

CBTS 2020

Between “untouched nature” and “mass tourism” - tourist perceptions of outdoor recreation pictures in South Tyrol

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Background of the Study

- Photographs are an essential tool in the creation and management of **destination image**. (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997)
- They create a strong **emotional response** (Björk, 2010)
- and the desire to **share the pictured experiences** in potential visitors. (Neumann, 2008)
- There is a strong relationship between the created imagery and **tourists' expectations**. (Urry, 1990; Garrod 2009)
- Many destinations **lack strategy** in the use of photographs. (Míguez-González & Huertas, 2015)

Research Questions

1. Which elements of outdoor recreation photographs in an Alpine tourism destination evoke strong **emotional responses**?
2. Do **sociodemographic factors** (nationality/gender) influence perception of photographs?
3. Which **expectations** towards the destination are expressed in the responses?

Explorative Study: Mixed approach (qual./quant)

- case study: South Tyrol
- data collection with online tool
- qualitative content analysis
- visualization of results

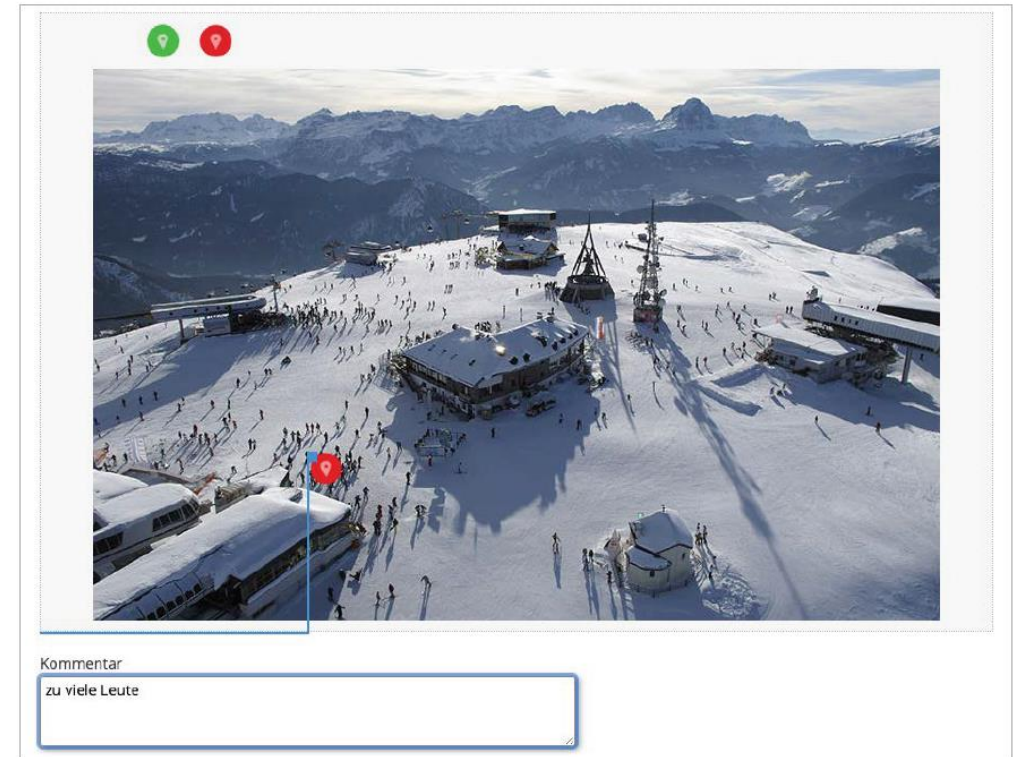
Sample: 154 participants from the two major source markets of South Tyrol, Germany and Italy

- active travelers (also to the Alps)
- visitors and non-visitors
- intention to visit South Tyrol

NOTE: This study was conducted before COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

- 10 photographs presenting outdoor activities in an Alpine environment
- Photographs contained **typical advertisement motives** (professional photography and image editing, staged situations), as well as **more realistic photos** (amateur snapshots of real situations).
- Respondents were asked to mark elements they perceive as positive and negative and to comment on them.



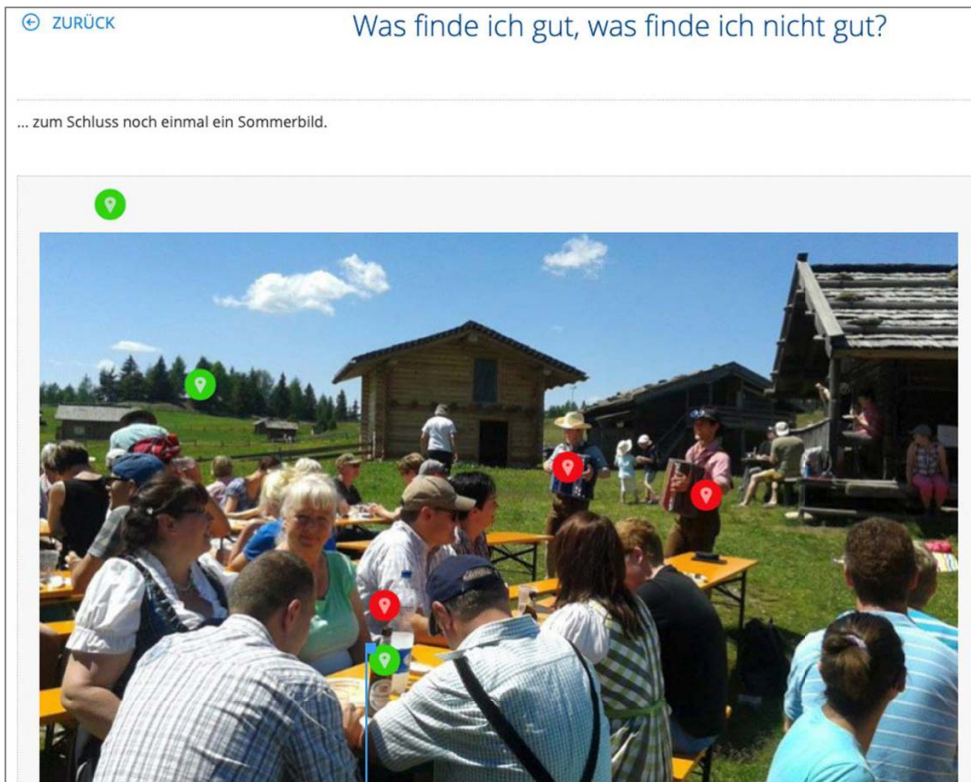
PROFILE_ID 16 Green pin: "Strutture all'avanguardia"
 Red pin: "Troppe persone"

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PROFILE_ID 15  Green pin: "Der Schnee"
                Green pin: "Die Aussicht"
                Red pin: "Die Masse an Menschen"
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Analysis

- Respondents had to **associate comments to a specific point** of the photograph (1).
- Using grids and coordinate systems we developed **"heat maps"** to **visually represent** the **accumulation of** positive and negative **comments** on each picture (2).
- Easily understandable representation of which elements are criticized, and which appreciated.

(1)

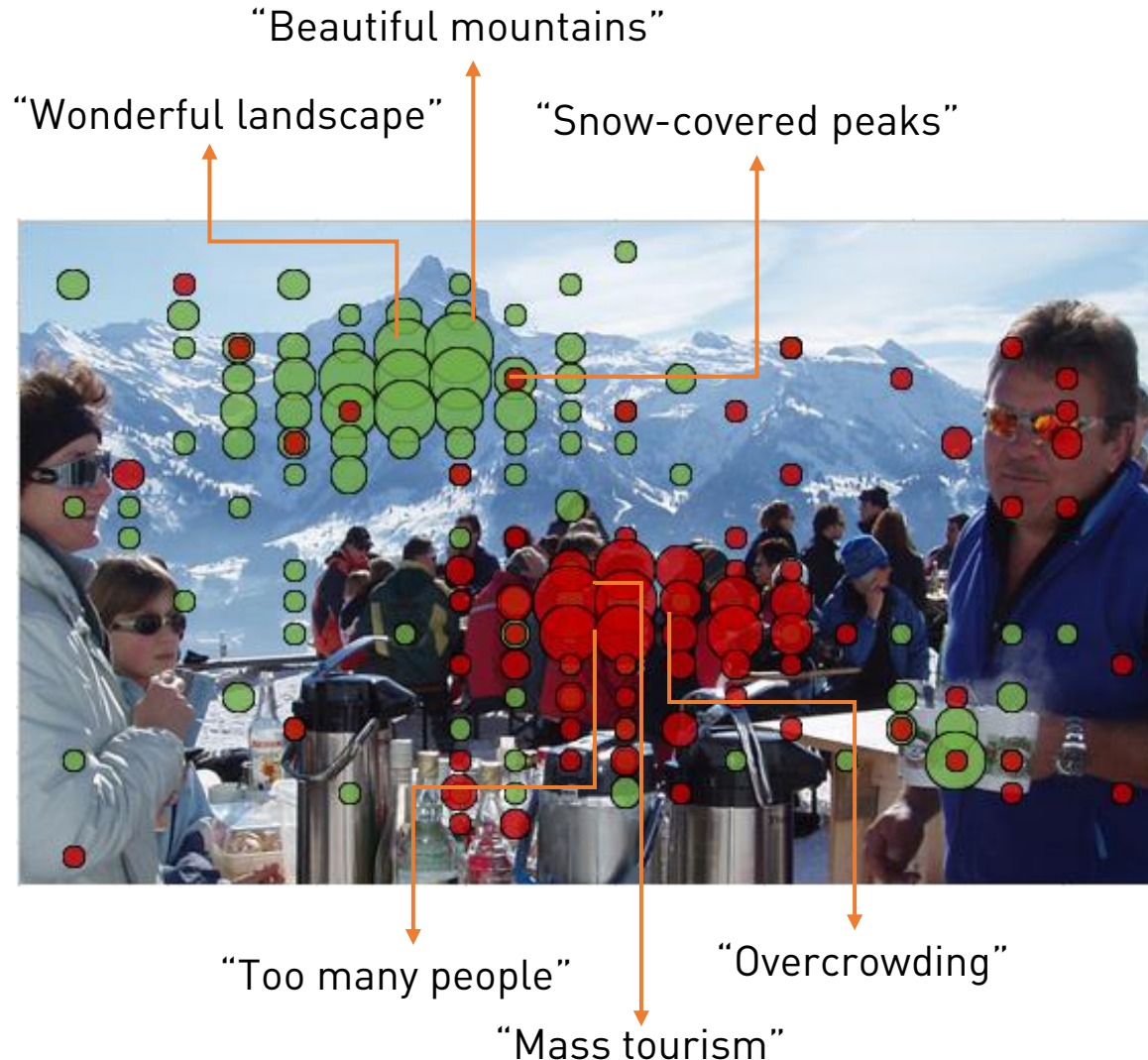


(2)



Results

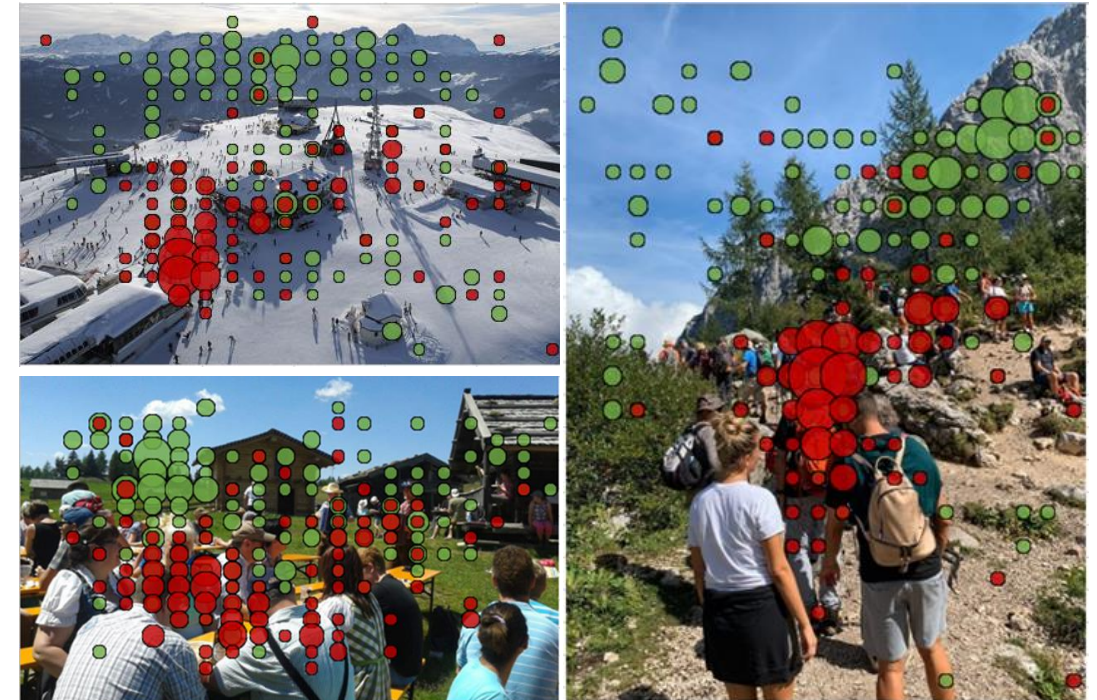
Which elements of photographs evoke strong emotional responses?



We found in **all pictures** showing a **group of people**:

✓ Positive: Nature

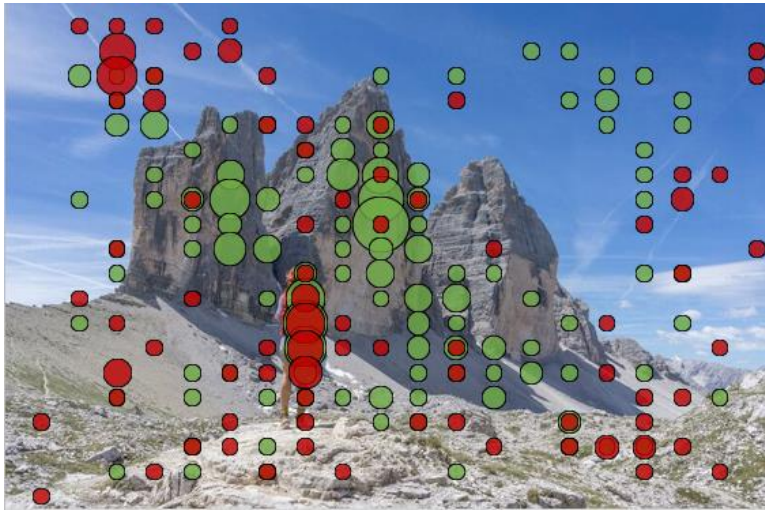
✗ Negative: Crowding



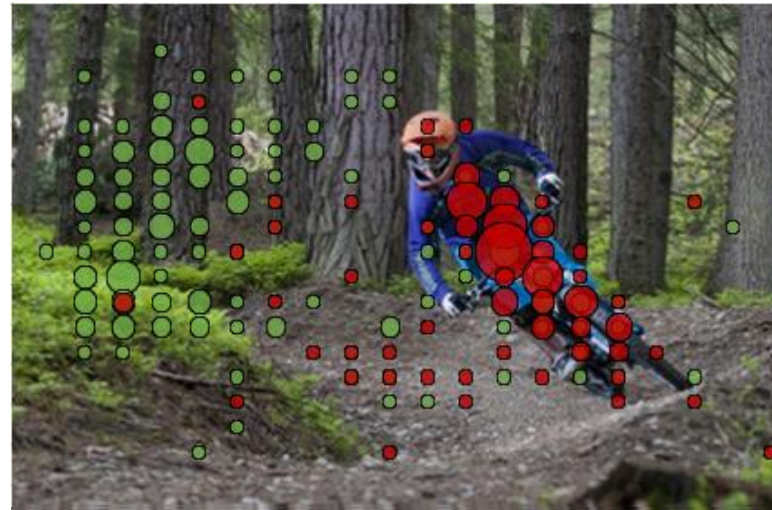
Results

Which elements of photographs evoke strong emotional responses?

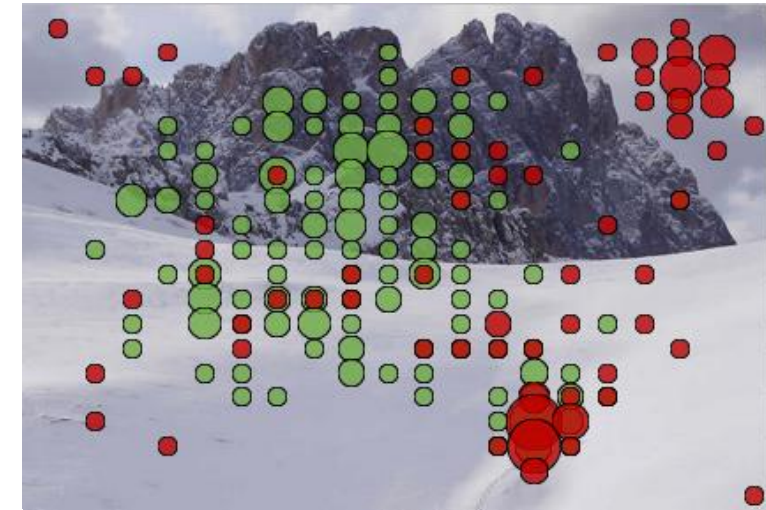
In pictures showing only one person, many red dots appear on the pictured person, but **for various reasons**.



- ✓ Mountains, View, Loneliness
- ✗ Potential risks/dangers
"One person too many"



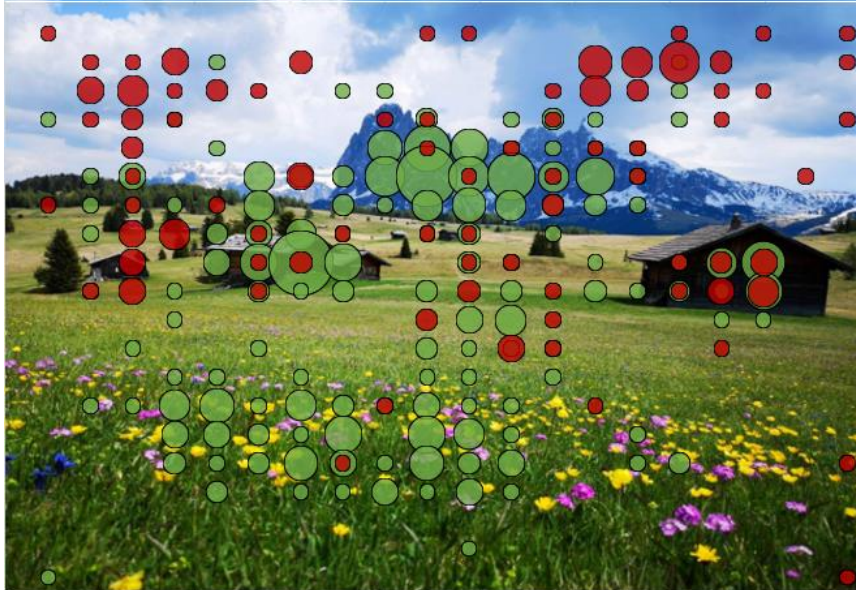
- ✓ Nature
- ✗ Potential risks/dangers
Environmental Impact



- ✓ Mountains, Snow
- ✗ Potential risks/dangers
Harsh landscape

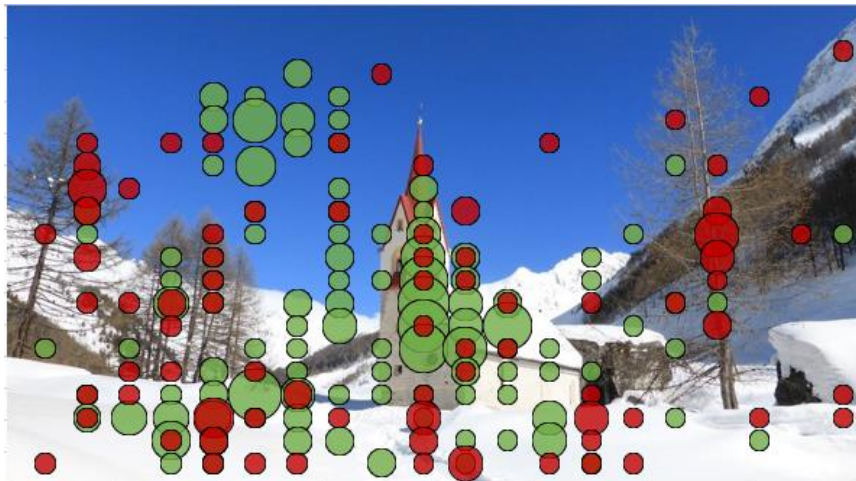
Results

Which elements of photographs evoke strong emotional responses?



In pictures showing **cultural landscapes with no people**, the negative comments focus on other elements:

- ✗ Negative: Unstable weather, huts
- ✓ Positive: “Untouched nature”, but it is a cultural landscape
- ? Mixed reactions and misconceptions
 - Negative comments appeared on the huts. A content analysis evokes misconceptions about the role of these buildings, often identified as “restaurants” and “chalet”. In few cases, “too many huts in the landscape”
 - Mowed meadow sometimes criticized
 - Only few people remarked the pictured scenario is “unrealistic”



- ✗ Negative: Leafless trees, accessibility issues
- ✓ Positive: Traditional church and snowy landscape

Results

Do sociodemographic factors influence perception of photographs?

Literature suggests that **differences** caused **by gender** and **cultural background** are to be expected in the perception of the landscape (Schirpke et al., 2019; Yang & Brown, 2016), and the perception of **crowding** (Stone & Nyaupane, 2019; Zehrer & Raich, 2016)



✗ We can **not confirm** differences caused by gender or culture, neither with this picture nor with the other included in the study.

Results

Which expectations towards the destination are expressed in the responses?

“The envisaged holiday then raises expectations (or expectational attitudes) of future satisfaction, both cognitively and emotionally” (Gnoth, 1997)

Participants mostly take a **personal perspective** in their comments, as if they were present in the pictured situation and comment mostly:

✓ Positively on staged pictures



„serenity!“
„unique experience“
„wonderful, alone in nature“
„all alone – just how I like it“
„peacefully enjoying nature“
„pure quietness and relaxation“
„alone in a great landscape“
„little tourism, almost by yourself“
„I like individual tourism“

✗ Critically on realistic pictures



„overcrowded ski lift“
„waiting in line for a long time“
„I dont want to vacation in a place where I have to fight through a crowd“
„too many people, crowded huts, stress?“
„its a horrifying thought to be here on holidays“
“too much infrastructure“

Expectations towards a holiday destination seem modeled after the staged imagery communicated through diverse sources (commercial, user-generated)

Results and Related questions

The results raise further questions and implications for destination marketers and researchers

Result	Questions/Implications
The threshold for perceived crowding in outdoor activity pictures is very low (compare Urry, 1992)	What does this mean for the marketing of destinations with outstanding natural attractions, which tend to be crowded?
Several picture elements (convivial groups, sports, specific infrastructure) have a polarizing effect: while they are appealing to few people (-> destination micro target group) they are seen negative by the majority of people (-> other destination target groups).	<p>Which factors determine if such pictures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have a negative effect on destination image - change destination preferences and choice at cognitive or affective level?
Pictures of a single person in a remote place generate positive emotional responses, but also doubts about accessibility and safety, or doubts about the veracity of the pictured situation.	
Staged pictures are mostly perceived positively, realistic pictures critically.	<p>How does this disparity in perception of “ideal” and “reality” influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the formation of destination image - tourist expectations - experiences and satisfaction during visitation?

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