

Escaping the Summer Heat – Revival Potential and Challenge of Near-Metropolitan Tourism Areas

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1 ABSTRACT

To be economically successful in the future, alpine tourism in Austria must develop appropriate strategies to adapt to changing climate conditions. The revitalisation of the historic “Sommerfrische” represents one potential strategy for low-lying mountain destination close to urban agglomeration to benefit by the increase in urban heat days. Whether this potential exists on the demand side and how it can be tapped by the respective destinations on the supply side will be investigated throughout this project. For this purpose, a large scale survey will be conducted in Vienna. This paper focuses on the development process, which is informed by a range of quantitative and qualitative methods at the pre-survey stage. First results indicate that the potential exists, yet mainly for shorter, spontaneous trips, not necessarily labelled as “Sommerfrische”.

Keywords: destination management, sustainable travel, tourism demand, heat waves, climate change adaptation

2 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most important sectors of the Austrian economy; it accounted to 5.6 % of the Austrian GDP in 2015 (Statistik Austria 2016). However, given the nature of tourism, this sector is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change (APCC 2014). Climate change has manifold effects on the tourism sector, mainly as a result of current temperature rise which is expected to increase further in future. In the city of Vienna, days with temperatures above 30 degrees have increased from 9,6 days per year (1957-1976) to 11,25 days per year (1977 – 1996) to 19,45 days per year (1997 – 2016) (Stadt Wien 2016), and is assumed to increase further to one in four summer days until 2040 (Kromp-Kolb et al. 2007). Similar numbers can be found for other Central European metropolitan areas. From a tourism perspective, these circumstances may create new potential for rural mountain destinations located close to agglomerations, such as the „Wiener Voralpen” and the „Mürzer Oberland“. They might turn more attractive for the Viennese population due to their refreshing character away from the urban heat, in higher elevations.

So far, most research in the area of climate change adaptation in mountain tourism deals with the effects of temperature and precipitation changes on winter tourism. However, not much research exists around the potentials for alpine summer tourism arising from climate change; with no empirical studies estimating the specific quantitative potentials for the affected destinations. It has not yet been investigated whether an escape from the heat is a significant motive for leaving the city and, if so, which destinations would be preferred for what reasons and what the preferences and requirements regarding the accessibility and the transport offers are. While this paper does not yet outlay the quantitative results of these potential estimations, it aims at sketching the different scientific methods that have informed the actual survey design process and have helped to scrutinize existing and generate new working hypotheses. Aiming to present the findings from these different pre-survey methods, this paper is structured along the following two main research questions:

(1) Can “Sommerfrische” represent climate change adaptation option for citizens of large urban agglomerations characterized by increasing occurrences of heat days and nights? What transport-related demand, especially by car-free urban households, can be expected?

(2) From the perspective of citizens and tourism and transport experts: How could a modern “Sommerfrische” look like in order to be considered an attractive travel option by Viennese citizens (with a special focus on car-free tourism options)?

3 LITERATURE

3.1 From Past to Present: summer tourism in the Alps & the definition of Sommerfrische

The original concept of “Sommerfrische” (summer retreat) evolved in Austria around the year 1800, driven by an increasing accessibility of mountainous areas by railway (Haas 1992). These journeys developed as trips of several months, undertaken by aristocrats and other upper social classes with affluent financial means. Schmidt-Lauber (2014) defined “Sommerfrische” as a “longer, stationary stay of a well-known, often family-related group of people during the summer months in a mostly repeatedly visited place and no trip with changing locations”. At the end of the 19th century, a catalogue of criteria for “Sommerfrische” destinations was developed stating the subsequent characteristics (Schmidt-Lauber 2014). Accordingly, “Sommerfrische” destinations:

- (1) were mostly reachable by railways,
- (2) were characterized by neither too flat nor too mountainous environments,
- (3) found in environments with access to forests and water in order to be able to go for walks and swimming,
- (4) provide cultural activities that could be enjoyed together with other families of a similar social standing.

As opposed to other trips made by these social classes (like Italy in late winter, educational trips to France or swimming holidays at the Baltic Sea), the traditional “Sommerfrische” was a retreat from the stress of other travels or the all-day life in cities. It was a conscious downtime in times of increasing mobility (Kos 1995). In terms of activities, “Sommerfrische” travels were hence characterized by nature-related relaxation and an avoidance of any type of exhaustion, meaning that days were filled with good food, short walks, swimming and concerts. With the increasing financial and physical accessibility of international tourism evolving in the 1950s, the historical “Sommerfrische” and the respective tourism destinations lost much of their attraction.

By now, the term as such has widely changed its meaning, also due to the fact that societal changes and current working patterns have made the classical “Sommerfrische” of several months impossible for most people (Weigel 2014). For this reason, it is now mostly understood as a synonym for shorter travels to these former “Sommerfrische” destinations or regions with similar characteristics that are – by now – accessible either by car or railway. As a touristic concept, it is still associated with relaxation, nature and an active “slowing down” (Schmidt-Lauber 2014). Yet, beyond the scope of tourism, the term has also found entrance into other product spheres, such as food and cosmetics where it connects the products with being “fresh”, “natural”, “regional” and, as a consequence, good for one’s well-being. Whether or not the focus of tourism destinations on offering “refreshing” vacations can meet the ever-changing demands of nowadays’ tourist and therewith represent a true potential remains unclear so far. For this reason, the subsequent sub-chapters aim at briefly outlining the different factors that could harm or support a positive development of current “Sommerfrische” destinations from a supply-side (destinations) and a demand-side perspective (tourists).

3.2 Climate Change Adaptation in Tourism – Demand-side perspective

There is strong indication from several studies that climate and weather conditions affect people’s leisure behaviour and in particular their tourism travel behaviour in many ways. Whereas these effects are well-researched for winter tourism (Smith 1993; Aaheim & Hauge 2005; Koetse & Rietveld 2009), there is a strong lack of empirical evidence dealing with summer tourism. Nevertheless, it is assumed by several researchers that an increasing number of heat days and tropical nights in urban areas is creating an increasing demand, for new multi- seasonal tourism developments. In particular with regard to urban source markets, the effects of heat days (days with temperatures greater than 30°C) are expected to lead to an increasing demand for short-term trips to more refreshing near-urban areas (Serquet & Rebetez 2011; Lieb et al. 2010; Fleischhacker et al. 2015).

Besides climate change, changes in lifestyle, consumption and mobility patterns are affecting the demand for tourism products and tourism travel behaviour (Sirakaya & Woodside 2005). The travel behaviour is also being influenced by developments in the societal, technological, social, economic, political and ecological

areas. According to Held (2013), the expected travel behaviour in the future can be described with the attributes of individual, spontaneous, frequent, shorter, cheaper, more comfortable, safer, more exotic, more relaxing and more experienceful. Nature, the environment and the landscape form the basis for tourism and are often referred to as the most important travel motives (Arnberger et al. 2002). This significance could grow even further in the future and the need for unspoiled nature will become even more important (Held, 2013). Furthermore, technological progress, particularly in the area of mobility, information and communication technologies, will continue to challenge tourism. The digitization and the enormous changes in communication and information exchange offer new possibilities, which are to be used optimally in tourism (Held 2013). When addressed appropriately by the respective tourism destinations, these trends or aspects could favour a revitalisation or rather re-invention of the historic “Sommerfrische” destinations given their suitability for short, spontaneous trips to nature while also allowing for a high level of comfort.

3.3 Climate Change Adaptation in Tourism – Supply-side perspective

On the supply side, climate change effects both the (foremost low-lying) winter sport destinations as well as summer destinations. Whereas in winter, these regions are facing challenges due to a decreasing reliability of snow conditions (APCC 2014, Steiger and Abegg 2013), there are chances in summer due to the potential to reactivate the traditionally known “Sommerfrische” (Abegg and Steiger 2011, Fleischhacker et al. 2012).

At the beginning of the 21st century, old Viennese touristic resorts were rediscovered due to new offers in the fields of health, leisure and culture with the flair of past and present times (such as Semmering, Reichenau or Kamptal). According to Grün and Benesch (2005), today’s tourism combines phenomena of different origins: “natural enjoyment of the Biedermeier period, day and excursion tourism, “second-home tourism”, the contemplative “Sommerfrische” as well as the organized mass tourism” (Grün & Benesch 2005).

In the field of mountain tourism development, various initiatives can already be observed that lead towards the direction of a new modern form of “Sommerfrische”. The tourism region surrounding Salzburg for example has branded itself as “Sommerfrischeland”, offering a range of modern services and activities around the topics of relaxation, time with friends and family, beautiful landscapes as well as cultural and culinary experiences. Other regions focus strongly on the overall development of year-round tourism strategies. One common strategy, adapted for example by the tourism destination Schladming-Dachstein and the Austrian region Styria is the staging of the destinations as refreshing and relaxing places, allowing tourists to find a relief from the stress as well as the heat of the cities.

The aspect of car-free accessibility of tourism regions holds a special role in many tourism development strategies. Within the frame of a climate change adaptation (and mitigation) strategy, such options represent a crucial requirement in order to avoid maladaptation by encouraging increased individual travels by car. As examples from Switzerland (i.e. Saas-Fee, car-free tourism destination) indicate, such a regulation can actually enhance a destination’s identity and therefore foster its economic development. This requires, however, the sufficient provision of alternative mobility options, a factor that often poses problems due to financial and other structural constraints. Especially in more rural, loosely populated areas, the commonly-promoted implementation of better public transport schemes is often very cost and energy-ineffective. For this reason, it does not always constitute a viable solution to the problem, requiring research to identify and develop alternative solutions suitable specifically for rural tourism destinations. In this respect, it is important to consider current visitor motives and planned activities and travel patterns (at the destination) to improve the suitability and therewith acceptability of imposed measures.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The project’s approach

A research project funded by the Klima- und Energiefonds under the „8th Call Austrian Climate Research Programme – ACRP” intends to evaluate the strength of intentions of urban residents to seek for refreshment in nearby mountainous regions and how the latter can respond to this demand by creating sustainable tourism offers and travel options to and in the destinations in order to avoid climate-unfriendly maladaptation as prioritized by the Austrian Tourism Strategy (BMWFJ 2010). These overall questions will be answered based on (1) a large-scale quantitative survey (n=800) to be conducted in Vienna in summer 2017 and (2)

future workshops to be conducted in two case study regions in two rural tourism destinations in the Austrian Voralpen (Mürzer Oberland and Ötscher-Tormäuer).

4.2 The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) underlying the survey design

It is increasingly recognized by researchers from various different fields including economics, psychology and transport studies that the reasons for people's consumption (and also travel) choices are much less rational than often assumed. While commonly named arguments such as price, product or service characteristics, time and flexibility are surely influential aspects, they can not account for the complexity of human decisions, which are also influenced by habit, spontaneous feelings and one's social environment (Lois & López-Sáez, 2009; Rise, Thompson, & Verplanken, 2003; Steg, 2005). This applies particularly to travel decisions, which are very much a representation of personal desires, societal trends and lifestyles as well as changing personal preferences and interests. For this reason, the survey will make use of Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to analyse the intentions and the predictors influencing them.

The TPB is a psychological theory of attitude-behaviour relations (Anable, 2005), which states that a defined behaviour (such as traveling to "Sommerfrische" destinations) is a reasoned process that is determined by an intention to perform it (Conner & Armitage 1998). This intention in turn is measured based on (1) attitudes towards the specific behaviour, (2) subjective norms or social expectations and (3) the perceived behaviour control (PBC), which also has a direct impact on the intention as such. While the original model only includes the three predictors mentioned above, the literature analysis provides evidence that an inclusion of further predictors may increase the model's explanatory power. In order to determine the most relevant predictors into the survey design, scrutinize the main hypotheses of the project and explore first tendencies with respect to the project's research questions, a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods have been conducted in the initial phase of the project. This paper focusses on the methods applied within this pre-survey stage and the retrieved results. The chosen approach will be outlined subsequently.

4.3 Qualitative & Quantitative Methods Applied within Pre-Survey Stage

(a) Literature Review

First, a systematic literature review on the historical roots and developments of the concept "Sommerfrische" was undertaken. More precisely, the aspects covered in this first literature review include the following topics, respectively keywords: (1) the influence of climate change on urban agglomerations including national and international climate change adaptation strategies, (2) climate change adaptation in tourism – approaches and best practice cases, (3) structural changes in tourism and related transport demand over time, including changing travel motives and the trend of sustainable tourism, (4) the development of the historical "Sommerfrische" from the past till the present.

(b) Telephonic Pre-Screening

In a second step, a telephonic pre-screening with a net sample of 100 people was conducted aiming to investigate the overall interest and intention of Viennese citizens in visiting such destinations. For this purpose, a gross sample of 450 people living in Vienna were randomly selected from the Austrian 2015 telephone directory CD "Herold". The entries were first filtered by location (Vienna) and then selected based on a randomization algorithm, whereby all entries clearly belonging to corporate entities were manually excluded. Each person of the gross sample was contacted, with one of three possible outcomes:

Gross sample	N= 450
Participation refused or not possible (active refusal, language/communication problems, number inexistent)	n = 293
Unsuccessful call attempts on three different weekdays and times of the day	n = 57
Successful participation = net sample	n = 100 (average age: 59,2) Female: 55 (average age: 66,2) Male: 45 (average age: 56,6) Households with car availability: 72% Households with children at home: 24%

Table 1: Description of the sample of the telephonic pre-screening

The pre-screening mainly consisted of three question blocks: (1) their previous travels to “Sommerfrische” destinations (places, activities etc.); (2) intention to visit similar destinations in the future – in general and in case of increasing urban heat, and (3) sociodemographics (age, gender, household size, car ownership).

(c) Focus Groups

In a third step, stakeholders were invited to join two semi-guided focus groups, one with tourism and climate experts (partly from “Sommerfrische” regions) and one with Viennese citizens of different age groups and residence areas across the city. The two focus groups have been conducted in the beginning of February 2017; the citizens group containing seven participants; the expert group containing eight participants. Both focus groups took place at premises of BOKU Vienna and were guided by a professional moderator.

Within the citizen focus group, the following topics were covered as part of the interview guideline: (1) response to heat waves with a special focus on leisure time behaviour, (2) the relevance of different factors for taking travel decisions, (3) summer travel preferences and the current image and future potential of “Sommerfrische” destinations. The overall ambiance during this focus group was very positive and especially optimistic towards the prospects of “Sommerfrische” destinations. The group seemed rather nature and mountain oriented in their leisure activities, which surely influenced the discussion.

Within the expert focus group, the following topics were covered as part of the interview guideline: (1) current trends and developments in Austrian alpine tourism, (2) chances for the tourism sector to benefit from climate change including best practice examples, (3) development potentials for “Sommerfrische” destinations with a focus on communication to tourists and necessary transport offers. The overall discussion during this focus group was more discordant and more sceptical towards the concept of “Sommerfrische”.

The analysis of both focus groups was conducted as a content analysis according to Mayring. For this purpose, an iterative coding process was followed, which allowed to continuously expand the original coding scheme which was based on the interview guideline and an initial analysis of randomly chosen subset of the focus group transcript. The final coding scheme was then applied to the entire transcript again. In a second stage, the quotes within the different sub-codes (i.e. A.1-A.8 in Table 2) were subsumed to more abstract yet distinct “theses”, which were, in a last step, each assigned one “key representative quote”. For the results section of this paper, direct quotes were translated from German to represent its meaning (not word-by-word) and marked the following way: > “quotation text” <.

(d) Picture Analysis as thought experiment

In a fourth and last step, a picture analysis was conducted that aimed at exploring the associations people have with the term “Sommerfrische”. For this purpose, 34 pictures were collected within the following five categories: (1) landscapes, (2) activities, (3) accommodation, (4) mobility, (5) random associations. The pictures within each category were selected with the aim of illustrating as much as possible a large variation of themes in order to account for different conceptualisations. The analysis was conducted subsequent to the focus group with the participants and was analysed descriptively using Excel.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Pre-Screening

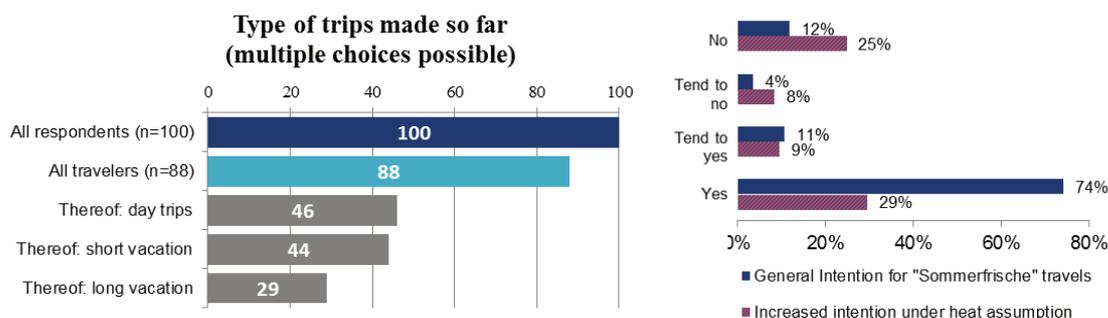


Figure 1: Type of trips in “Sommerfrische” destinations made so far (multiple answers possible). Figure 2: Intention for future “Sommerfrische” visits – in general and assuming increased occurrence of heat

The first results (see figure 1) of the pre-screening indicate that there is a strong overall interest from the part of the population in these regions, with 88% of respondents having visited such a region (for day trips, short or long vacations) in the past years. As shown in the figure, day trips without accommodation were most frequently mentioned with 46%. 44% of all respondents said they were making shorter trips (2 to 4 days) and 29% mentioned they were making long vacations of 5 or more days in recent years. Similarly positive, 72% of respondents indicated that they are likely to visit such regions again in the future. For 33% of the respondents, increasing urban heat may favour their decision to do so (see figure 2)

5.2 Focus Groups with Experts and Citizens

The subsequent tables illustrate the coding scheme for both focus groups, which were developed throughout the qualitative analysis.

A - Development trends in tourism	B.4: legal conditions	E - Mobility & offers
A.1: influence of weather on holiday behavior	B.5: existing structures and patterns of thought	E.1: requirements for public transport services
A.2: trend: active holiday	B.6: market dominance of large providers	E.2: challenges for proposal development
A.3: trend: craft and culinary	B.7: focus on good weather offerings	E.3: lack of availability of offers and services
A.4: trend: pure nature	B.8: influence of heat	F - Tourism-based strategies
A.5: trend: spontaneous holiday decisions	C - Picture of Sommerfrische	F.1: staging
A.6: trend: classic second-travel destination	C.1: duration	F.2: characteristics of a successful offer
A.7: differentiation of tourism offers	C.2: market potential	F.3: simple bundled offers
A.8: shift of the main season to the rear	C.3: other associations	G - Information for the customer survey
B - Obstacles and challenges	D - Staging a new "Sommerfrische"	G.1: attractiveness factors for a short vacation
B.1: flexible financing of (mobility) offers	D.1: redefinition Sommerfrische	H - Good practice examples
B.2: communication with (potential) guests	D.2: advertising	H.1: mobility
B.3: day visitors	D.3: combination with main travel motive	H.2: strategies
	D.4: staging cool places	

Table 2: Coding Scheme for expert focus group

A - Dealing with heat	C - Picture of Sommerfrische	D.6: local leisure activities
A.1: burden of heat	C.1: historical/nostalgic	D.7: touristic information online
A.2: restructuring everyday and work	C.2: to take a breath	D.8: bad weather options
A.3: apartment accommodation	C.3: childhood experiences	D.9: marketing: stronger focus on short trips
A.4: choice of district/flat	C.4: duration	E - Mobility & offers
A.5: leisure	C.5: uncomplicated	E.1: public transport accessibility
A.6: perception of climate change	C.6: potential for revival	E.2: preference car use
B - Influence on holiday decision-making	C.7: recreation	E.3: comfort needs
B.1: family/friends	C.8: other	E.4: car-free tourism
B.2: climatic conditions/weather	D - Requirement to SF-regions	F - Barriers SF-vacation
B.3: advertising/catalogues	D.1: more attractive accommodation	F.1: globalization of travel
B.4: affordability	D.2: more options for short trips	F.2: lack of time
B.5: diversity/new	D.3: rejection packages	G - The "Sommerfrischler"
B.6: tourist information online	D.4: individuality & solitude	G.1: mountain affinity
B.7: hobby-specific	D.5: spontaneity	G.2: closeness to nature
		G.3: city-dweller

Table 3: Coding Scheme for citizen focus group

Tourism development trends and the potential of a new Sommerfrische

The development trends in tourism can be viewed as diverse and active vacations as well as the interest in culinary and crafts are particularly popular themes for short vacations: >”*These short vacations should always be relatively dense...Not from the effort, but from the experience intensity.*”<. On the other hand, people on holiday are also looking for unspoiled and natural places: >”*There is the trend of deceleration, not to consume, just searching for regions which are still unaffected.*”<. The booking of short breaks and weekend trips is increasingly occurring at short notice. A further opinion of the experts was that the holidays at classic second-travel destinations can take place in the main season, but it can be recognized as a trend that the main season shifts backwards into the late autumn. As can be seen the opposites between strongly staged, infrastructure-based and near-natural tourism offers become greater. By and large, available tourism options are increasingly differentiated.

The citizens agreed with each other in their perception that heat represents a burden, especially at night: >”*But if it does not cool down in the night, then it can be quite exhausting.*”<. Therefore, the escape from the city represents a possible adaptation at extreme heat, because excursions to these “Sommerfrische”-

regions are associated with cooler air: >”...we wanted to get away, get out of the town”<. However, local refreshment options are a vivid and attractive alternative to these short trips in the specific case of Vienna: >”In Vienna you can go swimming everywhere.”<.

With respect to the resulting market potential of a new Sommerfrische, the opinions diverged considerably between the two focus groups. While the experts stated that there is not enough demand for a new “Sommerfrische”, the citizens perceived the potential to be very positive. Despite their general scepticism towards the concept of Sommerfrische, the experts emphasized that there will certainly be an increasing potential for short vacations in general: >”The market for “Sommerfrische” is available, at least for a short trip.”< Similarly, the demand for cool places and freshness is definitely also present.

General requirements for a new “Sommerfrische”

For the experts, a successful re-invention of a new “Sommerfrische” requires the definition of freshness as counterpart to the heat in the city. The establishment of a new “Sommerfrische” could be successful if the offer is combined with common main trip motives such as culinary or crafts for short breaks: >..the motive for travelling can be a culinary pleasure or for example hiking...”<. It is also important to ensure that advertising for this new concept is made consciously and with a view of the right timing, because “Sommerfrische” can be a solution for people who suffer from the heat in the city. An essential touristic strategy is to stage such excursion destinations and activities: > “Natural staging with benches and “power stations” is a huge theme in tourism.”<.

The citizens were in agreement that there are many different requirements for these “Sommerfrische”-regions. In addition to a close connection to nature and simplicity, a certain comfort level is expected, especially with respect to accommodation offers. Experts and citizens shared the opinion that short trips are a great opportunity for these rural regions and that these should be advertised more strongly. Furthermore, the experts pointed out that tourists like to use uncomplicated vacation offers, where they do not have to worry about anything, providing them with a sense of “security” away from home. In contrast to this view, most of the citizens did not want to book “prefabricated” packages for their vacation due to the lack of flexibility and individuality. They want to have the free choice at any time: >”It should be spontaneous; we want to design it ourselves.”<. For the participants, attractive “Sommerfrische”-offers allow for the possibility for individuality and loneliness as well as the spontaneity and accessibility. These points represent a central potential for these “Sommerfrische”-destinations.

According to the citizens, a certain degree of infrastructure and leisure activities will further enhance the attractiveness of a rural destination. Not only that, the travellers also have a great interest in regional products and activities, yet these leisure offers should be authentic for the each individual region: >”A small museum in each village is unnecessary...forcing that is difficult.”<. In association with the weather conditions, the availability of offers, which can also be used even by bad weather, increases the attractiveness of the destinations enormously: >”In the regions where there is a thermal bath, you can pay a visit, if the weather is really bad.”<. This goes in line with some of the experts stating that attractive and popular tourism offers provide the guest a personal connection to the region. With regard to tourism advertising, it was stated by the citizens that it should focus more on possibilities for short trips, as opposed to presenting Austrian regions as longer holiday destinations exclusively. Moreover, it was mentioned by both groups that the availability of information and the communication with the guests are important features of a functioning offering.

Mobility needs

With regard to mobility and associated offers, the citizens perceive public accessibility is an important feature for destinations, which requires improvements in many areas: >”For me, public accessibility is the most important thing.”<. The journey by train is perceived to be pleasant, as transport and leisure time can be combined: > “If we travel by train, we can both read the newspaper.”< On the other hand, the car offers greater comfort and can be associated with more spontaneity, which is very important to many travellers: >”By car it is definitely more comfortable.”< In the area of public transport, the number of changeovers has a major impact on the willingness to use it: >”If you have to change trains often, I understand that the car is more comfortable and so the train can be exhausting.”< Also the amount of luggage represents a big hurdle for the journey by public transport. The planning of car-free travel can prove difficult and understanding respective timetables is perceived to be complicated in new and especially some rural areas. Despite this

criticism, some of the citizens also highlight their satisfaction with the public transport services in Vienna and the surrounding area: >”*One comes comfortably from A to B. No matter whether you want to go up the mountain or stay in the city.*”<

The experts agreed that public transport services must be practical and uncomplicated to be used by the (potential) guests: >”*...also in the mobility area, whatever is simple will work.*”<. The guests also have certain demands with regards to public mobility, which are difficult to implement in rural areas. In this sense, the lack of access to public transport means that tourism companies are severely restricted in these rural areas. Information about mobility offers are often only insufficiently accessible and often obsolete, which also makes access to tourism enterprises more difficult.

5.3 A short excursus: picture analysis

The findings of the picture analysis were very revealing and varied. First, it can be said that the image of “Sommerfrische” is strongly focussed on landscapes and activities. This means that all images displaying landscapes (be it with waterfalls, forests, meadows, lakes or mountains) were strongly associated with “Sommerfrische”, without a difference between the different aspects. The activity-centred pictures illustrated a range of different activities including hiking, rafting, culinaric activities, swimming and relaxing among others. The degree to which these were associated with Sommerfrische or not, may be age-dependent. Besides those two categories most strongly associated with Sommerfrische, images with family members and friends were also often associated with “Sommerfrische”. The conceptualisation of “Sommerfrische, however, seems to be relatively independent of different types of accommodation and mobility tools. Within these categories, only cable cars and mountain huts were positively related to the image of “Sommerfrische”. Other forms of mobility towards or within the tourism destinations, whether by public transport or by car, are less associated with the concept of “Sommerfrische”. In addition to the categories of places, activities, mobility and accommodation, there were also pictures with different associations, for example the traditional “Sommerfrische” image with a family on a small boat, some women with a traditional costume or children on a playground. Even those pictures of people in rural regions were rather less or not connected with the concept of “Sommerfrische”. Overall, the conclusion is that the image of “Sommerfrische” can be regarded as surprisingly homogeneous and rather simple.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 The Potentials and Development Paths of a New Sommerfrische

The first quantitative results contradict the statements of the interviewed tourism experts who perceive the market for “Sommerfrische” regions to be rather unimportant due to the outdatedness of the concept. The citizens’ perception of the “Sommerfrische” concept diverged from the experts’ one: they perceive it as highly attractive and interesting for a range of reasons as soon as the destinations invest in providing easy access to destinations and to relevant tourism- and travel-related information (especially online) with a focus on spontaneous short trips. By the citizens, the varied travel possibilities are sensed as very positive, the interest in “Sommerfrische” destinations is definitely present, but it varies strongly between different groups of people (active vs. relaxed, longer vs. short etc.). This chapter discusses some observations or trends with respect to changes in tourism demand and the consequences for the destinations’ potential with respect to a “Sommerfrische” revival (PSF) and possible development paths (DP).

Observation 1: Changes in tourism behaviour have taken place; spontaneous, flexible short travels within Austria have increased in popularity, whereas longer holidays tend to be made abroad. “Sommerfrische” is hitherto rather perceived as an “Add on” to the otherwise often internationally oriented main vacation. For many respondents, short trips in Austria would be a lot more interesting if they had more free time or vacation time to enjoy the nature extensively. Given the time constraints though, they prefer to combine different types of travelling in order to see and experience as much as possible.

- PSF: It’s rather relevant for short weekend and multi-day trips, not necessarily conventional 2-week holidays. Also in terms of available offers (in terms of available activities, diversity...), “Sommerfrische”-destinations might be particularly interesting for short, more spontaneous travels.
- DP: The experts had the opinion that with respect to the marketing of “Sommerfrische”-regions, destinations should focus more on spontaneous offers for weekend and multi-day trips.

Observation 2: There is a strong indication from both the telephonic pre-screening and the focus groups that increasing amount of urban heat days is perceived as a burden and that travelling to nearby mountain regions is an attractive adaptation strategy.

- PSF: This seems to apply mainly for spontaneous short trips which are planned in accordance with weather forecasts (but not necessarily long-term changes in the overall climate).
- DP: “Sommerfrische”-places shall be staged with focus on fresh air, cool surroundings, waterfalls and ravines. For the staging of a new “Sommerfrische”, it might therefore be helpful to design a concept which emphasizes freshness and refreshment in the foreground.

Observation 3.1: An increasing need for comfort and at the same time, the desire for simplicity or “switching off from a stressful all-day life” are differentiated developments which can be observed. The conceptual definition of “Sommerfrische” has at least partly lost its historic meaning and may therefore gain new importance and attractiveness for travellers. Different holiday concepts are associated with the term “Sommerfrische”, above all, the connection with relaxation and simplicity. Especially for the elderly, the need for relaxation also goes together with the desire for familiarity in terms of acquaintances, places and available activities and a certain sense of home at the holiday destination.

- PSF: This favours a revival of “Sommerfrische” destinations because they are very suitable for providing relaxation, simplicity and an escape from the stressful city life.
- DP: It is important to combine offers for travel motives such as crafts and culinary delights with the exploration of unspoiled places close to or within nature, but without having to forego some comfort in the accommodation. This shall also integrate region-specific products and activities in order to allow for an authentic, natural yet exciting rural experience. The main focus here should be to follow the trend of deceleration and emphasize regions or places where people can actively and consciously recover themselves.

Alternative observation 3.2: As illustrated both in the literature and the focus groups, in addition to the growing need for relaxation, there is also an increasing trend towards active travels. The attractiveness of such places lies in the possibility of exercising versatile leisure activities, for which, however, a certain degree of infrastructure must be present. Individual offers and the opportunity to freely design the short holidays are important criteria for “Sommerfrische” resorts.

- PSF: This aspect can represent an obstacle for small rural tourism destinations, which do not necessarily have the financial and organisational resources to provide staged infrastructure of different types.
- DP: Depending on the respective type of travellers, destinations have two possible strategy options: either they provide pre-defined activity packages that are fully planned (incl. transport etc.) or they provide options for modularly combinable activity packages. For the smaller regions mentioned above, it may be necessary to specialize on few, very specific and authentic tourism products and services.

Observation 4: There are also two opposites in terms of mobility behaviour: on the one hand the growing comfort needs and on the other the general interest in car-free travel options.

- PSF: This point of view can express a development obstacle for those rural areas with no access to more comfortable public transport options (mainly rail) instead of buses. On the other hand, a well-developed mobility concept can also function as a unique selling proposition for a tourism destination.
- DP: Flexible, on-demand mobility options could be a possible approach for rural tourism destinations in order to facilitate the journey towards and within the destination and make it as comfortable as possible. For many travellers easily-accessible information (mainly online) is essential on their journeys.

6.2 Relevance of results for survey development

The main purpose of these method mix applied within the pre-survey stage was to inform the actual survey development and develop more precise and valid working hypotheses. Below, an overview is listed of the gained insights that affected the overall survey structure and design.

Literature analysis: The literature analysis has provided indications that current travel patterns can lead to potentials especially for short-term travels into “Sommerfrische” destinations. Therefore, the options of day trips and shorter trips will be considered in the questions for tourism behaviour and intentions. Furthermore, a range of potential TPB predictors (role of media, habit, social norm, emotions) were pre-selected based on existing literature for further pre-studies.

Pre-screening: The results of the telephonic screening indicate that no screening-out or filter questions (based on former visits of such regions or not) will be needed for the main survey structure as there were enough people in the pre-screening who had already visited these rural destinations. Hence, we now assume that a sufficiently large interest in these regions exists. Furthermore, the feedback showed that a short explanation is needed for the transition from general tourism questions towards the relationship with heat and climate change, since the context was not immediately apparent to everyone.

Focus groups: The image of “Sommerfrische” differed strongly between experts and citizens. To account for this wide range of understandings, an explorative question on “free associations with this Sommerfrische” will be added to the survey in order to gain a clear understanding of the respondent’s conceptualisation. As also depicted in the focus group results, the undertaken activities illustrate the strong diversity in people’s understanding of “Sommerfrische”. There were two main perspectives; the focus on relaxation vs. the focus on active holidays and sports. For this reason, the survey needs to allow the differentiation between different customer segments, requiring questions on general tourism behaviours, demands and attitudes. Furthermore, the results show that advertising and certain media play an essential role in people’s tourism decisions, so this aspect will be integrated as a TPB-predictor into the survey.

Picture analysis: In the case of landscape and mobility images, there were only minor deviations in the answers. One could see that the shown landscapes were all very positively associated with “Sommerfrische”. In contrast, the mobility pictures were very negatively connected with the term of “Sommerfrische”. Given the lack of internal variation in responses, these two groups of pictures were omitted from the survey.

Besides generating new methodological insights into how the TPB can serve as a valuable theoretical underpinning of projects in social adaptation research, the findings of both the pre-survey stages as well as the survey results will also feed into the future workshops to be conducted with stakeholders in the two Austrian case study regions to ultimately inform their strategic planning decisions.

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