem Grund hab ich halt auch ab und zu mal das Zelt auf einem Zeltplatz, Campingplatz aufgestellt. Weil im Tal wollte ich es dann nicht einfach irgendwie auf eine Wiese stellen.

R: Wie bist du denn darauf gekommen, die Reise zu unternehmen?

M: Ja, die Reise ist Teil von einem Fotoprojekt. Ich bin an einem Langzeit-Fotoprojekt dran über die Alpen, dass ich mache und die Reise ist halt einfach ein Teil davon.

R: Und hattest du besondere Erwartungen vorab an deine Reise? Vielleicht auch gerade im Hinblick auf die Fotografie?

M: Nee, eigentlich nicht nee. Ich wollte es auch einfach mal auf mich zukommen lassen und... ja, ich hab ein bisschen die Strecke geplant natürlich oder wo ich durchgehe oder so, aber besondere Erwartungen habe ich nicht gehabt, nee. Ich ging einfach los und lies passieren... ließ halt geschehen, was ... ja, ließ einfach geschehen was da so kommen mag.

R: Und im Hinblick auf die Fotos, ist es denn so geworden, wie du dir es vorgestellt hast?

M: Ja, zum Teil, ja. Es ist natürlich so, um zu fotografieren braucht man sehr viel Zeit. Ja, das war halt viel Zeit und halt auch gerade wettertechnisch ist es nicht ganz so rausgekommen, wie ich mir das erhofft habe, das ist ... ja, kann man sagen ist das Einzige, was sag ich mal nicht ... oder wo ich ein bisschen Hoffnung gehabt habe, dass das Wetter einigermaßen gut wird und das war nicht so prickelnd gewesen.

R: Schade.

M: Also das heißt, es ging dann auch während dem Laufen ziemlich schnell einfach nur noch um das Laufen und um das Wandern und um das Erleben. Und die Fotografie, ja, das hat sich dann ergeben, wenn die Stimmung gerade richtig war und so. Also was durchaus auch der Fall ist, also der Fall war und ... ist halt so, ist immer ein bisschen eine Glückssache, dass das Wetter stimmt und dass man zur richtigen Zeit am richtigen Ort ist und so, ja.

R: Wenn ich jetzt mal ein bisschen zur körperlichen Erfahrung komme – du hast schon gesagt, wirklich trainiert warst du zu dem Zeitpunkt nicht, hab ich das richtig verstanden? Wie hast du denn deinen Körper während der Wanderung wahrgenommen?

M: Ja, also trainiert in dem Sinn war ich nicht, ich hab auch nicht groß vorher trainiert und ich bin halt einfach so weit gewandert, wie es mir gut ging und man entwickelt da sehr schnell ein Gefühl, wieviel ... ja, wieviel man wandern kann, wo man aufhören sollte, damit man am nächsten Tag wieder genügend Kraft hat, um weiter zu gehen. Und ja, wie ich meinen Körper wahrgenommen habe... man lernt halt sehr schnell, auch auf seinen Körper zu hören. Und ja, es war eigentlich wirklich das, dass ich ein Gefühl entwickelt habe, wieviel Leistung ich erbringen kann, ohne dass ich es am nächsten Tag büßen muss quasi.

R: Ja, und hat das geklappt?

M: Ja, das hat gut geklappt. Und das ist eben, ich hab da nicht ... weißt du, ich hab mir nicht irgendwelche Etappenziele gesetzt, sondern ich bin einfach losgelaufen, ich wusste welche

Strecke ich nehme und bin dann in der Regel soweit gegangen, wie es halt einfach ging und ...

R: Was waren in der Regel so die größten physischen Herausforderungen? Gab es da so Sachen, die besonders einprägsam waren?

M: Ja, also eine Herausforderung war sicher die Strecke von Zernett auf den Ofenpass raus, weil das Gebiet ist gänzlich auf dem Nationalpark, Schweizer Nationalpark. Das sind 25 Kilometer und höhenmäßig... was waren das, sicher... das waren über 1200 Höhenmeter, das war doch ein richtiges Stück, ja, ich kann es nicht mehr genau sagen, aber so um den Dreh rum, 1200 Höhenmeter oder so. Und da musste ich halt einfach ... an einem Tag musste ich das durchwandern. Also es hat schon noch Hotels gehabt, ein Hotel war noch unterwegs, aber da wollte ich nicht übernachten und ja, bin dann das in einer Strecke durchgewandert. Das war dann schon so ein bisschen eine körperliche Grenzerfahrung, vor allem das letzte Stück, da geht es nochmal 150, 250 Höhenmeter rauf und das ... ja, das merkt man dann schon, wenn man sowieso schon müde ist und ... ja, der Tag langsam zu Ende geht, man weiß, man muss das Stück noch gehen, man sollte es zügig gehen, damit man noch bei Tageslicht ankommt.

R: Ja. Wie hast du dich danach gefühlt, als du die Etappe geschafft hattest?

M: Ja sicher ein gutes Gefühl, ja. Und ich wurde dann auch herzlich begrüßt oben. Das ist auch so ein kleines Hotel, aber da ... ja, da wusste ich schon vorher, dass ich dort übernachten wollte und kenne auch die Leute da oben und entsprechend wurde ich herzlich begrüßt, und ... ja, das war dann schön auch. Die wussten ja auch, dass ich komme und haben dann quasi auf mich gewartet, Sie waren gerade am Zigarettenrauchen draußen zufälligerweise, und da bin ich dann angekommen. Ja, ich war natürlich auch auf mich selbst stolz, dass es das geschafft hab. Dass ich es auch durchgezogen habe und dass das alles so geklappt hat, wie ich mir das vorgestellt habe.

R: Ja, kann ich mir vorstellen. Ich komm jetzt mal zu den sozialen Interaktionen entlang des Weges. Wen hast du denn auf deiner Reise alles getroffen?

M: Ja, das kannst du an einer Hand nicht abzählen, auch nicht an zwei. Also da trifft man halt allerlei Leute. Halt einerseits die Bewohner der Region, man trifft auf andere Wanderer.

R: Also doch viele Leute hast du getroffen.

M: Ja, ja, sicher, weil ich bin ja auch oft am Tal nachgegangen, vor allem am Anfang bis ins Finschgau. Da bin ich viel einfach auf Talhöhe gegangen und entsprechend ist dann natürlich die Besiedlung auch dichter.

R: Ja. Genau, du bist in der Nähe von Zürich gestartet, habe ich gesehen.

M: Genau, Zürcher Oberland.

R: Inwieweit hattest du denn die Möglichkeit, tatsächlich mit lokalen Bewohnern in Kontakt zu kommen? Ging das gut oder wie würdest du das beschreiben?

M: Ja sicher, also ich wurde immer freundlich begrüßt, nett behandelt, sei es jetzt von lokalen Leuten oder einfach anderen. Ja und natürlich, wenn ich von meinem Projekt erzählt habe und von meiner Langzeitwanderung und so waren alle sehr, sehr positiv darauf eingestellt

und fanden das eine gute Sache, ja.

R: Gab es eine bestimmte Begegnung, die dir besonders im Kopf geblieben ist?

M: Ja, eine ... das sind einige. Also manchmal auch mit Leuten, mit denen ich heute noch Kontakt habe. Zum Beispiel eine Begegnung ist... das war in Laars, das ist die Marmormetropole im Finschgau, und da gibt es so einen kleinen Campingplatz, wo ich ein paar Nächte geblieben bin. Und die Leute dort, also die Besitzer, die sind sehr nett und es hat sich jetzt so eingebürgert, dass immer wenn ich oder meine Eltern da durchfahren Richtung Südtirol – weil meine Eltern sind auch jedes Jahr eigentlich, machen die in Südtirol Urlaub, und sie sind mich ja abholen gekommen, als ich da den Fuß kaputt hatte und da wollte ich ihnen unbedingt da diesen Campingplatz zeigen, weil einerseits die Leute sehr nett sind und sich da andererseits ein Kindheitstraum erfüllt hat. Die haben nämlich einen Sandkasten, der ist gefüllt nicht mit Sand, sondern mit feinstem weißen Marmorsand. Also das ist schneeweiß das Zeug, das holen sie da massenweise aus dem Berg und das wollte ich den Eltern zeigen und die waren auch so begeistert von den Besitzer, dass sie jedes Mal, wenn sie nach Südtirol fahren, mindestens einmal, entweder auf dem Hin- oder auf dem Rückweg dort Pause machen und einen Kaffee trinken. Also das ist ... die kennen mich dort auch immer wieder, wenn ich vorbei komme und meine Eltern und so.. ja.

R: Schön.

M: Ja, da hat sich was, sozusagen wie eine Freundschaft entwickelt. Und ein anderes Erlebnis war noch, das war in Südtirol selber, da bin ich in Richtung Schlärn unterwegs gewesen und da gibt es auf halbem Weg hoch so eine kleine Alp, ich mag mich jetzt gar nicht mehr an den Namen erinnern... das ist wirklich, die haben so eine Alphütte, das ist so eine richtige urige Alp. Und so eine urige Alphütte, also wunderschön. Da bin ich da angekommen und da hab ich ... war es auch schon etwas später am Nachmittag und ich wusste, dass ich nicht mehr ganz hoch komme auf den Schlärn, und da hab ich gefragt – also da waren die Leute sogar noch oben, die Besitzer – ob es da irgendwie eine Möglichkeit gäbe, um zu übernachten. Irgendwie das Zelt aufzustellen oder so. Und da haben sie gesagt, ja eigentlich sind sie jetzt gerade auf dem Weg nach unten, weil sie haben noch was familiäres gehabt, aber das sei kein Problem. Sie haben daneben im Stall, quasi da hinten am Haus so ein kleines Massenlager für irgendwie sechs oder acht Leute und sie geben mir den Schlüssel und da könnte ich da schlafen, müsste ich nicht da Zelt aufstellen. Und am nächsten Morgen kämen Sie dann wieder hoch und dann gäbe es noch einen Kaffee und dann kann ich ihnen den Schlüssel zurückgeben. Ja, und dann war ich da ganz alleine auf der Hütte oben und die haben mir das anvertraut, ohne irgendwie was zu hinterfragen und ... ja, das war schon auch sehr eindrücklich.

R: Ja, schön! Wie hast du die Dörfer wahrgenommen, die du besucht hast oder an denen du vorbei gekommen bist?

M: Ja, wie habe ich die Dörfer wahrgenommen, das ist noch ... s ist halt unterschiedlich. Sicher, man nimmt die Dörfer sehr stark wahr natürlich durch den Stil, der Baustil der Häuser. Und im Engadin da sind eben die Häuser anders gebaut. Die typischen Engadin-Häuser, das ... ja, das macht dann halt auch den Charme, das Bild der Region aus. Und dann, das sieht dann halt im Finschgau wieder anders aus, da wird wieder anders gebaut. Also ich hab die Dörfer sicher sehr stark durch den Baustil und die lokalen Eigenheiten auch wahrgenommen. Also das ist das,

was einem in die Augen fällt oder ins, wie sagt man, ja, halt einfach stark auffällt als erstes.

R: Ja, und wenn du über die Alpenlandschaft nachdenkst, durch die du gewandert bist, wie hast du die Alpenlandschaft erlebt als etwas, wo du zu Fuß durchgelaufen bist? Anstatt jetzt nur mit dem Auto zu fahren, oder so, wie würdest du das Landschaftserleben an sich beschreiben auf deiner Reise?

M: Ja, das ist natürlich was total anderes, wenn man zu Fuß unterwegs ist, dann hat man auch viel mehr Zeit, die Landschaft zu genießen, eben die Landschaft wirklich wahrzunehmen, zu spüren. Und ja, man nimmt natürlich... ja, mit allen Sinnen wahr, man riecht die Landschaft, man hört, was um einen herum passiert... ja.

R: Welcher Aspekt hat dir dabei besonders gut gefallen?

M: Ja, ich bin halt schon ein sehr ... ein visueller Mensch. Also die Schönheit natürlich der Alpenlandschaft, das fällt einem natürlich ins Auge, das ist klar. Aber was auch sehr intensiv ist, das ist der Geruch. Also eigentlich sind es alle Sinne, es ist auch der Geruch. Da kann ich mich anderweitig zum Beispiel erinnern, das ist so eine Geschichte aus Australien und die haben – da untern gibt es so Eukalyptuswälder – und die haben einen ganz speziellen eigenen Geruch, das riecht so ein bisschen wie Patschuli oder so, das geht so ein bisschen in die Richtung, wenn du das kennst. Und vor allem wenn es dort frisch geregnet hat, dann ist der Geruch sehr intensiv. Und das ist ein Geruch, da hab ich wie eine Erinnerung dran. Also wenn ich an diese Wälder denke, quasi in meiner Erinnerung rieche ich diese Wälder wieder. Ja also, das ist halt schon der Geruch... oder wie der Geruch von frischem Heu, dann musst du das nur sagen und wenn du das jemals gerochen hast, dann hast du das in deinem Geruchsgedächtnis quasi, oder?

R: Ja, ich hab da eher negative Assoziation, ich hab nämlich Heuschnupfen.

M: Ah OK, gut.

R: ... aber dadurch ist es auch recht stark, ja.

M: Oder halt auch zum Beispiel Gülle ist auch so etwas, wenn du nur das Wort hörst, dann riechst du das schon und hast ... ja, und zum Beispiel der Geruch von Lärchenwäldern, oder allgemein Nadelwälder, oder irgendwie von Harz, von frischem Tannenharz und so weiter und so fort... also das sind so auch schon sehr starke Eindrücke. Also ich würde sagen, visuell, vom Geruch her, dann kommt natürlich auch das Gehör. Auch mal nichts hören, oder sehr wenig hören, mal die Stille genießen, das ist auch mal was sehr schönes in der heutigen Zeit, wo wir permanent von Lärm und irgendwelchen Geräuschen traktiert werden. Man nimmt die Umwelt natürlich auch durch den Tastsinn wahr, durch das gehen. Gehen auf steinigem Boden oder auf Felsen, das fühlt sich total anders an, als auf Waldboden und so weiter und so fort. Und durch das wandern selber hat man halt eben wirklich Zeit, diese Eindrücke auch auf sich wirken lassen... es ist halt, es kommt dann ein Eindruck und man hat auch die Zeit, das wirken zu lassen, es ist nicht gleich ein nächster Eindruck da, der den ersten dann verdrängt, sondern man saugt das dann quasi auf wie ein Schwamm.

R: Hast du viele Tiere gesehen auf deiner Wanderung?

M: Immer wieder mal, immer wieder mal. Zum Beispiel im Nationalpark natürlich, da merkt man auch, dass es dort, dass die Tiere geschützt sind und man merkt einfach, dass dort

keine Landwirtschaft gibt. Einfach die Dichte an Tieren, die ist dort viel größer, als in landwirtschaftlich oder vom Mensch genutzten Zonen. Und ein Erlebnis war, als ich da am Uffenpass angekommen bin, da hat das Hirtenpaar gesagt: 'Nimm deine Kamera, wir machen jetzt eine kleine Autofahrt, fahren zurück in den Nationalpark, nimm deine Kamera mit'. Haben mir nicht gesagt, was es da zu sehen gibt und da sind wir dann ein Stückchen in den Nationalpark zurückgefahren. Und da sind einfach massenweise Rehe und Hirsche aus dem Wald gekommen. Sobald halt die Dämmerung eingesetzt hat, sind die rausgekommen und da hast du irgendwie zwanzig, dreißig Tiere auf einem Haufen gesehen. Das hab ich noch nie gesehen in meinem Leben. Und so, man hat schon Erlebnisse mit Tieren, aber es ist nicht ... also, ja, es ist nicht so, dass man ständig und überall einfach Tiere sieht.

R: Ja. Ja, hängt wahrscheinlich ganz stark vom Ort ab.

M: Ja natürlich, es hängt vom Ort ab und man sieht die Tiere, die meisten Tiere sieht man am Abend oder am Morgen. Hängt davon ab, wo man natürlich ist und man muss auch ein bisschen Glück haben. Und auch ... ja, vor allem auch Tiere fotografieren oder Tiere zu sehen, das braucht Zeit. Ja, das ist halt auch wieder ein Erlebnis aus Australien: passt jetzt vielleicht nicht ganz in deine Arbeit rein, aber in Australien in den Nationalparks da gibt es auch so ... sie nennen es ... das sind quasi wie so Stege auf denen man gehen kann, board walk nennen Sie das und das heißt, die sind unten offen, damit in den Wäldern dort quasi unten die Tiere auch, die kleinen Tiere und so unter dem Weg durchkönnen. Und wenn man da wandert, also ich bin da ein paar ganz allein gewandert – so lange man geht und unterwegs ist, sieht man kein Tier, nix. Das siehst du praktisch nix. Du musst da wirklich erstmal stehen bleiben, oder dich hinsetzen, und dann wartest du fünf, zehn Minuten und plötzlich merkst du, dass um dich herum überall Tiere sind. Also die sind natürlich gut versteckt auch im Wald und du musst dir die Ruhe nehmen, die Zeit nehmen, um einfach mal die Umwelt auf dich wirken zu lassen. Und dich quasi, ich sag mal, dem Wald gegenüber, deinem Umfeld zu öffnen und erst dann nimmst du auch die Tiere wahr. Das ist sehr häufig so. Ja, lustigerweise, auch beim Wandern sieht man viel mehr Tiere in dem Moment, wo man also wirklich mal sich hinsetzt oder, ja, vielleicht einfach mal ein bisschen in die Gegend schaut, oder irgendwas ist oder so ... gut, essen, da gibt es natürlich auch Tiere, die kommen dann wegen dem Essen. Aber wenn man einfach mal zur Ruhe kommt, dann sieht man plötzlich mehr Tiere und fängt plötzlich an, die Tiere wirklich zu sehen. Die eigentlich vorher schon da waren oder sich halt einfach versteckt haben oder einfach beim vorbeigehen, hat man es einfach nicht gesehen, nicht beobachten können.

R: Hast du generell das Gefühl, dass du solche Momente der Ruhe oft gehabt hast auf der Reise, also ist das was, was prägend war für die Wanderung?

M: Ja, absolut. Absolut. Highlights war auch wieder der Schweizer Nationalpark, und zwar bin ich da durch gewandert und ich war praktisch alleine. Ich bin einmal zwei Leuten begegnet, die haben, die sind mit dem Auto reingefahren und haben so eine kleine Rundwanderung gemacht. Weil es war kalt, das Wetter war nicht, nicht spitzenmäßig, es hat ... also den dem Tag hat es sogar noch ein bisschen geschneit. Für die Jahreszeit viel zu kalt und wenn man in dem Schweizer Nationalpark, in der Sommerzeit ist der einfach dermaßen voll und da sind so viele Leute. Und da bin ich die 25 Kilometer praktisch alleine durchgegangen, war da alleine unterwegs und von der Landschaft her erinnert es dich vielleicht manchmal so ein bisschen an Kanada oder Alaska oder so, aber das, das war wirklich ein geniales Gefühl. Also das war

irgendwie... ja, ich sag mal ein bisschen seltsames Gefühl, einfach hinsichtlich ... ok du wusstest ja, du bist jetzt da alleine unterwegs. Wenn jetzt was passiert, dann kommt nicht gerade Hilfe und so... also da musst du schon ein bisschen schauen. Aber andererseits hast du da aber auch trotzdem, oder obwohl es da in der Natur, auch guten Empfang. Also im Notfall hätte ich da auch einen Anruf absetzen können. Das beruhigt dann wieder ein bisschen und so kann man es einfach ... ja, einfach wirklich die Natur genießen, effektiv die Wildnis. Also in den Momenten fühlst du dich wirklich wie draußen in der Wildnis.

R: Wenn du einige Emotionen beschreiben würdest, die du während der Reise öfter gehabt hast, also einfach ein paar gefühlsmäßige Eindrücke – was würdest du dann sagen?

M: Ja, ganz oft war ich einfach positiv überwältigt von der Schönheit der Bergwelt und die Alpen, die haben mir schon immer gefallen. Undja, manchmal hat es wirklich einfach Momente gegeben, da bist du einfach in mitten der Bergwelt und es ist einfach so wunderschön, und da könntest du schier heulen, oder? Vor Freude, dass du das jetzt erleben darfst. Einfach halt auch die Wahrnehmung mit allen Sinnen so intensiv genießen kannst und sonst ... das ist eigentlich, ja, Freude, das ist eigentlich die Hauptemotion. Freude an der Schönheit der Natur und der Berge. Ja, ich überlege, eine Emotion oder eine Emotion ist vielleicht auch Stolz, ja, Stolz über sich selbst, dass man wieder ein Stück geschafft hat, dass man wieder einen Teil von der Strecke zurückgelegt hat. Vor allem hab ich das dann gemerkt, als ich mit meinen Eltern nach Hause gefahren bin und das war eine gute Tagesreise mit dem Auto. Da sind wir auch ganz oft eigentlich die Strecke wieder zurückgefahren, die ich zu Fuß gegangen bin und so konnte ich im Auto nochmal miterleben, was das eigentlich – klar aufgeteilt in Etappen – aber am ganzen Stück was das für eine Gewaltswanderung war.

R: Das fühlt sich dann bestimmt ganz besonders an, wenn man das dann an einem Tag nochmal im Schnelldurchlauf an sich vorbei ziehen sieht, kann ich mir vorstellen.

M: Ja, absolut... Absolut, ja. Ja, ja und ich hab quasi, ich war ja fast andauernd nur am Reden im Auto weil ich hab zu jeder Stelle und so wieder etwas zu erzählen gewusst und irgendwelche Erlebnisse halt gehabt, die ich dann erzählt habe. Und das ist auch eine Strecke, wenn ich nach Südtirol fahre, also ich bin dann später die Strecke nochmals mit dem Motorad auch gefahren... und einfach die Strecke, die... das ist unsere Hausstrecke quasi, oder, wenn wir da runter fahren und... ja, die sehe ich jetzt mit ganz anderen Augen. Und das ist etwas, das bleibt fürs Leben, also ich denke, wenn ich da noch als Großvater mit meinen Enkeln oder so da vielleicht mal durchfahre, dann werde ich denen das erzählen. Also das ist etwas das bleibt, ja.

R: Ja ich ... das ist meine nächste Frage: Wenn du heute zurück schaust, wie siehst du deine Reise aus heutiger Perspektive?

M: Also das ist absolut einfach nur positiv. Also in... die Reise, die hat mich auch als Mensch verändert. Halt auch die Art, wie ich auf Leute zugehe. Ich war schon immer eigentlich ein offener Mensch und bin auf Leute zugegangen, aber seit der Reise bin ich irgendwie noch offener geworden und ... ja... hab mich auf irgendwie so verändert, dass ich, ich sag mal, einen Teil von meiner inneren Unruhe – man hat ja immer mehr oder weniger so ein bisschen eine Unruhe in sich und... ja, das konnte ich auch ablegen. Also das ist auch was, das ich vorher hatte, so quasi eine gewisse innere Unruhe und das ist wie als ob durch die Reise irgendwie ein Teil, der die Unruhe vielleicht verursacht, befriedigt wurde. Ja, weiß auch nicht, ganz schwierig zu

erklären, aber es hat mich definitiv als Mensch auch verändert. Also das ist eine Erfahrung, die ich unter keinen Umständen missen möchte und, im Gegenteil, wieder machen möchte.

R: Ja, das wäre jetzt noch eine Frage: Würdest du es denn nochmal machen?

M: Ich greif so ein bisschen vor.

R: Ja, also du würdest schon sagen, wenn du die Möglichkeit hättest, würdest du schon nochmal die Reise machen?

M: Definitiv, ja. Und ich hab die Möglichkeit auch. Jetzt habe ich zwar noch nicht konkret geplant, aber ich möchte im Juni diesen Jahres nochmal so etwas machen. Wo es dann durch geht, weiß ich noch nicht konkret, also eine Option wäre, dass ich die restlichen 400 Kilometer, die ich dann nicht machen konnte durch den Unfall, dass ich die noch nachhole. Oder eine andere Option wäre, dass ich einfach in der Schweiz eine Fernwanderung, quasi wie eine Rundwanderung mache.

R: Das Ende der Reise war ja nun relativ abrupt und auch so nicht geplant, wegen der Verletzung. Wie ging es dir denn dann an diesem Ende quasi?

M: Ja, am Anfang nicht so gut. Also das war halt wirklich irgendwie .. ja, wie wenn man gegen eine Wand rennt. Aber einerseits hab ich innerlich .. war ich eigentlich die ganze Zeit drauf vorbereitet, dass etwas passieren kann.

R: Ja.

M: Und dass aus irgendeinem Grund, was auch immer, die Reise plötzlich einfach zu Ende ist. Daher bin ich nicht völlig aus allen Wolken gefallen. Aber es war halt vor allem auch ... es war sehr sehr ärgerlich, weil ich körperlich sehr gut dran war. Ich hab in den ersten Wochen zwölf Kilogramm abgenommen und entsprechend – die zwölf Kilogramm habe ich in zwei Wochen abgenommen und danach bin ich immer gleich schwer gewesen, aber ich denke ich habe weiter Fett abgenommen und Muskelmasse aufgebaut, weil ich habe einfach gemerkt, dass von Tag zu Tag meine Leistungsfähigkeit größer wurde. Und ich wusste, ich hab noch vierhundert Kilometer vor mir, ich hab mich total drauf gefreut auf die vierhundert Kilometer, weil ich auch wusste, dass ich das problemlos leisten kann oder ... ja, mit der Kraft, die ich aufgebaut habe. Ich hab gewusst, dass ich auch nicht mehr so leiden muss, wie am Anfang, weil ich halt einfach mehr Power hatte. Und ja,... das ist quasi wie Abbruch am Höhepunkt.

R: Ja, ich wollte gerade sagen, du hast bestimmt genau da aufgehört, wo es am besten lief gerade?

M: Ja.

R: Schade eigentlich.

M: Ja eigentlich schon, aber andererseits habe ich aus den ersten Wochen schon sehr viel mitgenommen und die Motivation, auch weiter zu machen oder das nochmal sowas zu machen, das hab ich vielleicht auch ... ist vielleicht sogar noch gut, weil die Motivation, die habe ich jetzt, weil ich fühl mich so quasi vom Schicksal so ein bisschen betrogen. Weil die Pläne waren anders und das Schicksal hat halt nicht so entschieden, wie ich das gerne gehabt hätte. Und ich hab mit

dem Schicksal quasi noch eine Rechnung offen und die will ich noch begleichen, und das ist so auch eine Motivation, um weiter zu machen oder um das nochmal zu machen.

R: Ja. Das kann ich gut nachvollziehen. Gibt es bestimmte Dinge, an die du während der Reise oft gedacht hast?

M: Das ist jetzt eine schwierige Frage, bestimmte Dinge...

R: Oder irgendwie was, was öfter wiederkam oder waren die Gedanken einfach sehr frei, einfach ...

M: Ja, eigentlich schon, weil wenn man, gerade, wenn man alleine unterwegs ist, dann denkt man sehr viel. Und ich weiß nicht, hast du meinen Audio-Blog, mein Audio-Tagebuch, hast du da mal reingehört?

R: Nee, ich hab mir mehr die Fotos angeguckt auf deinem Blog.

M: OK, du musst mal unter perleneuropas.th... das ist die Website von dem Blog, die kennst du?

R: Ja genau, da habe ich mir die ganzen Bilder angeschaut und auch ein bisschen mit gelesen.

M: OK gut. Und dann hast du vielleicht gesehen, da gibt es ja noch so ein Audio-Tagebuch.

R: Ja.

M: Und das ist ziemlich unfiltriert, also das hab ich alles mit dem iPhone aufgenommen, häufig während dem Wandern. Und das ist eigentlich ziemlich unfiltriert, was mir da durch den Kopf gegangen ist und ich hab da einfach ... ich hab der Sache freien Lauf gelassen, ich hab da nichts geschönt oder so. Das sind wirklich die Gedanken, die mir so durch den Kopf gingen und das hab ich dann so aufgenommen und... ja, wenn du mal ganz viel Zeit hast, dann kannst du dir das mal anhören. Ist zwar auf Schweizer-Deutsch, also musst du dich ein bisschen dran gewöhnen...

R: Große Konzentration erfordert das bestimmt.

M: Ja genau, aber ich denke, mit der Zeit geht es.

R: Ja, da werde ich auf jeden Fall mal Reinhören.

M: Da kannst du mal Reinhören. Also das ist wirklich... das ist so ziemlich unfiltriert, was mir durch den Kopf gegangen ist. Ja, es ist halt schwierig, häufig denkt man auch von Tag zu Tag. Bisschen so ja was hab ich heute geschafft, ein bisschen ... man reflektiert ein bisschen über das Erlebte von den letzten Tagen. Man macht ein bisschen Pläne, denkt ein bisschen, ja was mach ich morgen, wo welche Richtung möchte ich morgen gehen, welchen Weg nehme ich da. Es sind halt auch einfach irgendwie banale Gedanken: was hab ich noch im Rucksack, was gibt es heute zum Abendbrot, also was ist da noch und so Sachen. Man denkt aber auch an zu Hause, man denkt an die Leute zu Hause, also es sind ganz viele Sachen wirklich.

R: Ich komm jetzt mal ... ich sehe gerade, wie sind schon bei Minute 43. Ich hab nämlich noch zwei mittlere Themen, würde ich jetzt mal sagen. Also einmal die Bedeutung der Reise, darauf bist du schon ein bisschen eingegangen und auch auf dein Leben danach. Das sind so meine zwei

Schlussthemen. Und die erste Frage dazu: Was macht denn das Weitwandern in den Alpen für dich anders als andere Reiseformen?

M: Also ich sage mal so, was sicher in Punkt ist, ist einfach das Übernachten. Und klar, hast das Zeit dabei, musst aber dann auch viel Schleppen. Also andere Reiseformen sind bei mir: Ich war zweimal in Australien mit dem Camper quasi unterwegs, mit dem Allrad-Camper-Fahrzeug und, ja, da hast du halt einfach alles dabei, Betten und so, musst nicht viel aufstellen, brauchst einfach nur einen Platz wo du übernachten kannst. Und das ist vielleicht schon ein bisschen anders beim Wandern. Aber sonst eigentlich... ich bin halt einfach ein Typ der ... ich reise gerne individuell und ich hab schon ein bisschen meine Pläne, wo ich durch will, was für eine Strecke ich mache und so, was ich ungefähr sehen will, aber ich genieße es halt auch einfach unterwegs zu sein. Und das ist eigentlich egal, ob ich jetzt mit dem Auto unterwegs bin oder ob ich zu Fuß unterwegs bin. Ja.

R: Ja.

M: Es ist ja ... weiß auch nicht, kann es jetzt nicht so genau sagen, das ist einfach eine Reiseform, die mir sehr zusagt, das individuelle Reisen. Der einzige Unterschied ist halt jetzt dann, dass man selber geht und zu Fuß unterwegs ist und nicht mit dem Auto unterwegs ist.

... Ja, ich überleg mir was, was da der Unterschied ist

R: Ich glaub, du bist schon ein bisschen darauf eingegangen gerade, was so die Sinneseindrücke und so angeht. Ja, ich denk da gibt es schon ... es ist schon eine besondere Art, eine Landschaft zu erleben, denke ich.

M: Das auf jeden Fall. Vielleicht ist ... mit dem Auto ist es halt so punktuell. Dann fährt man von A nach B, man ist ... ich bin da auch immer unterwegs gewesen in Australien und hab dann meine Plätze gehabt und hab auch zu Fuß dann Wanderungen gemacht, einfach dann an Ort und Stelle. Und wenn man mit dem Auto unterwegs ist, diese intensive Sinneserfahrung ist dann so ein bisschen punktuell. Wenn man das Auto stehen lässt und dann irgendwas anschaut, dann hat man diese Erfahrungen und sonst ist man unterwegs und fährt, ja. Und beim Wandern ist es einfach wirklich permanent, permanent die ... ja, die Umgebung, die quasi fließt dann halt so an einem vorbei und ja... ist schon langsamer, ja, und intensiver kann man da sagen.

R: Die Alpen generell, was bedeuten die für dich?

M: Für mich ... ja, Heimat eigentlich, Heimat. Das ist ... da fühl ich mich wohl, also ich brauch immer, wo ich auch wohne, ich brauch immer irgendwie Hügel oder Berge um mich herum. Jetzt hier, wo ich wohne, das sind nicht direkt Berge, aber die Landschaft ist sehr hügelig und es hat sehr viele Bäche, es hat so kleine Schluchten und so. Also ich mag nicht ... ich mag nicht, wenn es nur flach ist.

R: Das würdest du dich hier überhaupt nicht wohlfühlen...

M: Nee, ich glaub nicht. Ich glaub nicht.

R: Ich vermiss das hier auch ein bisschen in den Niederlanden.

M: Also ich war auch schon in Holland und war da schon Fahrradfahren und so. Ja, zum

Fahrradfahren ist es noch ganz in Ordnung, wenn es jetzt flach ist, aber bei Wohnen, Leben, kann ich nicht. Also ja, die Alpen sind schon für mich ... ist das Heimat einerseits und es ist halt auch einfach die majestätische Schönheit der Berge. Das ist etwas, das ... zum Beispiel da wenn man vergleicht die Alpen und die Dolomiten. Die Berge, die Strukturen, die sind so unterschiedlich, oder? Es ist beides schön, aber die Dolomiten, die haben halt sowas, so etwas filigranes und die Alpen oder die Berge im Bündner Land, im Berner Oberland in der Schweiz, die sind halt sehr viel größer und mächtiger, als die Dolomiten und dafür nicht so filigran, nicht so ... sagen wir mal facettenreich irgendwie.

R: OK. Ja, noch ganz kurz zum letzten Thema, du hast es schon angesprochen wie sich dein Leben nach der Reise so ein bisschen verändert hat oder bzw. was du daraus mitgenommen hast. Was bedeutet denn die Reise generell für dich persönlich im Rückblick?

M: Ja, sie ist einfach eine absolut positive Lebenserfahrung, die ich eigentlich jedem, der gerne wandert oder der gerne in der Natur ist in der Art oder in einer ähnlichen Art einfach nur empfehlen kann. Sofern man die Möglichkeit hat sich ... ja, einfach mal so ein bisschen abzukapseln und sich ein bisschen Zeit zu nehmen, um sowas zu machen.

R: Würdest du denn einen bestimmten Ratschlag den Menschen mit auf den Weg geben, die das jetzt das erste mal machen?

M: Ja, offen sein. Für alles offen sein, auf die Leute zugehen und dann... Wenn man offen auf die Leute zu geht, dann ist es eigentlich sehr selten, dass man ... ich sag mal, dann wird man sowieso positiv von den Menschen wahrgenommen. Und so wie man von den Menschen wahrgenommen wird, so agieren die Menschen auch mit einem und dann kann eigentlich nicht viel schief gehen.

R: Gut, das wären meine Fragen soweit gewesen.

Appendix 3 – Telephone interview guide English

Introduction checklist

- Introduce yourself if necessary: Name, institution
- Perhaps ask for short introduction of the participant
- Explain the purpose of the interview
“This master thesis has the aim to investigate how long-distance hikers experience Alpine landscape, for example natural surroundings, interaction with local inhabitants and cultural attractions. It also wants to find out why people choose to go on long-distance hikes, what these journeys mean to them and how what influences their experiences have on their lives.”
- Explain to the interviewee why her/him was approached!
You are a hiker who undertook a journey along the Via Alpina.
- Overall structure and length
In this interview I would like to talk with you about these topics: There will be about 2 to 3 questions for each of these topics.
- Recording
I would like to record this interview – do I have your permission to do that, please?
- Anonymity and confidentiality
I will handle any of your private information and all answers you give in this interview absolutely confidential. Moreover, I will not reveal your identity in the thesis (content and person stay anonymous).

Opening questions

What is your experience with long-distance walking in mountain regions? (how long, frequency, for how many years, where, company)

What drives you to go on such journeys?

Motivation and expectation

Why did you complete a walking journey through the Alps? (personal reasons, how did ideas come up)

Why did you particularly choose the Via Alpina for your journey?

What did you expect from your journey before you started walking?

Physical and sensual experience

How did you experience your own body during your journey?

Which were the main physical challenges?

How would you describe the state of (your relationship with) your own body during your journey?

Social interaction along the way

Who did you meet during your journey? (other travelers, locals)

To what extent did you have the chance to engage with locals? (capable, easy/difficult, pleasant, open)

Which impressions did you have about the people that you met?

How did you experience villages that you visited?

Physical environment

How did you experience the Alps? (places, mountains, villages, vegetation, animals, architecture, condition of landscape, weather)

How would you describe the Alpine landscapes you walked through?

How did you perceive the Alps as a walking territory?

How did you experience the trails of the Via Alpina?

Experiences

Which moments from your journey can you remember most clearly?

Why was this moment (mention) was extraordinary?

What did this moment do to you?

If you look back now after some time, how do you see your journey from today's perspective?

Can you name some emotions you felt frequently during the walk? (dominant, returning emotions)

How were you at the end of your journey?

For you personally, what were the biggest challenges during your journey?

What did you think about during your journey?

Personal meaning of journey and visited places

What makes walking through the Alps for you different from other means of travel?

What do the Alps mean to you as a place that you discovered on foot?

Which places were most intriguingly for you? (Why)

Life after the walk

How did your journey change you afterward? (your daily life, your attitudes...)

What does this journey mean to you now?

How would you describe your journey to someone who never hiked in his/her life before?

Some possible closing questions/optional

Please complete this sentence: When I think about the Alps, ...

What understanding of the Alps do you have now after you completed this journey?

What would you do differently if you would walk the Via Alpina again? (Why?)

Which difficulties did you encounter during your journey?

What did you not like during your walk?

Which aspect of your journey did you like best?

What does walking long distances mean to you?

Thank the participant for their time and contribution!

Ask for comments or additional remarks. Explain what happens next (more interviews, data transcription and analysis). Ask if participant would like to stay up-to-date with the thesis progress.