

# **Pilgrimage Routes in the Alps - A Case Study of Mariazell**

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## **Statutory Declaration**

***“I declare in lieu of an oath that I have written this bachelor paper myself and that I have not used any sources or resources other than stated for its preparation. I further declare that I have clearly indicated all direct and indirect quotations. This bachelor paper has not been submitted elsewhere for examination purposes.”***

***Datum: 06 05 2016***

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## Abstract

The pilgrimage network in Europe has developed to one of the most popular cultural ways of the world, however, few information on the actual usage level of these routes exist. Based on a comprehensive literature review, semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven pilgrimage experts in Austria were conducted in order to shed light on the amount and nationality of visitors. Furthermore, this paper encompasses a case study on Austria's most important pilgrimage site, Mariazell in Styria. Although the importance of experiences and their proper design is stressed in the academic world, little effort has so far been made to enhance this process in the field of pilgrimage. Therefore, a set of another seven semi-structured in-depth interviews are the means of choice to investigate which key elements contribute to the pilgrimage experience in Mariazell.

The findings reveal that due to the high difficulty in measurement, only limited data on the amount and nationality of visitors has been gathered so far. The means and extent of measurement differ from region to region, hence, information is rather fragmented among the various tourism organisations in Austria. Additional layers of complexity are added by the difficult distinction of pilgrims and non-pilgrims as well as by a yet only limited demand for data. In terms of regional, national or international usage of pilgrimage routes, the findings emphasize that it inheres in the nature of pilgrimage to be a national and in most cases even regional form of travelling. However, growth potential is seen in the Central Eastern European markets. In regards to the key elements constituting the pilgrimage experience in Mariazell, the following aspects can be extracted as defining: Along the way to Mariazell, feelings of community, silence, physical exhaustion and being in nature dominate. In Mariazell, the Basilika, the souvenir stalls and the culinary offer are inevitably connected with the pilgrimage site. Additionally, feelings of pride, memories of childhood and religious as well as non-religious rituals constitute crucial elements of the pilgrim's experience in Mariazell.

**Key Words:** Pilgrimage Routes, Austria, Mariazell, Experience

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# **1 Introduction**

“Pilgrimage is a passage and an arrival, a line and a node, vector and raster. It warns us that we are going to die and reminds us of the somatic joy of living. It teaches us that time is short and eternity is timeless. [...] Pilgrimage is about myth, not as something false, but as a process beyond proof. It is an unfalsifiable kinetic act built of legend and bone, superstition and soil.” (Wright, 2014, p. 32)

Religion is inevitably and inseparably linked with the human being in social, cultural as well individual dimension (Duda, 2014, p. 36). In that respect, the phenomenon of pilgrimage constitutes a crucial characteristic of the five major world religions Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity (Collins-Kreiner, 2009, p. 440). Travelling with religious motives is not only ranked among the oldest forms of tourism in our world, but also counts as one of the tourism sectors with the most dynamic development in modern times (Duda, 2014, p. 37).

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

Pilgrimage is one of the best known phenomena of human culture and religion today and represents the roots of modern tourism as we know it (Collins-Kreiner, 2009, pp. 440, 444). However, its influences can by far not be limited to its spiritual, religious or cultural aspects. On the contrary, pilgrimage has a comprehensive impact on politics, economy, society, and even on global health and trade (Collins-Kreiner, 2009, p. 441).

In the course of time, destinations worldwide have inevitably been merged with the world's religions (Padin, Svensson, & Wood, 2016, p. 78) and are numbered among the most ancient places in the world to travel to (Nolan & Nolan, 1992, p. 68). For example, Jerusalem is linked with Christianity, Mecca represents a spiritual centre for the Islam, Hinduism worships the River Ganges, and Lumbini has an outstanding

significance for Buddhists (Padin et al., 2016, p. 78). In Austria, Mariazell in Styria represents the epitome of Christian pilgrimage and welcomes countless streams of religious visitors every year (Girrer, 2015).

In nowadays' times the sacred sites attract a broad spectrum of visitors. According to Nolan & Nolan (1992, pp. 68-69) they are on the one side frequented by visitors who believe that the churches, temples, shrines, festivals, and features of the landscape are connected with the divine; on the other side, they also appeal to secularly oriented tourists who are curious about the place and maybe about the religious visitors as well. However, a clear division into these categories is often impossible (ibid., p. 69). Furthermore, the veneration of believers is not limited to holy places themselves, but may also encompass the journey between two significant locations; the pilgrimages from Lourdes to Rome or from Mont-Saint-Michel to Lourdes constitute Catholic examples for this (Rotherham, 2007, p. 65). As a matter of fact, pilgrimage has caused a network of pilgrimage routes to emerge (Duda, 2014, p. 37) that also covers Austria.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

Although religious tourism is an essential part of today's tourism market (Rotherham, 2007, p. 64) and the pilgrim's paths in Europe count to the most popular cultural ways of the world (Duda, 2014, p. 37), little is known about the actual usage level of the pilgrimage routes. In further consequence, only very few information exists whether the paths attract visitors on a regional, national or international level. Although a certain degree of uncertainty in behalf of numbers and origin of pilgrims is inherent in the form of travelling itself, this type of data would be important from the tourism suppliers' point of view. It would enable stakeholders along the pilgrimage trails to assess the economic potential of the niche market and to adapt their offers adequately. Moreover, in order to detect trends and prepare for the future, it is inalienable to know about the past and current status quo.



Religious tourism has been in the focus of various academic disciplines for several years and the supply of research is considerable (Margry, 2008a, p. 13), however, only recently academics have started to bring the subjective experience of the pilgrims into focus (Collins-Kreiner, 2009, pp. 441-442). This shift also goes hand in hand with the transformation from a service to an experience economy which is characterized by an emphasis on the individual's emotions and personal perceptions (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, pp. 98-99). However, although the importance of experiences and their proper design is stressed in the academic world, little effort has been made to enhance this process in the field of pilgrimage. Given the fact that qualitative data about the experiences is needed to provide the foundation for further steps (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002, p. 2), in-depth interviews constitute an initial approach towards comprehending the pilgrimage experience.

### **1.3 Aim of the Research and Research Questions**

As already mentioned in the previous subchapter, only very few information exists on the usage level and nationality of pilgrimage routes in Europe. As an investigation of all of these trails would by far go beyond the scope of this Bachelor paper, it concentrates on Austria with a special emphasis on the Alps, as this area has a high influence on Europe's culture since ancient times (Bätzing, 2015, p. 9). The aim of the research is to provide an overview of already existing knowledge of the usage level and nationality. Furthermore, current approaches, difficulties and obstacles with regards to measurement will be revealed.

Secondly, the Bachelor paper focusses on the subjective experience of pilgrims. Qualitative data will be collected, aiming at the illustration of common themes and elements among pilgrims. As previously depicted, the data gathered on these key experience aspects shall provide the basis for further research on the topic. In order to concretise the endeavour and in an attempt to make the results comparable, the research will focus on Austria's most renowned pilgrimage centre, Mariazell. The village is not only located in the Alps, but appears to be especially suitable, as it is of special importance to several Austrian provinces due to its proximity to provincial

borders. Furthermore, it is situated in the centre of a star-shaped pilgrimage route network called “Mariazeller Wege” which all end at this pre-defined destination.

In consideration of the background, research problem and research aim of this Bachelor paper, the following research questions have been elaborated:

- Which pilgrimage routes in the Austrian Alps can be identified as regional, national or international routes?
- What is the usage level of these pilgrimage routes?
- What are the key elements of the pilgrimage experience in Mariazell, Austria’s most important pilgrimage centre?

## **1.4 Research Methodology**

In this paper, exploring the usage level and nationality of pilgrims on pilgrimage trails in the Austrian Alps is realized by researching with two methods: Firstly, a literature review is undertaken to collect already existing data and critically analyse current findings (Veal, 2006, p. 131). As the lack of sources in literature was already conceivable during the composition of the Bachelor Paper I, the qualitative approach of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with experts in the field of pilgrimage tourism in Austria will supplement the method at this initial stadium of research (van Eunen, 1995, pp. 43-44). The results of the two research questions are then presented on an illustrative map of Austria’s pilgrimage routes. For the purpose of answering the third research question on the key elements of the pilgrimage experience in Mariazell, again semi-structured in-depth interviews are the means of choice, as they provide a valuable foundation of profound knowledge to build upon (van Eunen, 1995, pp. 43-44). The respondents of the interviews have undertaken a pilgrimage to Mariazell by foot and provide rich data about the experiences acquired during such a trip. The following three subchapters address the topics of Literature Review, In-depth Interviews, Sampling and Field Work in greater detail and are complemented by an elaboration on Ethics in Research.

### **1.4.1 Literature Review**

According to Veal (2006, p. 131), literature review describes the process of critically and analytically reviewing literature for research purposes with the main focus on scrutinizing the text and discovering issues that have been left blank. For the purpose of this Bachelor Paper II, the main focus is set on analysing literature on religious tourism and pilgrimage as well as providing a critical discourse on current issues among researchers. Besides that, literature on the Alps as cultural landscape as well as on Mariazell are reviewed and presented in the paper. The comprehensive engagement with specific literature on the topic creates the foundation for the in-depth interviews with pilgrimage experts in Austria. Last but not least, an examination of the concept of the experience economy provides the theoretical framework for the conduction of interviews with pilgrims who went to Mariazell. Based on this qualitative data, the third research question about the key elements of the pilgrimage experience is elaborated on.

### **1.4.2 In-depth Interviews**

Veal (2006, p. 198) describes in-depth interviews as a qualitative research method that typically includes a relatively small number of participants und usually lasts from 30 minutes to several hours. Interviewers commonly work with a checklist to ensure that all essential topics are covered and use a tape recorder in order to prepare a verbatim transcription afterwards (ibid., p. 198).

In-depth interviews provide a deeper insight into people's minds than questionnaire-based interviews do and, therefore, come into use if interviewees are asked to talk freely and elaborate on their ideas (Veal, 2006, p. 197). They allow the researcher to understand experiences regardless of age, sex, social class or other characteristics, to reconstruct events which he or she did not visit and to examine social and political processes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 4-5). Interviewees on the other side are required to reflect on their experiences, order their thoughts and give their story a meaning (Seidman, 2013, p. 7). Rubin & Rubin (2005, pp. 4-5) explain that the

answers to the questions are not meant to be short and simple, but allow the participants to describe their emotions and explain thoughts to the interviewer.

Indications for in-depth interviews are given if only a small number of appropriate interviewees is available or if the research is still on an initial level of development and first insights into the topic are desired (van Eunen, 1995, pp. 43-44). After having gathered rich qualitative data, the method can then be followed by quantitative methods like questionnaire-based surveys (Veal, 2006, p. 198). However, Seidman (2013, p. 11) also points out the negative aspects of this method: In-depth interviews often require great financial and time resources, because the research process includes selecting the participants, contacting, arranging and conducting the interview with them, and finally transcribing and analysing the data.

Rubin & Rubin (2005, pp. 157-159) lay down useful rules for the conduction of interviews: They recommend to start off with broad questions that are simple to answer and continue in greater depth during the interview. According to the researchers, closed questions that could be answered with Yes or No should be avoided; instead interviewees should be encouraged to answer questions from their own experience and express their personal thoughts about a topic. In the experience of Rubin & Rubin, directly addressing the research problems is most often obstructive, as they are formulated in academic language and difficult to answer; instead, they should be split into several smaller and easier questions (2005, pp. 157-159).

A skilled interviewer resists the temptation to lead the interview and avoids signs of approval or disapproval during the interview as this would influence the interviewee; instead the interviewer finds the right balance between showing a neutral attitude and creating a positive atmosphere (Veal, 2006, p. 199). In case of insecurity, it might be necessary to reassure the interviewee that he or she has the competence to answer the questions and no one will judge the quality of their answers, as some

people might fear that they say something “wrong” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 114-115).

#### **1.4.3 Sampling and Field Work**

The selection of participants is a crucial step in the qualitative research process (Seidman, 2013, p. 54). The approach towards sampling can either be random/probability sampling, which means that everyone has the same chance of being picked, or purposive sampling, for which researchers state a list of recruitment criteria (van Eunen, 1995, pp. 52-56). For both types of in-depth interviews conducted for the Bachelor Paper II, purposive sampling is favoured as the interviewees are required to fulfil some basic criteria.

In order to receive insights in the usage level and nationality of pilgrims on pilgrimage in the Austrian Alps, experts with profound knowledge on the topic are chosen. These specialists qualify themselves mainly because they are occupied with the topic in their job life or within the frame of voluntary work. The selected participants for the in-depth interviews examining the key elements of the pilgrimage experience in Mariazell on the contrary had to fulfil the basic criteria that they have undertaken a pilgrimage to Mariazell. Furthermore, they were selected with regards to maximum variation. According to Seidman (2013, pp. 55-56), this sampling method aims to select people with a fair proportion to the larger population and is considered as “the most effective basic strategy” in the selection process. In the context of this paper, it was attempted to compile a sample with balanced characteristics in terms of age, gender and chosen pilgrimage route. Although firstly intended to conduct the interviews directly on-site in Mariazell, this plan turned out to be unfeasible due to the tight time schedule that required the field work to be done off-season in February and March.

#### **1.4.4 Ethics in Research**

Ethical questions may occur during various stages of the research process and almost always lead to some conflicts in academic work; however, it is essential to

accept that ethical ideals are hardly achievable in reality, but should guide and support the researcher throughout the process (Seidman, 2013, p. 139).

Alvesson points out that in-depth interviews as research method contain some difficulties in particular that the researcher has to be aware of: During the analysis of the data, the researcher should bear in mind that the information gathered has to be critically analysed, as interviewees may be of the opinion to be knowledgeable and truthful, however, due to different causes, the true meaning of what was said may be misunderstood or misinterpreted (2011, pp. 146-150). Seidman (2013, p. 12) argues that the process of in-depth interviews classifies the interviewees as subjects a researcher uses for the purpose of the work and, hence, can be described as a balancing act not to exploit the interviewees, but to make the interview process as fair as possible, not only in economic terms but also on a deeper level.

## **2 Literature Review**

This chapter comprises four topics: First of all, a literature review on religious tourism with a focus on pilgrimage is presented. As a starting point, it constitutes the historical development of the sector. This part is followed by a depiction and critical comparison of current concepts of religious tourism and pilgrimage in research. The subchapter is succeeded by an exploration on the Alps as a touristic and cultural landscape with an emphasis on the Austrian part of it. The third subchapter focusses on Mariazell, Austria's most renowned pilgrimage destination, and examines its history and importance on the Austrian pilgrimage and tourism market. Finally, an insight into the experience theory rounds up the chapter and provides the reader with a theoretical understanding of the term "experience" and a basis for applying it to the context of Mariazell.

### **2.1 Religious Tourism**

The first documented pilgrimage of the Christian world took place in the 10<sup>th</sup> century to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, but even before journeys to the Holy Land and Rome were done (Duda, 2014, p. 37). A well-established consensus among scholars attests that pilgrimage to the Holy Land has already taken place in the fourth century, when Christianity was only about to arise in the Roman Empire (Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008, p. 675). Its popularity was significantly increased in medieval Europe, as it was believed that this kind of journeys enhances the remission of sins (Liutikas, 2015, p. 16). In the course of the Reformation in Europe, the empowered Protestants contained the habit of pilgrimages, and if they took place, the believers sought to distance themselves from Catholic traditions (Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008, p. 676). Belhassen et al. (2008, p. 675) argue that Protestants still view holy sites associated with Catholicism as a form of institutionalisation of a religion and, hence, reject them. Nonetheless, pilgrimage gained popularity again and, over the centuries, has resulted in a "well-developed network of pilgrimage trails" which comprises some of the most popular cultural paths in the world (Duda, 2014, p. 37).

Pilgrimage does not only represent an essential part of today's tourism market, it is also claimed to be one of the oldest forms of it (Rotherham, 2007, p. 64). However, Margry (2008a, p. 13) remarks that the phenomenon is not only of interest to tourism experts, but has attracted academic researchers from a wide range of areas for several decades, leading to a great amount of academic studies and books on the topic. He explains this broad engagement with the fascination the topic evokes on the researchers and its high importance in socio-cultural and politico-strategic dimensions (2008a, p.14).

However, the great amount of research conducted during the last decades has not led to a similarly high level of clarity of the concept, as some authors argue: Olsen (2013, p. 43) states that segmenting the religious tourism market still causes difficulties as researchers often do not share the same definitions and even the overall term for the market leads to inconsistencies: Faith, pilgrimage, spiritual, religious tourism or tourism pilgrimage are only examples for this. In Margry's opinion (2008b, p. 323), a high level of vagueness concerning the actual sense and extent of pilgrimage defines the market. He emphasizes on the distinction between secular and religious pilgrimage and rejects to unify these two different approaches into one concept with too broad dimensions (2008a, p. 14).

Olsen (2013, p. 42) points out that several different models on segmenting the religious tourism market have evolved. The first starting point of differentiation was the division of travellers in pilgrims and tourists (ibid., p. 42). An established approach is Smith's pilgrim-tourist continuum (1992, as cited in Olsen, 2013, p. 42) which places a visitor with secular motivations on the one pole and a visitor with sacred motivations on the opposite side, allowing infinite combinations for every individual. Rotherham (2007, p. 65), thus, characterizes the classical mass tourist as someone who is led by a high degree of superficiality and typical consumer behaviour, whereas a pilgrim can be described as pious, serious and involved in deep spiritual experiences. Hence, secular visitors view sacral sites as museums, whereas religious ones engage themselves in profound processes and seek for a spiritual haven



(ibid., p. 65). However, Collins-Kreiner (2009, p. 443) discerns a movement toward dedifferentiation in research in the last twenty years and stresses that many scholars comprehend the differences between the secularly motivated and religiously motivated travellers as narrowing. Therefore, she proposes the usage of a new continuum that is not occupied with the distinction between secularity and religiosity, but with the effect the visit has on the visitor: One end of the continuum represents life-changing visits, the other end visits with no effect at all (2009, pp. 451-452).

Religion is defined as a human phenomenon that affects the individual as well as society and has a great impact on culture (Duda, 2014, p. 36). However, religious institutions and movements increasingly face the challenge that their offers sometimes do not satisfy some individuals' needs anymore (Margry, 2008b, p. 327). These individuals then seek for other opportunities to get in touch with the sacred and will finally find the right itinerary in themselves (ibid., p. 327). As a result, the decreasing impact of traditional religious institutions is counterbalanced by a growing individual search for a higher meaning in life (Rotherham, 2007, pp. 66-67). On the other side, the development of a secular and multicultural society also offers a tremendous chance for religious institutions, as churches, shrines and other religious sites increasingly attract secular visitors who are receptive for spiritual or transcendent experiences and could on this way discover or rediscover their faith (Nolan & Nolan, 1992, p. 73; Rotherham, 2007, pp. 69-75).

This secularization of nowadays society on the one hand and the increasing demand for spiritual encounters on the other hand have led to a "research dilemma" of how to set the boundaries for religious tourism and pilgrimage (Lopez, 2013, p. 2). Therefore, Margry (2008a, p. 17) suggests an alternative approach towards pilgrimage, including any form of travel that aims at spiritual inspiration and heading for a place that is seen as more extraordinary or more sacred than one's daily surroundings.

According to Nolan and Nolan (1992, p. 69), the proportion of religiously motivated pilgrims and travellers with rather secular motives tend to depend on the type of attraction they visit. They, hence, suggest a separation of religious sites into three categories: First of all, the researchers (1992, pp. 70-71) introduce the category of *pilgrimage shrines* which are mainly visited by the nearby communities and religious groups. The second category mentioned by Nolan and Nolan (1992, pp. 72-73) are *religious tourist attractions* whose history, architecture, outstanding view or art exhibition attract secular visitors. *Religious festivals*, such as Christmas, Easter or Carnival, are part of the third category of religious sites in the concept of Nolan and Nolan (1992, pp. 74-75).

Olsen (2013, pp. 41-43) further mentions attempts to segment the niche market with regards to the world regions and countries in which they take place or on the basis of activities in which people participate, an approach that is commonly used by partners from the industry. Moreover, the researcher (2013, pp. 44-52) adds an additional layer of complexity by analysing how the different types of religious attractions are connected with the motivations and expectations of the visitors: If the major focus of the journey lies on a point, for example a cathedral, visitors tend to be ambiguous with their motivations and expectations. Very few call themselves pilgrims, nevertheless they desire to have an emotional experience in some way. For testimonies travelling along a route, for example along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, the way itself is more important than the destination. They identify themselves with the way, however, the reasons are as various as for visitors of point attractions. The Holy Land can be characterized as an area and hosts travellers which label themselves to a very high percentage as pilgrims and consequently follow a religious itinerary.

In recent years the emphasis was increasingly put on determining the motivations of a religious journey, shifting from a descriptive approach to the exploration of causes (Olsen, 2013, p. 43) and from the attempt to find objective truths to an emphasis of the subjective side of pilgrimage (Collins-Kreiner, 2009, p. 442). Lopez

(2013, p. 7) highlights that the experiences made during a pilgrimage varies significantly and are, therefore, hardly quantifiable: There is no fixed general starting and end point for the journey, as for most of the pilgrims the physical and mental preparation is already an essential part of the experience. Plus, the “essence” of it does not stop with the return home, but is a permanent change: Travel testimonies who had done a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela described a new feeling of freedom, in a material as well as in a social context (Lopez, 2013, p. 7). These changes in the academic world can be attributed to what Collins-Kreiner (2009, p. 442) calls postmodernism: It comprehends a focus on the subjective and individual and aims to deconstruct existing theories.

All in all, researchers have to know of the pilgrim’s emotions, experiences and values in order to truly understand pilgrimage (Lopez, 2013, p. 3). Instead of differentiating between right and wrong, they are encouraged to act as an interpreter and to display the phenomenon in all its coexisting facets (Collins-Kreiner, 2009, p. 450). Therefore, a methodology acquiring subjective data is needed (Lopez, 2013, p. 3).

## **2.2 The Alps**

The Alps have influenced the European culture since the Roman times, as it has been these mountain ranges with which the Europeans have developed their understanding of the interactions between nature and civilisation (Bätzing, 2015, p. 9).

According to Bätzing (2015, pp. 20-23), the borders of the Alps can be defined in different ways; two common ones are introduced in this paper: For the narrowest demarcation, which is commonly adopted in the tourism sector, only the mountainous part with an altitude of 1000 to 2000 metres are described as Alps. Industrial areas and Alpine cities are usually omitted in the common tourism industry’s point of view as they do not support the image of an extraordinary natural landscape. The broadest borders are set by the political sector: In order to avoid the partition of provinces, cantons and administrative regions, the European Union has defined the

term “Alpine Space” which includes an area of 390 000 kilometres and 65,8 million people. According to this definition, the entire country of Austria is regarded as part of the Alps (Alpine Space Programme, 2007-2013).

Although often believed, Bätzing (2015, pp. 188-193) argues that tourism is neither an all-encompassing nor economically dominant sector in the Alps; this only holds true if the narrowest demarcation mentioned before is applied. Nonetheless, Macchiavelli (2009, p. 99) points out that the Alps have faced an enormous increase of visitor numbers in the last fifty years and that some alpine destinations, especially in winter sports areas, have already reached their saturation point in tourism. However, he raises awareness of the fact that the product diversification in the recent years has encouraged tourists to choose the destination out of other reasons than outdoor sports: Culinary tourism and activities connected with the cultural heritage of the Alps have gained in popularity and raised the attractiveness of the destination for a broader target group (ibid., p. 109).

The Austrian Alpine tourism is characterized by a decentralized development, comprising mainly small- to medium-sized enterprises operated and controlled by and with the active support of locals (Bätzing, 2015, pp. 188-193; Macchiavelli, 2009, p.102). Whilst this structure constitutes the unique charm as a tourist destination (Bätzing, 2015, pp. 188-193) and creates a more intimate and human relationship between hosts and guests (Macchiavelli, 2009, p. 102), the individual tourism providers will have to cooperate to an extended amount in the future in order to stay competitive to monopolistic arranged destinations (Bätzing, 2015, pp. 188-193). As Macchiavelli (2009, p. 109) points out, the high number of decision makers in alpine valleys decelerate innovation and adaptation processes.

### **2.3 Mariazell**

A destination that perfectly combines the both before mentioned concepts of pilgrimage and the Alps as cultural landscape is Mariazell. Located within the Alps and

nationally as well as internationally renowned as pilgrimage site, the city hosts religious tourists all year round. According to a study conducted by con.os tourismus consulting GmbH (2009), Mariazell represents the most important pilgrimage site of Austria. Moreover, the paper revealed that the network of routes leading to Mariazell, the so-called “Mariazeller Wege”, count, together with the Way of St. James, as the most important pilgrimage routes in Austria, making it the destination with the highest frequency of pilgrims in the entire country (2009).

Mariazell is located in Northern Styria on the border to Lower Austria, embedded in one of the biggest connected forest areas of Middle Europe; the tourism association Mariazeller Land comprises two communities and three component localities and markets the area as an all-year round tourism destination (TVB Mariazeller Land, 2015). The community Mariazell builds the centre of the area and owns an Austrian treasure: the Magna Mater Austriae, a statue of the Virgin Mary dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (TVB Mariazeller Land, 2015). According to Girrner (2015), Mariazell has become the “embodiment of pilgrimage” in Austria since that time. This outstanding position is further emphasized by two visits of the Pope in 1983 and 2007 as well as by the constant streams of religious people travelling there (ibid.).

## **2.4 Experience Theory**

According to Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 98), our economy has evolved in a four-stage process: The starting point of the economy as we know it today can be traced back to the agrarian sector and the extraction of products that are referred to as commodities. This stage was superseded by the production of tangible goods in the era of industrialisation. Afterwards, services, which are characterised by a customized delivery of intangible goods, evolved in economic value. Finally, the researchers claimed in the Nineties that the progression of our markets has shifted to an experience economy.

Pine and Gilmore (1998, pp. 98-99) define an experience as a set of services and products which are staged for the customers in such a way that it creates a memorable event that engages them in a personal way. They point out that an experience is unique in its nature, as no two people can share exactly the same experience (1998, p. 99). In further consequence, this means that the customer value of a good cannot be narrowed down to the relationship of price and functionality, but is determined by the ability of the company to offer experiences with personal worth for the customers (Berry et al., pp. 1-2). In order to do so, Berry et al. (2002, p. 1) advice to implement a comprehensive strategy encompassing and analysing the entire customers' journey and all cues that they are confronted with in the course of experiencing. On one side, this comprises to link the customers' impressions with positive cues which underline the overall theme; on the other side, it includes the diminution of distractive or irritating cues (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 103). In the end, companies with a successful customer experience management deliver functional as well as emotional value to the customers and profit from their high loyalty in return (Berry et al., 2002, p. 5).

For the purpose of managing the total customer experience, Berry et al. (2002, pp. 2-3) recommend to undertake the following steps: The first task is to execute an experience audit that demonstrates the status quo of the experience. This can be done by observations of the customers, for example with videotaping, and the conduction of in-depth interviews aiming to clarify customers' emotions during the experience. As a next step, the company develops an experience motif which functions as the underlying guideline for the implementation of consistent clues as a final step. The clues can either have a mechanic or human nature and are consequently applied in a graphical or narrative form. The necessity of an effective experience management is once again emphasized by the researchers' statement that customers have an experience anyway, however, it is up to the companies to utilise it in a beneficial way (ibid., p. 5).

### 3 Usage of Pilgrimage Routes in the Alps

The first and second research question of this paper occupy themselves with the amount and nationality of visitors on pilgrimage routes in the Austrian Alps. Although it was originally intended to close the demonstrated research gap with a literature review, the lack of resources made it impossible to move forward with this methodology. Therefore, it was decided to conduct in-depth interviews with experts in the field of Austrian pilgrimage routes in order to provide first insights into the topic. The table below provides information about the participants; all in all, seven persons with profound background knowledge on the topic could be recruited.

One interview was held on a face-to-face basis, three were conducted using Skype and two took place over telephone due to a higher degree of flexibility in terms of time management. One participant agreed to answer the questions in written form. All experts permitted to record the semi-structured interview and availed themselves of the option to review and give feedback on it. The interview guideline was articulated in two sections: The first one with five questions referred to the first research question on the amount of visitors, the second part consisting of four questions concentrated on the nationality of these visitors.

Table 1: Expert Interviews on Amount and Nationality of Pilgrims

| Name                       | Position  | Date of Interview | Length of Interview | Type of Interview |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Roland Stadler</b>      | Chairman of the work group for the tourism and pilgrimage pastoral care, Katholische Kirche Kärnten | 10.03.2016        | 50 minutes          | Skype             |
| <b>Sonja Eder</b>          | Project Leadership Way of St. James Weinviertel, Weinviertel Tourismus                              | 22.03.2016        | 40 minutes          | Skype             |
| <b>Johann Kleinhofer</b>   | General Manager, Mariazeller Land GmbH  | 23.03.2016        | 30 minutes          | Telephone         |
| <b>Werner Kraus</b>        | Chairman, Association of the Ways of St. James Austria  | 26.03.2016        | 50 minutes          | Telephone         |
| <b>Stefan Nieder-moser</b> | Project Manager Way of St. James Tyrol, Pillerseetal Regionalentwicklungs GmbH                      | 07.04.2016        | 25 minutes          | Skype             |

|                                     |  |            |            |              |
|-------------------------------------|--|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>H. Petrus Stockinger CanReg,</b> | Augustiner-Chorherrenstift                                 | -          | -          | Email        |
| <b>Leo Führer</b>                   | Advisor of the project „PILGERN“ of the Archdiocese Vienna | 14.04.2016 | 30 minutes | Face-to-face |

Source: by the author

In the course of conducting the interviews, it became clear that a separation of pilgrimage routes based on their location within or without the Alps according to the narrowest demarcation is hardly feasible in Austria. This is because most of the routes expand over several geographical landscapes and would need to be separated. However, the difficulty can be circumvented by using the political concept of Alpine Space mentioned in chapter 2.2 which encompasses the whole country of Austria (Alpine Space Programme, 2007-2013).

### 3.1 Data Analysis and Findings

The tape recordings of the interviews were transcribed and sent to the participants for approval. The field work was then succeeded by the coding and interpretation process of the data. In the following subchapters, the results of the in-depth interviews are represented.

#### 3.1.1 Usage Level of Pilgrimage Routes

According to Roland Stadler (2016), the spokesperson of the national network “Pilgern in Österreich”, the most important pilgrimage routes in Austria are in backward-sorted order the Way of St. James, the “Mariazellerwege”, the network of pilgrimage routes in Salzburg and the “Benediktweg” from Kremsmünster to Gornji Grad in Slovenia. This evaluation largely corresponds with a study of con.os tourismus.consulting GmbH (2009): Its findings suggest that next to the first two mentioned routes, the “Hemmapilgerwege” to Gurk in Carinthia are the third most important. Furthermore, the study points out that the pilgrimage destinations Mariazell, Gurk, St. Wolfgang, Maria Plain and Sonntagsberg are of highest relevance in Austria (2009).

Werner Kraus (2016) remarks that in Austria the Via Sacra leading to Mariazell and the Way of St. James are of same importance, whereas on an international level the



latter represents the most significant brand in pilgrimage. The most popular parts of the Austrian Way of St. James are the ones along the Danube River as well as the ones in the Wachau Valley (Kraus, 2016). Concerning the “Mariazellerwege”, the general manager of the region “Mariazeller Land” Johann Kleinhofer (2016) elucidates that the Via Sacra, the parallel running Viennese Pilgrimage Way, the route coming from Graz and the route from Burgenland are the most frequented ones. Leopold Führer, who is the contact person for pilgrims in the archdiocese Vienna, draws attention to the fact that most pilgrims start from their hometown and find their own ways to Mariazell at the beginning, before they finally lead to the official routes (2016).

The acquisition of data on the amount of pilgrims on Austrian pilgrimage routes represents a great challenge (Stadler, 2016). The expert interviews show that data existing on the quantitative usage level of pilgrimage routes is partly based on inquiries and partly based on estimates. On grounds of the issuance of pilgrims’ passes as well as on the amount of information service, the number of pilgrims on the Austrian Way of St. James can be gauged to be about 5 000 per year (Stadler, 2016). This number, however, refers to the primary routes next to the Danube River (Kraus, 2016). Stefan Niedermoser (2016), the project leader of the Way of St. James in Tyrol, reports that between 2 000 and 2 500 pilgrims visit the section in this province every year. The number is based on a spot-checked inquiry of 317 persons in May 2015 and is then offset for the whole year; it excludes day and event visitors (Niedermoser, 2016).

Two of the pilgrimage experts interviewed in this paper are related to the Way of St. James Weinviertel in Lower Austria. Sonja Eder is occupied with the project leadership from Weinviertel Tourismus, Werner Kraus functions not only as a chairman of the Association of the Ways of St. James Austria but also participates in the interest group of the section in the Weinviertel. The Way of St. James Weinviertel was opened in 2010 and now approximately welcomes between 1 000 (Eder, 2016) and

3 000 visitors (Kraus, 2016) per year. In the centrally located pilgrimage accommodation “Bildungshaus Großrußbach”, which both of the interviewees closely cooperate with, the number of pilgrims staying there per year ranges between 350 (Eder, 2016) and 600 (Kraus, 2016).

Due to the complexity of distinguishing between different types of travellers, which will be focussed on in one of the following chapters, Roland Stadler (2016) indicates that it is not possible to reinterpret arrival numbers registered at pilgrimage sites as pilgrims. He clarifies that from the 350 000 persons arriving in Sankt Wolfgang every year, probably not more than 500 can be defined as pilgrims. In Mariazell, it is estimated that from one million visitors in the main season between May and October 70 000 of them are pilgrims arriving by foot (Kleinhofer, 2016).

### **3.1.2 Nationality of Visitors on the Pilgrimage Routes**

The second research question of this paper aimed to elucidate which of the pilgrimage routes in the Austrian Alps are regionally, nationally or internationally used. According to Roland Stadler (2016), it inheres in the nature of pilgrimage that it is mainly used on a national level, because a high level of motivation and preparation in respect of language barriers and map material is needed. Furthermore, different price levels and time constraints also contribute to the decisions in favour of routes in the home country (Stadler, 2016). The expert (2016) further points out that the visitors on regional pilgrimage routes can actually be narrowed down to the respective province of Austria; exceptions are destinations like Mariazell which are located quite close to the provincial borders.

This opinion finds oneself in the statements of the other experts who have first-hand knowledge from the work with pilgrims. Johann Kleinhofer (2016) refers to the overnight statistics of Mariazell, which reveal that 70 percent of visitors are Austrian, followed by guests from Germany, Hungary and Czech Republic, and is convinced that the proportion of national guests in the group of pilgrims arriving by foot is even

higher. He links this percentage to the fact that pilgrimage is a rather slow means of transportation, although he perceives a gradual increase of foreign guests frequenting the “Mariazellerwege” (2016). Sonja Eder (2016) assumes that the visitors on the Way of St. James Weinviertel are to a majority of 80 percent from Austria. Moreover, she sees growth potential in the Czech and Polish market if the Czech section of the Way of St. James increases in quality (2016). Leopold Führer (2016) also believes that the preparation of the routes in the Central Eastern European Countries is the prerequisite for increased visitor levels on the Austrian pilgrimage routes. Once they are prepared, the Way of St. James will also boost in popularity (Führer, 2016). In regards of the Austrian guests, the majority of pilgrims on the Way of St. James Weinviertel are from Lower Austria and Vienna, followed by Salzburg and Tyrol (Eder, 2016). Werner Kraus adds that it was the topic of pilgrimage that opened up the market of Salzburg to the area (2016). Furthermore, he raises awareness to the fact that the final destination generally determines the direction of pilgrimage; as Santiago de Compostela is located in the very west of Europa, the major flow of pilgrims naturally moves in this direction on the European Way of St. James as well as on the Austrian part of it (2016).

On the contrary, the Tyrolian section of the Way of St. James gives a different picture in terms of nationality: According to Stefan Niedermoser (2016), only 45 percent of the visitors are Austrians; to a same percentage the pilgrimage tourism relies on German source market, followed by 2,5 percent from Switzerland. Concerning the future developments, he also recognizes an increasing amount of visitors from Central Eastern Europe countries coming to Tyrol because of the pilgrimage route (2016). However, Roland Stadler (2016) adds for consideration that a further rise of market share in these markets still highly depends on the development of price levels and affordability in Austria.

Another aspect that might determine the level of international visitors on Austrian pilgrimage routes is raised by Roland Stadler (2016): He states that the increase of refugees in Europe might also have an influence on the number of foreign pilgrims

and the Austrian pilgrimage market in general. In his point of view, closed borders and a feeling of insecurity when being on the way on one's own will create additional barriers to pilgrimage, especially to the visitor flows coming from the East of Europe (2016).

### **3.1.3 Methods of Measurement**

In order to gather data on the usage of level of the Austrian pilgrimage routes, the pilgrimage experts draw on various methods. The following chapter will give an overview on the previous attempts and future ideas to cast light on the complex topic of a quantitative acquisition of pilgrims.

The most obvious method to gather data is to directly count the visitors on the way. However, no regular counting stations exist on the Austrian pilgrimage routes (Stadler, 2016). Furthermore, in order to have reliable data it would actually be necessary to monitor the number of visitors for an entire year which is practically impossible (Eder, 2016). Sonja Eder (2016) and Werner Kraus (2016) agree on the fact that the crucial point in this endeavour lies in the determination of strategically suitable points along the way which are mainly passed by pilgrims. If it would be possible to find these points where only or mainly pilgrims pass by, sensors with counting functions, as already used on bicycle routes, could be positioned (Eder, 2016). Stefan Niedermoser (2016) explains that every three to four years a comprehensive investigation with interviews conducted directly on site is carried out on the Tyrolian Way of St. James and results in the most reliable data of all methods in use. During the last survey of 2015, 317 persons were interviewed at two strategically adequate points on the way and additionally, about 600 persons who have ordered a pilgrimage pass in this year were interviewed via an online survey; based on this data, the number of total visitors per year can then be added up (Niedermoser, 2016).

Another method used by the pilgrimage experts is the cooperation with accommodation providers along the way (Eder, 2016; Führer, 2016; Kleinhofer, 2016; Kraus, 2016; Niedermoser, 2016). On the Way of St. James Weinviertel, the “Bildungshaus Großrussbach” functions as a major hub for pilgrims and interview the arriving guests if they are pilgrims (Eder, 2016). For Werner Kraus (2016), the close cooperation between the clerical and touristic institutions in the Weinviertel represents a paradigm in Austria, because all parties work together in order to strengthen the Way of St. James. In this regard, the “Bildungshaus Großrussbach” represents a reliable partner in the project (2016). Johann Kleinhofer (2016) works with accommodation providers as well as with service stations located in the surroundings of Mariazell who gather data. Furthermore, the overnight statistics in Mariazell can be used as a foundation for estimations (Kleinhofer, 2016). This is in stark contrast to other pilgrimage routes like the Way of St. James Weinviertel, which is organized in several day’s stages without one final destination where counting would be meaningful (Kraus, 2016).

Pilgrimage passes constitute a further way to collect data. The usage rate, however, significantly differs among the Austrian pilgrimage routes. Roland Stadler (2016) generally recognizes a decreasing interest in pilgrimage passes, as pilgrims nowadays feel less need to prove their journey and are not so much fond of collecting stamps as they used to be. Moreover, he remarks that the pass in Austria is less important than for example in Spain, where it allows the pilgrims to receive discounts and are useful in an economical sense as well (2016). In contrast to that, Stefan Niedermoser (2016) accounts an unvarying demand for stamps; according to his evaluation, almost all pilgrims on the Tyrolian Way of St. James have something to stamp with them. In addition, the issuance of these passes provide solid information on the pilgrims, as for the Tyrolian version they register online with their name, birth date and further characteristics (Niedermoser, 2016). In total, several hundreds of pilgrimage passes are ordered via an online system and the Tyrolian “Jakobsge-meinschaft” each year (Niedermoser, 2016). In the context of pilgrimage passes, Sonja Eder reports on plans to install some form of counting feature in the stamps

located in the churches in order to comprehend the number of stamps made. However, she also adverts to the fact, that the exact amount might be easily distorted as some people might stamp several times and others might not enter the churches at all (2016). In contrast to the partly high significance of pilgrimage passes in Austria, Werner Kraus (2016) states that the demand for the certificate of the Way of St. James is rather low. Pilgrims who have walked more than 100 kilometres can request a pilgrimage certificate online; however, only about 100 pieces are issued every year (Kraus, 2016). On the contrary, Leopold Führer (2016) points out that the certificates issued in Santiago de Compostela are such a reliable indicator that the most important statistics about the topic of pilgrimage are based on these.

Sonja Eder (2016) from Weinviertel Tourismus adds another method of measurement into consideration: She analysed the books which are available in every of the 39 churches along the Way of St. James Weinviertel. These books are officially designated for pilgrims but are also used by others who write in their sorrows (Eder, 2016). The analysis of these books intended to give basic information on the pilgrims, however, it turned out that the entries were too imprecise to derive information (2016).

#### **3.1.4 Difficulties of Measurement**

In his paper on the religious tourism market, Olsen (2013, p. 43) criticises the existing inconsistencies when it comes to broadly accepted definitions in regards of what constitutes the market. Margry (2008a, pp. 13-14) views the academic scholars at fault for not providing a clearly distinguished picture of the pilgrimage phenomenon, leading to the emergence of a too broad concept that combines secular as well as religious segments. The default of clear demarcations also aggravates the work of the pilgrimage experts interviewed in this paper. Roland Stadler (2016) mentions the fact that the German language requires the complex distinction between the two terms “Pilger” and “Wallfahrer”. According to con.os tourism.consulting GmbH (2009, p. 3), the former term applies to way-oriented individuals with personal concerns, whereas the latter one describes a goal-oriented community travelling for mainly

religious reasons. Moreover, due to their good infrastructure, sufficient map material as well as waymarks and accommodation providers along the way, the pilgrimage routes attract visitors with various motives, for example sportive reasons, cultural-historical interests or the need of deceleration (Stadler, 2016). Although researchers have increasingly started to focus on the motivations of the travellers (Olsen, 2013, p. 43), in practice the motives for being on pilgrimage routes are not clearly separable (Stadler, 2016).

Besides, asking visitors for their motives often implies an unfeasible challenge in operational terms. As an example, Stefan Niedermoser (2016) mentions the Jakobskreuz, a Tyrolian tourism attraction along the Way of St. James: With more than 75 000 visitors in the last year, it is hardly possible to ask every single one for their motives. The same difficulties hold true for Mariazell with one million visitors per year: No records on the guests' motives are made which means that no clear distinction between religious, sportive, culturally or historically interested visitors can be made (Kleinhofer, 2016).

The next difficulty in measuring arises from the high proportion of people who go along the same pilgrimage route in stages (Führer, 2016; Stadler, 2016). Werner Kraus (2016) proposes the question of how to count a pilgrim who completes the first half of the Way of St. James Weinviertel at a time and continues with the other one a few months later. As a consequence, the same obstacles which inhibit the quantitative measurement of pilgrims also aggravate the determination of the countries of origin (Stadler, 2016).

### **3.1.5 Demand for Data**

Although several difficulties in the acquisition of data exist, the scarcity of information cannot be limited to methodological challenges; it can also be traced back to the partly insufficient demand for this data. In Johann Kleinhofer's perspective (2016), the clerical institutions might have less interest in this kind of data, as the

pilgrimage routes are by far not only frequented by religious travellers. For them, it is rather important that many pilgrims visit the churches (Kleinhofer, 2016). In contrast, for him it is crucial that Mariazell is perceived as attractive destination, be it for leisure or religious reasons (Kleinhofer, 2016). Sonja Eder (2016) also perceives certain discrepancies between the clerical and the touristic parties involved: For the clerical interest groups, the spiritual and religious development of the pilgrims are more important than the quantitative aspects. This impression is underlined by the statements of H. Petrus Stockinger of the Augustinian canon monastery in Herzogenburg, who reports that the monastery has no interest in gathering any data on the amount of pilgrims or their nationality (2016). For Leopold Führer (2016), the quantitative acquisition of pilgrims is also of secondary importance; more essential to him is the interest in pilgrimage in general and that he can support the prospective pilgrims as good as possible.

On the other hand, the tourism organisation needs this kind of data to demonstrate the economic impact of pilgrimage tourism to third parties (Eder, 2016). Stefan Niedermoser (2016) explains that data about the usage level of the pilgrimage routes is obligatory to justify the financial contributions the concerned tourism associations have to make. Werner Kraus (2016) also believes that quantitative data is rather important if support is needed from third parties than for the actual work on the Way of St. James. Roland Stadler (2016) adds that the churches on site anyway offer a spiritual program, unaffected by the actual number of pilgrims.

Furthermore, Roland Stadler (2016) submits that the question of responsibility arises not only between the clerical and touristic side, but also in organisational terms. As many pilgrimage routes stretch over several regions, he points out that cooperation across several provinces would be necessary. Last year, those responsible for tourism in Tyrol and Salzburg initiated such a project together and conducted a comprehensive survey with more than 900 participants (Niedermoser, 2016).



Another issue that limits the demand for data also from a touristic point of view is the fact that pilgrimage tourism eventually constitutes a niche product in this sector and, hence, would not justify comprehensive endeavours (Stadler, 2016). However, Sonja Eder (2016) points out that this is a self-fulfilling prophecy: The usage levels might be low because the pilgrimage paths are not enough promoted, but the costs for these promotions would need to be vindicated by the missing information of usage numbers.

Although this form of tourism creates valuable impulses on the tourism market in Weinviertel, Werner Kraus (2016) also relativizes that in other regions like Tyrol the same amount of visitors would not receive lots of exposure. Stefan Niedermoser (2016) confirms that in Tyrol and Salzburg pilgrimage is seen as niche product and not a central element in tourism; however, he emphasizes that it is still a perfect touristic product that can help to enhance Tyrol's summer revenues. On the other side, the touristic intervention at the Tyrolian Way of St. James is kept to a minimum in order to avoid its commercial absorption (Niedermoser, 2016).

### **3.2 Evaluation of Usage of Pilgrimage Routes in the Alps**

The aim of the research questions was to shed light on the usage levels of pilgrimage routes in the Austrian Alps as well as on the nationality of the visitors. However, the expert interviews conducted for this paper reveal the underlying complexity of gathering such data. The ambiguity and absence of clear definitions in the sector of religious tourism constitute not only a main finding of the conducted literature review, but is also rediscovered in the various in-depth interviews. However, only with a clear theoretical foundation, practical endeavours can be carried out in a meaningful way. Due to the lack of such a foundation, the visitor numbers acquired through the interviews are only comparable to a limited extent, because the applied classifications might differ.

Furthermore, it has to be taken into consideration that the majority of data is based on estimations by the pilgrimage experts. In addition, it was gathered using different means of measurement. In consideration of all methods applied so far, the allocation of considerable amounts of human resources seems to be inevitable in order to receive reliable data. Only in direct contact with the visitors of the Austrian pilgrimage routes, it would be possible to distinguish between the various groups of people.

Moreover, if information about the usage level and nationality of pilgrimage routes is available, it tends to be quite fragmented among the various regions, tourism associations and interest groups in Austria. Acquainted with the fact that the scope of action of the pilgrimage experts is restrained to the section of a pilgrimage route they are in charge of, it is not surprising that the interest on a general elicitation seems to be rather limited. However, information exchange within the Austrian pilgrimage community seems to work well and cooperation is initiated if essentially indicated.

Pilgrimage tourism is a niche product in Austria, however, it can constitute an essential economic impact in some regions. The Way of St. James Weinviertel demonstrates how the success of a pilgrimage routes does not only depend on the route itself, but also on the effort made with it. However, it also exposes the hurdles pilgrimage tourism has to face: Due to its perception as a niche product, high spending on measuring usage levels or its development in general does not seem to be justified. However, if it never receives the chance of being properly promoted, it might never change to anything else than a niche product.

At the same time, the question arises to which extent a pilgrimage route should actually be promoted. On the one side, it inheres in pilgrimage that it is non-touristic. On the other side, it is doubtful whether this needs to preclude a comprehensive quantitative coverage. The customers, in this case the pilgrims, are as different as the theoretical concepts that are written about them. Some may favour the designing

of a well-conceived customer journey during their pilgrimage, others may avoid anything that seems to be prepared for them in any form. All in all, the crucial characteristic of pilgrimage seems to lie in the co-existence of concepts, attitudes and expectations along the way. It might be exactly this vagueness which constitutes the unique charm of this very special mode of travelling and which is consistently displayed in the data gathering process.

## **4 Key Elements of the Pilgrimage Experience in Mariazell**

For the purpose of gathering qualitative data regarding the key elements that constitute the experience of a pilgrimage to Mariazell, in-depth interviews are chosen as research method. After the analysis of the existing literature and the derivation of the research problem, an interview guideline was developed based on the respective research question. The respondents of these interviews are pilgrims who have made a pilgrimage to Mariazell by foot recently and are willing to share their experience with the researcher. In total, seven in-depth interviews were conducted in the timeframe of one week. The respondents recruited for these expert interviews were pilgrims directly or indirectly related to the researcher's hometown or the researcher's educational environment.

In consideration of maximum variation, it was intended to compile a sample with balanced characteristics in terms of age, gender and chosen pilgrimage route. However, certain inequalities could not be avoided, as the table of respondents listed below displays. Furthermore it has to be mentioned that all of the experts recruited for the interviews are Catholics, a fact whose influence on the overall pilgrimage experience is not investigated in the frame of his paper. Before the interview, the participants consented to the record of the conversation and the usage of information in the frame of this Bachelor Paper. The interviews lasted between 15 and 35 minutes and were conducted following a semi-structured interview guideline. This guideline contained some introductory questions with the aim of familiarising the respondents with the interview situation, finding into the topic and providing a general overview of the pilgrimage. All of the interviews were conducted in German, the mother tongue of the pilgrims, in order to ensure that they could fully express their thoughts regardless of potential language barriers. As a result, a potential influence of translation bias cannot be fully excluded.

Table 2: Expert Interviews on the Pilgrimage Experience in Mariazell

| <b>Code</b>          | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age Group</b> | <b>Starting Point</b>   | <b>Length of Interview</b> | <b>Type of Interview</b> | <b>Location of Interview</b> |
|----------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Interviewee 1</b> | Female        | 21-25            | Lilienfeld              | 15 minutes                 | Face to face             | Participant's home           |
| <b>Interviewee 2</b> | Female        | 25-35            | Krems-Land              | 35 minutes                 | Face to face             | café                         |
| <b>Interviewee 3</b> | Male          | 21-25            | Neunkirchen             | 15 minutes                 | Face to face             | Participant's home           |
| <b>Interviewee 4</b> | Female        | 56-60            | Neunkirchen             | 25 minutes                 | Face to face             | Re-searcher's home           |
| <b>Interviewee 5</b> | Female        | 61-65            | Neunkirchen             | 15 minutes                 | Face to face             | Re-searcher's home           |
| <b>Interviewee 6</b> | Female        | 51-55            | Neunkirchen             | 20 minutes                 | Face to face             | Participant's home           |
| <b>Interviewee 7</b> | Female        | 51-55            | Neunkirchen, Eisenstadt | 15 minutes                 | Face to face             | Participant's home           |

Source: by the author

## 4.1 Data Analysis and Findings

After conducting the interviews, all conversations were transcribed and coded by the author. In course of this analysis, it was distinguished between deductive codes issued by the interviewer and inductive codes emerged during the interviews. Next, these codes were linked to broader categories and organised with the help of a coding tree. In this chapter, the findings obtained during the expert interviews are presented and compared with the existing literature on the topic.

In order to have a comprehensive understanding of an experience, it is necessary to consider the entire customer journey, starting with the customer's expectations beforehand until its final assessment afterwards (Berry et al., 2002, p. 1). In line with this, a pilgrimage in particular can be divided into a pre-process, main process and post-process (Padin et al., 2016, p. 79). However, the analysis of all of these parts

would have gone beyond the scope of this paper. It was, therefore, decided to focus on the main process of the pilgrimage. For reasons of clarity, the findings are divided into three aspects, namely the experiences on the way to Mariazell, the experiences in Mariazell as destination of pilgrimage and the image of Mariazell in general, regardless of the concrete pilgrimage.

#### **4.1.1 Experiences on the Way to Mariazell**

By examining 63 travel diaries of Italian pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela, Lopez (2013, pp. 4,6) found out that the most relevant emotion on the journey is solidarity. The enormous significance has also been confirmed by the expert interviews conducted for this paper: All of the interviewees emphasized the importance of being on the way with other pilgrims. As one of the respondents explains, the great amount of time spent together while walking, eating and even sleeping together in shared accommodations for several days enables the pilgrims to build up a relationship with each other quite easily (Interviewee 4, 2016). Another pilgrim points out that in her experience, pilgrimages are especially suitable for serious conversations about topics that one would probably not discuss about in everyday life (Interviewee 7, 2016). Plus, these relationships are by far not limited to the duration of the pilgrimage. One interviewee narrates that her group of pilgrims has met again months after the pilgrimage and still felt bonded to each other, because they share very special memories with each other (Interviewee 2, 2016). However, the feeling of solidarity can be so important and crucial for the entire pilgrimage experience that a disharmony in the group might lead to feelings of discomfort and disappointment: One pilgrim (Interviewee 4, 2016) tells that she used to enjoy the pilgrimages for many years, but now she has the feeling that the other pilgrims rush her on the way and that the time for conversations is missing. As a consequence, she decided not to participate in pilgrimages to Mariazell anymore.

The in-depth interviews, furthermore, revealed the importance of nature on the experience. All of the interviewees mention that being outside is a main asset of pil-

grimage and generally has a positive effect on the overall experience. Some interviewees explicitly point out that this makes them aware of God's creation and that they enjoy an experience of gratefulness in this moment (Interviewee 2, 2016; Interviewee 7, 2016). One pilgrim repeatedly associates the weather conditions along the way with religious meanings (Interviewee 2, 2016). Statements of this kind are illustrative examples which strengthen the concept of place introduced by Belhassen et al. (2008, p. 673): In a pilgrimage, the physical environment is essential for the trip as it is a legitimization of the experience. However, its true significance can only be revealed if the social meaning and the human experience of the place are also taken into consideration. Only if all three aspects are combined, a pilgrimage can be perceived as an authentic experience. The theoretical construct of Belhassen et al. (2008, p. 673) can also be applied to the analysis of meaning the Alps have for the interviewed pilgrims. One interviewee (Interviewee 2, 2016) for example perceives the mountains as an especially quaint landscape that differs from the one of her home town.

Moreover, the perception of nature tends to be strongly linked with the weather during the journey. Ongoing bad weather can even cause the pilgrims to abort their endeavour (Interviewee 6, 2016). One pilgrim (Interviewee 4, 2016) underlines the enormous effect bad weather can potentially have on the travellers: "Once we had wild hail, I never experienced anything like that before, it was like the end of the world. [...] I never had so much fear in my life. Well, because you really are in nature, you cannot do anything, you don't have any protection."

Closely linked to the topic of nature are feelings of silence and peacefulness. Walking a long period of time in nature has a calming effect (Interviewee 5, 2016) and enables the pilgrims to feel inside, which has the same effect as meditation, yoga or similar techniques (Interviewee 2, 2016). One interviewee (Interviewee 6, 2016) traces the pilgrimage trend back to the increasing need of people to slow down again. Another pilgrim (Interviewee 3, 2016) illustrates the decelerating effect of pilgrimage in the following way: "Because in modern times one is too much clinged to

television, mobile phones and so on. And when you go to Mariazell, then it is just turned off and you just walk.” However, the same respondent also points out to be afraid of turning on the mobile phone again after the return home, in fear of having received dozens of messages in the meanwhile. This aspect of pilgrimage can be rediscovered in topic-specific literature, stating that this form of travelling requires a certain degree of disconnection from daily life (Padin et al., 2016, p. 78). To put it in other words, pilgrimage means travelling at a slow pace exempt from everyday obligations (Olsen, 2013, p. 52). It enables the travellers to leave the daily grind behind (Interviewee 7, 2016) and to do something extraordinary (Interviewee 6, 2016).

The accompanying symptoms of the physical exercise of pilgrimage, like fatigue, blisters or joint pain, also appear as a common theme among the travellers interviewed for this paper. However, they did not spoil the overall experience of any of the participants, but are retrospectively taken with a sense of humour. Nevertheless, some pilgrims emphasized the importance of physical exercise before the trip (Interviewee 2, 2016; Interviewee 6, 2016). One respondent raised the issue that the physical effort is an inherent part of pilgrimage as it means to make sacrifices for a reason (Interviewee 7, 2016). Fatigue is also the key feature Lopez (2013, p. 5) reports in her study on the travel diaries of Italian pilgrims.

In his research, Olsen (2013, p. 41) compared the expectations and motivations of religious tourists at three types of tourist attractions, being points like cathedrals in the United Kingdom, areas like the Holy Land and lines like the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. He concluded that religious tourists along a line would put more emphasis on the way than the end point itself and even religious monuments would only be considered as part of a religious landscape they have to pass (ibid, p. 52). Padin et al. (2016, p. 83) derive at the same conclusion that the essence of pilgrimage tourism is the journey and not the site. However, this impression could not be confirmed with the conducted in-depth interviews. Quite the opposite, the emotion of reaching the final destination constituted an important aspect of the overall pil-



grimage experience to Mariazell. One interviewee (Interviewee 2, 2016) finds figurative words in this context: "And then it was somehow very special, the path to the Basilika. [...] Somehow, everyone was already so fixated on it, you kind of go 10 centimetres above the ground, you are swinging in because you see: I have reached the destination." Having accomplished the pilgrimage awards the pilgrims with pride combined with the feeling of being rewarded for the pain they have endured during the last days. One pilgrim (Interviewee 5, 2016) admits that she has often asked herself during the walk why she does that to herself. However, the feeling of having reached the destination makes her so happy that she always decides to participate again. One interviewee (Interviewee 7, 2016) regards the journey as preparation phase for Mariazell and adds for consideration that visitors coming by car and without preparation might not be able to fully comprehend the happenings at the destination. Another pilgrim repetitively emphasizes that a pilgrimage without reaching the destination is no pilgrimage to her (Interviewee 4, 2016).

#### **4.1.2 Experiences in Mariazell**

When the interviewees of this research are asked to describe the key aspects of Mariazell, all of them name the Basilika as main feature of Mariazell (2016). The majority of the respondents reports to celebrate the Holy Mass there right after the arrival (Interviewee 1, 2016; Interviewee 4, 2016; Interviewee 5, 2016; Interviewee 6, 2016; Interviewee 7, 2016). In their research about religious sites in Europe, Nolan and Nolan (1992, p. 69) propose to distinguish between three different categories of religious sites: Pilgrimage shrines, religious tourist attractions and festivals with religious associations. The Basilika in Mariazell can be categorised as a pilgrimage shrine (ibid., p. 71), as it serves as a goal for religious journeys, but also attracts tourists due to its historical and artistic significance. Religious sites of this kind are at risk of provoking conflicts between pilgrims and tourists (Rotherham, 2007, p. 69). This can be avoided by using a sophisticated visitor management that might include to create a spatial segregation between these two groups (Nolan & Nolan, 1992, p. 73). This system has also been applied to the Basilika in Mariazell and is met with a positive response: One pilgrim (Interviewee 6) states that this separation allows the believers to celebrate the Holy Mass in a quiet ambience. She

generally notes that in twenty years of pilgrimage to Mariazell, the Basilika was hidden behind a scaffold for at least fifteen of them; finally admiring the building after restauration was a special experience for her.

Religiosity is not limited to thoughts, emotions and beliefs in one's head, but also encompasses certain practices and rituals that are attributed with certain meanings (Margry, 2008a, p. 32). Thus, pilgrimage as a form of religiosity is also shaped by the accomplishment of certain activities. Examples for this mentioned by the pilgrims are praying on the way (Interviewee 1, 2016), performing an ablution with healing waters (Interviewee 2, 2016) and lighting a candle in the Kerzengrotte next to the Basilika (Interviewee 3, 2016; Interviewee 5, 2016; Interviewee 6, 2016). One pilgrim remarks that for her it is the rituals that make the difference to a normal hiking tour (Interviewee 1, 2016).

The experience of the Basilika is closely linked to the nearby stalls that sell religious items and souvenirs. Wandering through the stalls and having a look at the offer is mentioned as a main activity during the stay in Mariazell (Interviewee 1, 2016; Interviewee 3, 2016; Interviewee 4, 2016; Interviewee 5, 2016; Interviewee 6, 2016), whereas it is interesting to note that no one of these pilgrims makes a mention of an actual purchase. However, the degree of commercialization, which might inevitably emerge due to high amounts of visitors, also leads to potential conflicts with visitor expectations (Nolan & Nolan, 1992, p. 71). This topic is also raised by one of the pilgrims (Interviewee 2, 2016) interviewed for this paper, as she perceives that the touristic offer at Mariazell exceeds an acceptable level and distracts from the proper sense of pilgrimage. Especially the stalls within the Basilika bothered her during her stay, although she concedes that others might not feel the same way.

The touristic offer regarding food and accommodation was less often mentioned by the participants. For the majority, a farewell dinner together with the group of pil-

grims is regarded as a key aspect of their experience (Interviewee 1, 2016; Interviewee 2, 2016; Interviewee 5, 2016; Interviewee 6, 2016; Interviewee 7, 2016). This activity functions to talk about the journey (Interviewee 1, 2016) and process the impressions of the previous days (Interviewee 7, 2016). In contrast to the others, one respondent (Interviewee 7, 2016) reports to have stayed in Mariazell for the night. In her opinion, the additional day enables her to mentally arrive in Mariazell and digest the happenings.

#### **4.1.3 Image of Mariazell**

In the course of conducting the interviews, certain descriptions of the destination Mariazell have repeatedly been named: It is perceived as a power place (Interviewee 2, 2016; Interviewee 4, 2016) and place of mercy (Interviewee 6, 2016; Interviewee 7, 2016). For believers, it represents a mundane place where they can go to receive help (Interviewee 2, 2016); a place of homecoming to the Holy Mother (Interviewee 7, 2016).

Another interesting aspect represents the frequency that the respondents spontaneously described Mariazell as a place they strongly connect with their families and childhood. One pilgrim ranks her family as one of the major aspects she associates with the pilgrimage to Mariazell (Interviewee 1, 2016). For two other interviewees, the pilgrimage experience is strongly shaped by the high significance the destination had respectively has for their mothers, although both cannot take the same pleasure in Mariazell (Interviewee 2, 2016; Interviewee 4, 2016). Another pilgrim has been there with her family for many times and remembers with joy that they once had their car blest in Mariazell (Interviewee 6, 2016).

### **4.2 Evaluation of Key Elements of the Pilgrimage Experience in Mariazell**

The third research question of this paper aimed to determine the key aspects that contribute to the pilgrimage experience in Mariazell. After having conducted and

analysed seven in-depth interviews, the topics elaborated on in the previous chapter can be presented as being essential parts of it. It is crucial to note that both the journey to the destination and the destination itself are important parts of the pilgrimage; hence, it is neither possible nor reasonable to separately analyse one without the other. For the purpose of presenting the findings of the research, it nevertheless appears to be suitable to divide the chapter into three parts, the experiences on the way to Mariazell, the experiences at the destination itself and the general image of Mariazell.

Regarding the way to Mariazell, feelings of solidarity among the group of pilgrims are dominant parts of the experience. All of the interviewees reported this aspect as a main benefit of pilgrimage and enjoy the intensive time spent with like-minded persons. The conversations and the common activities along the way facilitate the emergence of relationships which often persist beyond the pilgrimage. Moreover, spending time in nature is also mentioned as a positive aspect of the experience. The effect it has on the pilgrims in combination with walking is described as calming and may lead to a state of mind similar to meditation. Closely linked with the topic of nature are weather conditions during the journey which can be subject to religious or personal interpretations with special meaning to the pilgrims. However, due to lack of protection against bad weather along the way, it might also cause severe feelings of fear. Silence and peacefulness are further characteristics the pilgrimage to Mariazell is commonly described as and might contribute to its increasing popularity in the future. The accompanying symptoms of physical exercise are accepted as inherent parts of the pilgrimage to Mariazell. Hence, the pilgrims retrospectively take the pain they suffered from with a sense of humour. For the interviewees, reaching the destination constitutes a major aspect of the pilgrimage which could otherwise not be viewed as complete.

In Mariazell, visiting the Basilika represents the one activity that unifies all pilgrimage experiences reported in this paper. Further impressions were created by the stalls selling souvenirs and religious items nearby. These sales points are not exclusively

seen as positive; the controversial issue to which degree commercialization is acceptable at a religious site is raised by one interviewee. Besides, the conduction of religious practices and rituals embodies another key element of the pilgrimage experience. A farewell dinner is most often seen as the last activity together with the group of pilgrims. Except of one respondent, all interviewees report not to stay in Mariazell for the night but return home on the same day.

Although not addressed in the interview guideline in any way, many of the interviewees spontaneously describe Mariazell as a destination they strongly connect with their families. It might be a destination of special importance to a close relative of the pilgrims or of experiences made during childhood. Furthermore, Mariazell is often referred to as a power place or place of mercy and seen as a place believers can go to if they have worries.

## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Pilgrimage is said to be one of the best known phenomena of humanity (Collins-Kreiner, 2009); however, after having concentrated on the topic for several months, this statement seems to be hardly valid. Due to its ever-changing nature, high complexity and its receptiveness to external influences, researchers are continuously urged to shed light on this topic anew. The in-depth interviews conducted with pilgrimage experts have unveiled certain issues which only as a superficial result influence the quantity and nationality of pilgrims in Austria.

Because of its inherent characteristics, pilgrimage can be regarded as a rather fragile form of travelling and is, hence, also exposed to global incidents. According to Roland Führer (2016), the increased feeling of insecurity might have a negative influence on the amount of pilgrims in Austria and especially of those coming from Eastern Europe. However, also the opposite might be the case: Precisely because of these emotions, people might prefer tourism aside from urban sprawls and in close proximity to their homes. Together with the rising need of deceleration and the quest for meaning in life, pilgrimage might experience a significant boom in future years.

At the moment, a sophisticated data acquisition of pilgrims on Austrian pilgrimage routes might not be indicated yet, as the rather small amount of visitors is still easy to grasp. However, given the considerable probability that this or similar forms of travelling will increase in importance, a clear counting system might be inevitable in the future. Assuming that the forecasts are correct, the demand for accommodation could reach a critical level that would justify the construction of special pilgrim hostels accompanied by the introduction of obligatory pilgrim's passes. In this case, a development similar to the one already existing along the Spanish Way of St. James could be likely also in Austria and would deliver similarly reliable data on the amount and nationality of pilgrims. On the other hand, technological improvements might

alter the system in a way that the precise acquisition of pilgrim-related information is done automatically by the usage of certain hardware or software.

In general, the low demand for data tends to constitute the main obstacle in behalf of data gathering. However, it seems likely that the demand for data will increase proportionally to the popularity of pilgrimage over time. If the same research questions are raised in a couple of years again, it is believed that more precise information will already be available.

Cooperation represents the key to a harmonious maintenance of the pilgrimage routes. Only if resources are bundled, data acquisition will be possible in a both efficient and effective way. This not only holds true for partnerships between the touristic and clerical side, which seems to already work well in certain regions of Austria, but also among different tourism regions in Austria. As pilgrimage routes often stretch over several regions and provinces, cooperation is especially indicated. Therefore, the pilgrimage experts should take the challenge to create a network of solidarity that serves as role model for the tourism system in Austria.

At its core the third research question sought to reveal the key aspects of the pilgrimage experience to Mariazell. Already during the preliminary stages of literature review, it became clear that the experience of Mariazell is neither limited to the destination itself nor does it solely encompass the journey. On the contrary, it differs from individual to individual and is influenced by social and familiar backgrounds and previous experiences. The hypothesis is underlined by the fact that many interviewees spontaneously made remarks on how Mariazell has accompanied them since their childhood. Hence, it can be assumed that their pilgrimage is still strongly shaped by memories from often a long time ago.

It might be argued that all pilgrims have lived in rather close proximity to Mariazell, which could have increased the probability of previous familiar experiences. Hence, pilgrims walking from other locations might not share the same experiences. However, as the choice of pilgrimage destinations is in most cases limited by the physical abilities of the participants and the majority of pilgrims in Mariazell naturally descend from nearby villages, the results of this paper are believed to have their legitimacy and might be generalised for the pilgrimage experience in Mariazell. As the limited choice of destinations due to the need of walking there also holds true for other pilgrimage paths in Austria, it might be derived that the pilgrimage experiences at other religious sites in Austria are also strongly shaped by the pilgrims' childhood.

The level to which Mariazell uses its commercial potential at the moment has led to discrepancies among the interviewees. The way the stalls next to the church are experienced by the pilgrims demonstrate how differently Mariazell can be perceived: While some of the respondents cannot imagine the one without the other and accept or even welcome the touristic offer, it might irritate others at the same time. It seems to exist a very thin line regarding the acceptable degree of touristic offer on site; hence, the destination managers should continuously be encouraged to keep the religious and touristic aspects balanced.

Aside from that, the qualitative research highlighted the outstanding position Mariazell seems to have in the Austrian pilgrimage landscape. The destination is referred to as "place of mercy" or "power place" and consequently evokes certain expectations. The enablement of certain practices and religious rituals like the lighting of candles, thus, is an essential task the destination managers have to accomplish. Furthermore, the descriptions mentioned above might give valuable clues for the formulation of the underlying motif, which would represent the next step towards a professionalised experience design on site.



From an economical point of view, the circumstance that an overnight stay in Mariazell is not part of the common pilgrimage experience might cause difficulties in terms of revenue. Apart from one interviewee, all participants report to stay in Mariazell only for a few hours and return home on the same day. In these cases, revenues are mainly generated with culinary offers and souvenirs, but not with accommodation. As a consequence, it might be difficult as a destination manager to argue for common expenditures on touristic infrastructure in Mariazell and along the ways, if most of the tourism partners located at the destination do not benefit in any way from the visitors. Therefore, it might be necessary to analyse the current clues that constitute the pilgrimage experience and to attune the current accommodation offers with them.

## **5.1 Limitations of Research**

Adapting a qualitative research approach implies that the findings of the research strongly depend on the participants selected for it. Hence, the selection of the participants for both sets of conducted expert interviews propose certain limitations to the results presented. The information on usage levels and nationality of pilgrimage routes can be described as rather fragmented in Austria. As a consequence, pilgrimage experts from other regions of Austria might have also had information on these research questions available; the list of potential candidates could have been perpetuated as often as desired. However, it is believed that the diligent selection of these seven experts already constitutes a representative sample on Austria's pilgrimage experts.

In terms of the second set of expert interviews conducted with participants who have done a pilgrimage to Mariazell, the majority of interviewees were female and older than 35 years which might have an influence on their experiences. Furthermore, the main proportion chose a starting point in the district of Neunkirchen which might also limit the ability to generalise the findings. Although the sample size of seven participants is big enough to draw first comparisons, more interviews would be needed to verify them.

## 5.2 Further Research

As previously mentioned, the topic of pilgrimage offers various possibilities of further research due to its ever-changing nature and complexity. With regards to the research questions focussed on in this Bachelor Paper, the following subchapter presents issues which are particularly worth of further investigation.

The first set of expert interviews has shown that several methods of acquiring data on the usage level and nationality of pilgrimage routes exist. Most of them have already been in use, but some might still lack a proper implementation and evaluation. For example, the introduction of stamps with counting features in a co-operation with Weinviertel Tourismus would constitute an interesting topic of further research which is also of interest to the tourism branch. Further studies could also concentrate on Mariazell as Austria's most renowned pilgrimage site. The fact that in this case a clearly defined final destination is given enables the usage of a broader range of means in order to measure the visitor numbers at this important site.

In terms of nationality, the pilgrimage experts mentioned the rising importance of the Central Eastern European countries on Austrian pilgrimage routes. It would, therefore, be interesting to investigate this issue with a comprehensive target group analysis as well as potential analysis and to elaborate a promising tourism strategy to address and satisfy these customers on the Austrian pilgrimage market. The broad topic on the effects of global crises on the pilgrimage market also constitute countless possibilities to further engage oneself in the topic.

In order to base the results of the third research question on a more solid ground, additional interviews could be conducted. While the interviews used for this paper illustrate how pilgrims perceive the experience in Mariazell in retrospective, it might be interesting to investigate the perceptions and feelings on site. In comparison, the research findings might give some indications of how the experience changes over

time. In terms of experience design, in-depth interviews only represent the initial steps towards a sophisticated management. The next step would constitute the observation of pilgrims along the way and in Mariazell. Based on these findings and the key elements already elaborated with the expert interviews, the destination management organisation would then be able to develop a common experience motif which would function as a guideline for the introduction of harmonious clues.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that associations with familiar experiences have an influence on the pilgrimage experience. Given the fact that religion has been a significant aspect of Austrian culture, these memories might have a greater impact on religious tourism than anticipated at the moment. Further research could occupy itself with the interrogation of how and to which degree the experiences of religious sites are influenced by the familiar background of pilgrims and tourists. Moreover, future papers could be concerned with the degree of commercialisation that is acceptable in Mariazell. In this context, it would be interesting to find out if differences in perceptions can be linked with certain demographic characteristics or external factors.

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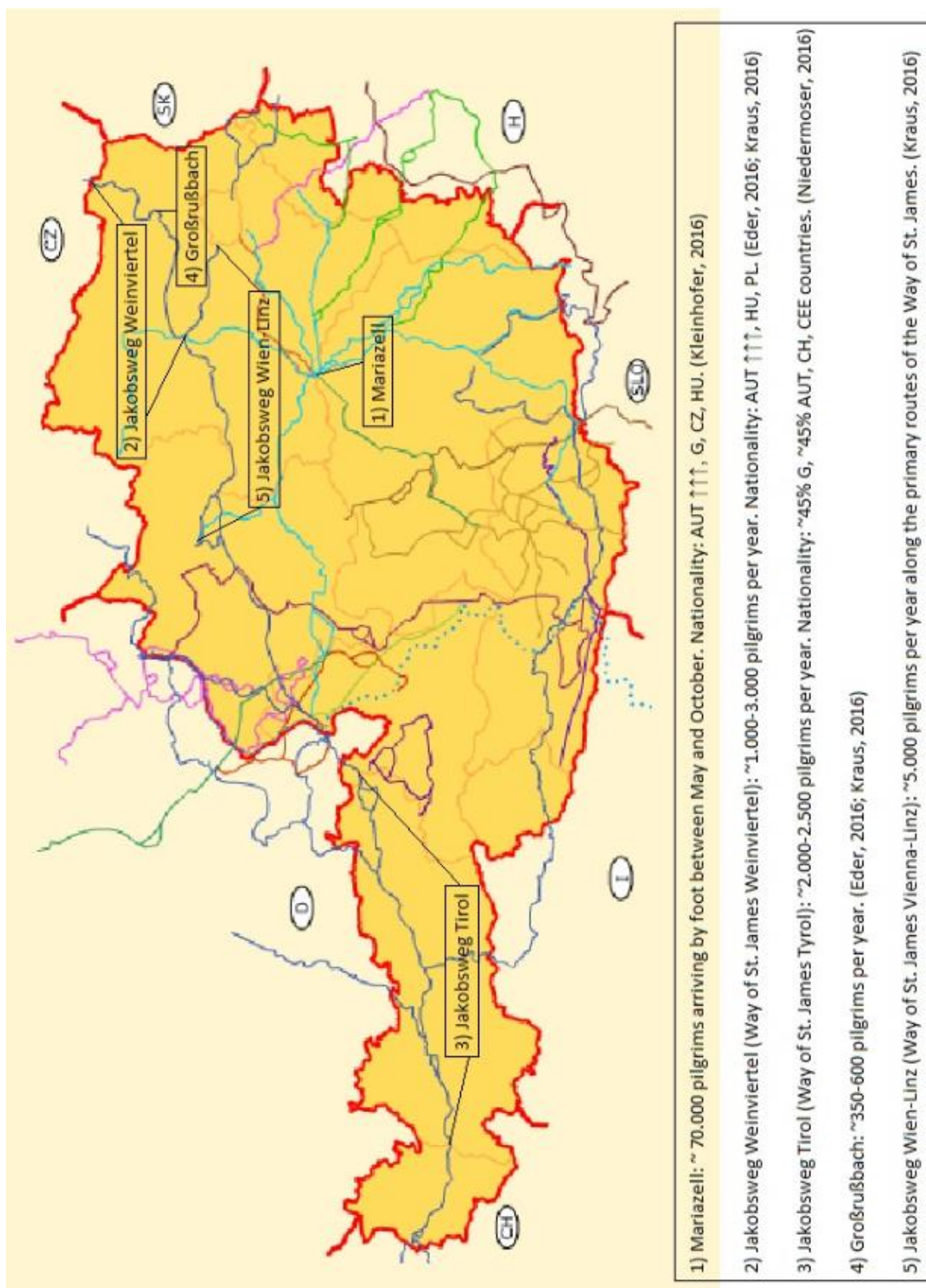
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## Annex

### Map of Pilgrimage Routes in Austria



## **Interview Guideline for Research Questions 1 and 2 (German)**

### Anzahl der Pilger auf österreichischen Pilgerwegen

1. Welche sind die am meisten genutzten Pilgerwege in den österreichischen Alpen?
2. Welche Aufzeichnungen über die Zahl der Pilger an den jeweiligen Pilgerwegen gibt es?
3. Welche Schwierigkeiten existieren bei der Erfassung der Pilgerzahlen?
4. Wie hat sich die Zahl der Pilger dieser Pilgerwege über die Jahre hinweg entwickelt?
5. Welche Entwicklung bezüglich der Zahl der Pilger dieser Pilgerwege erwarten Sie in den kommenden Jahren?

### Herkunft der Pilger auf österreichischen Pilgerwegen

1. Regional, national oder international genützte Pilgerwege in den österreichischen Alpen - Welche Aufzeichnungen über die Herkunft gibt es?
2. Welche Schwierigkeiten existieren bei der Erfassung der Herkunft der Pilger?
3. Wie hat sich die Herkunft der Pilger dieser Pilgerwege über die Jahre hinweg entwickelt?
4. Welche Entwicklung bezüglich der Herkunft der Pilger - regional, national, international- dieser Pilgerwege erwarten Sie in den kommenden Jahren?

## **Interview Guideline for Research Questions 1 and 2 (English)**

### Amount of pilgrims on Austrian pilgrimage routes

1. Which are the most used pilgrimage routes within the Austrian Alps?
2. Which records exist about the amount of pilgrims on the amount of pilgrims on the Austrian pilgrimage routes?
3. Which difficulties exist with the acquisition of pilgrimage numbers?
4. How has the amount of pilgrims on these pilgrimage routes developed over the years?



5. Which development regarding the amount of pilgrims do you expect in the upcoming years?

#### Nationality of pilgrims on Austrian pilgrimage routes

1. Regional, national or international used pilgrimage routes within the Austrian Alps – Which records about the nationality of pilgrims exist?
2. Which difficulties exist with the acquisition of pilgrimage nationalities?
3. How has the nationality of pilgrims on these pilgrimage routes developed over the years?
4. Which development regarding the nationality of pilgrims do you expect in the upcoming years?

### **Interview Guideline for Research Question 3 (German)**

#### Wesentliche Elemente der Pilgererfahrung in Mariazell

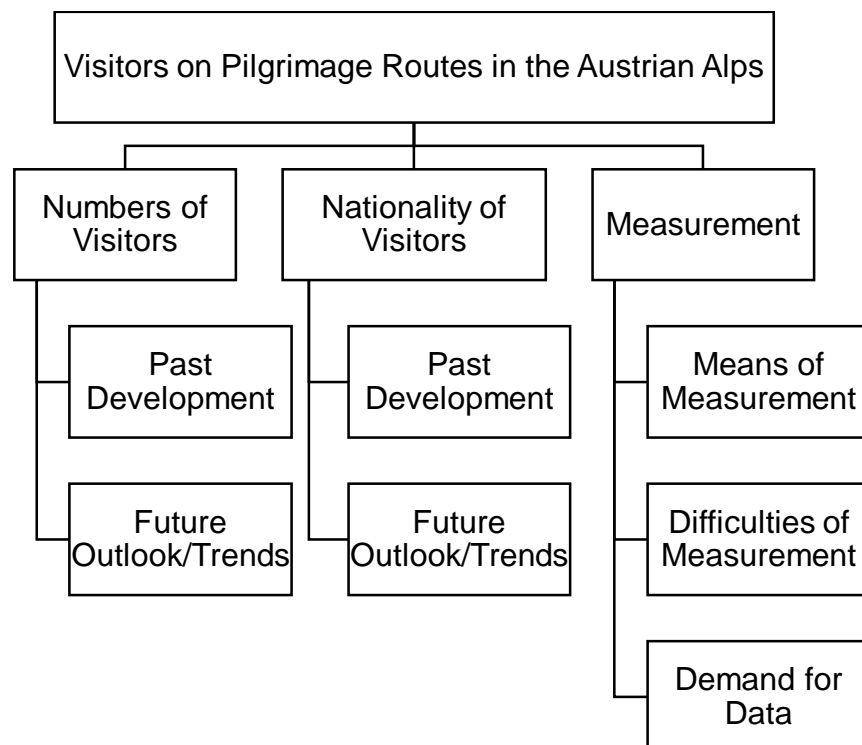
1. Allgemeine Fragen
  - a. Mit wem waren Sie unterwegs?
  - b. Wie waren Sie unterwegs (zu Fuß, mit dem Rad)?
  - c. Wie lange waren Sie unterwegs?
  - d. Wie lange waren Sie in Mariazell?
2. Bitte vervollständigen Sie den folgenden Satz: Die drei Dinge, die mir zuerst zu meiner Pilgerreise nach Mariazell einfallen, sind...
3. Bitte vervollständigen Sie den folgenden Satz: Die drei Dinge, die mir zuerst zu Mariazell einfallen, sind...
4. Nehmen wir an, Sie brechen nächste Woche noch einmal nach Mariazell auf, auf was freuen Sie sich am meisten?
5. Nehmen wir an, Sie brechen nächste Woche noch einmal nach Mariazell auf, auf was freuen Sie sich am wenigsten?

### **Interview Guideline for Research Question 3 (English)**

#### Key elements of the pilgrimage experience in Mariazell

1. General questions
  - a. With whom have you been on the way?
  - b. How have you been on the way (by foot, cycling)
  - c. How long have you been on the way?
  - d. How long have you been in Mariazell?
2. Please complete the following sentence: The three things that first come into my mind when thinking about my pilgrimage to Mariazell are...
3. Please complete the following sentence: The three things that first come into my mind when thinking about Mariazell are...
4. Let us assume you set out again to Mariazell next week, what are you looking forward to?
5. Let us assume you set out again to Mariazell next week, what is the least thing you are looking forward to?

### Coding Tree of Research Questions 1 and 2



**Coding Tree of Research Question 3**