



# Route development: Experience design on the move

*Final report of the project SilViAlp*



**Via Transalpina**  
supported by Via Alpina International Secretariat



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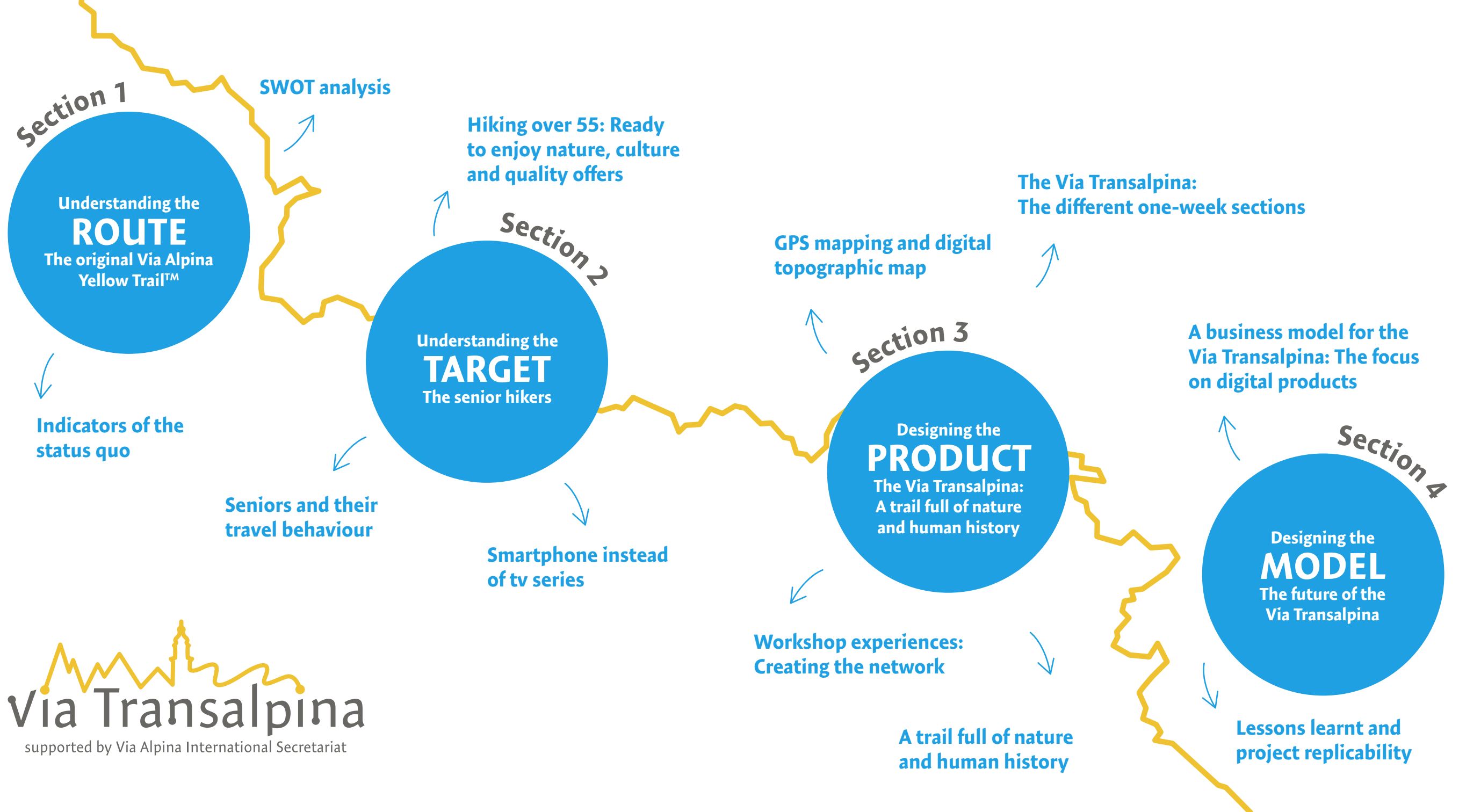
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# Introduction

The importance of long routes has been widely recognized at a global, European and national scale. The Global Report on Cultural Routes and Itineraries by the UNWTO underlines the growing trend of long distance trails and the need for cross-sectoral coordination to guarantee their protection and encourage their development. At EU level, several initiatives stress the importance of routes for the innovation and competitiveness of SMEs. Even at a national scale, the Italian Ministry for Tourism (Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo) has officially declared the year 2016 as the “Year of the Italian routes”. This increasing attention at the global, international and national scale creates new opportunities to reflect on the governance, management and marketing possibilities of long routes. It offers the chance to understand the complex business model behind a transnational route and to foster its success. Routes are lines, destinations are dots. There is a huge difference between managing dots and lines. The challenge with the management of routes is how to develop

attractive lines and how to benefit from good dots. Indeed, there is much more to a route than the sum of the destinations that it transverses. The experience of travelling across space and time is what makes the difference in a route. And the tourism attractiveness of the site is an additional value, next to the value of travelling for its own sake. Therefore, route management implies the capacity to create unique tourism experiences on the move, while mediating a dialogue with local attractions. Routes can be windows along which destinations are discovered, and destinations can be treasures that enhance the value of routes. Within this framework, the SilViAlp project on the valorisation, which means enhancement, promotion and added value, of the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ aims exactly at creating these cross-related values: value for tourism destinations that are crossed by the trail, value for the trail through unique destinations. Variety and richness in natural and cultural beauty are the strengths of the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, both along the route and in the connected destinations.

The trail crosses several epochs of human life in the Alps, from the prehistorical mummies of Ötzi and Mondeval, to the more recent medieval monasteries in Schnalstal/Val Senales or in the Province of Udine; from the histories of soldiers during World War I in the Dolomites, to the different UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The aim of the project is to make this outstanding value more accessible to potential hikers, with particular attention to digital technologies, as well as to create a network of interested Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that will work together for the future development of the trail. The project creates a tailor-made Via Transalpina on an existing Via Alpina route. This report is the result of 18 months of work on the Via Transalpina, which produced updated and precise GPS information, a website and a mobile App to increase the accessibility of the trail, a new brand name and logotype and a business model to set the strategic objectives to ensure the success of the trail in the future.

It is all about creating a network of good dots and good lines to design unique experiences with hikers.



**Harald Pechlaner** – Head of the Institute for Regional Development and Location Management of Eurac Research, Italy

Full professor of Tourism at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Eichstätt, Germany





## The original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™: A long history, a challenging future

The development of sustainable tourism activities respecting and promoting the natural and cultural characteristics of the Alpine area, the search for quality and innovation as well as the involvement of different sectors and stakeholders: these are some of the principles for the future of Alpine tourism laid down in the Alpine Convention. The Via Alpina – whose idea took shape 17 years ago and therefore has a long history – has always aimed at promoting these principles, offering a way to enjoy the cultural and natural beauty of the Alps by the most sustainable means of transportation available: walking.

The idea is not only relevant from a symbolic point of view, being meant to raise the awareness among hikers about the extent and diversity of the Alps, but also has a practical intent as a tourism instrument to help remote regions promote themselves on the international markets.

However, turning a year-long hike and its several sub-itineraries into a marketable tourism product is easier said than done. The project SilviAlp concretely addresses this challenge by linking the Via Alpina

spirit and approach with the needs of “silver age” visitors, a touristic target group that will gain increasing relevance in the future. Not only will they benefit from the results of the project, but also the Alpine population in general: here the increase in the number of active senior citizens is a fact, which policies and planning are already tackling, also in the tourism sector. Finally, SilviAlp can count on a transnational partnership and a practice-oriented approach; this will provide the perfect basis for the project results to be sustainable in the long run and to go many and many kilometres further.

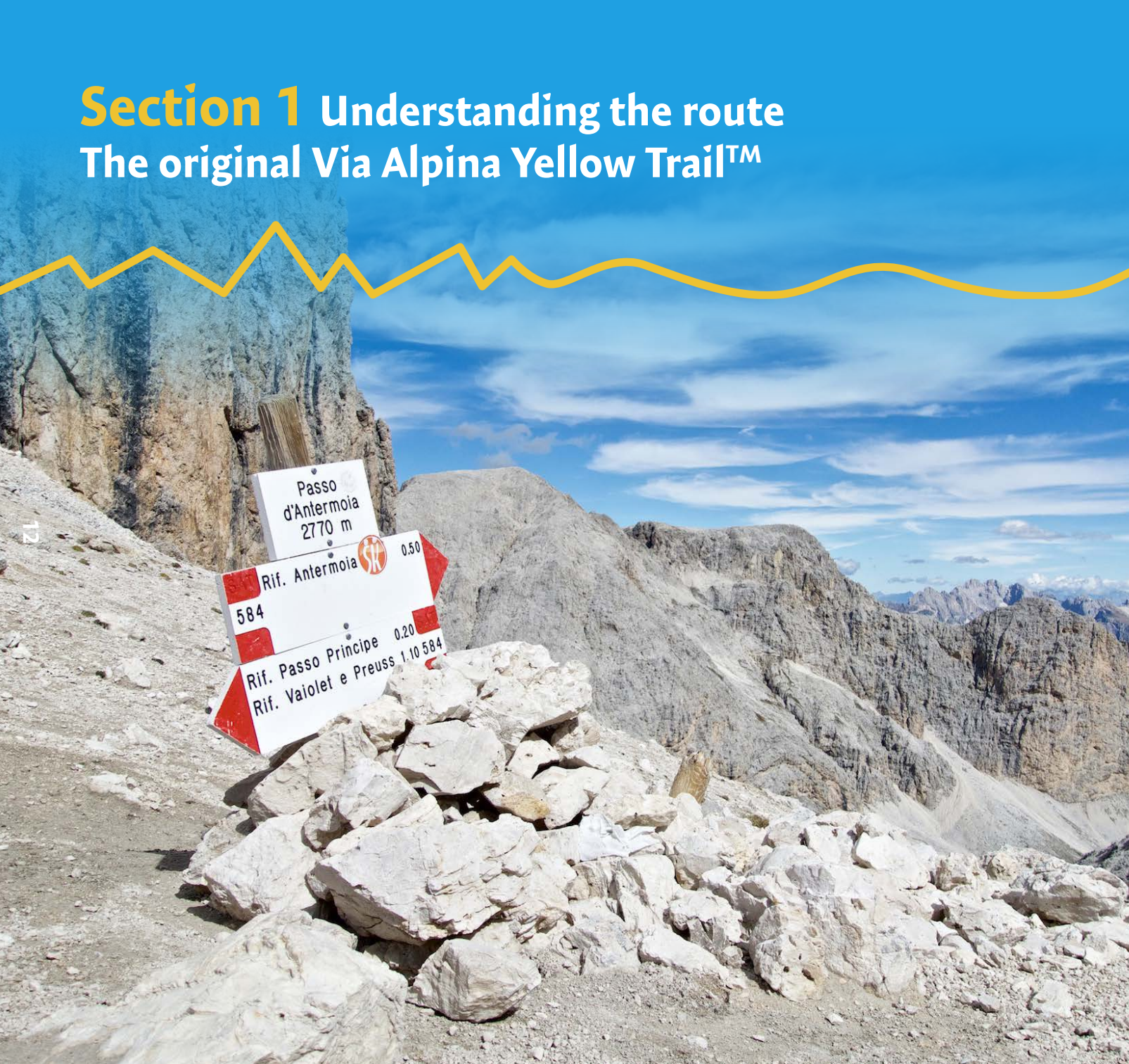


**Marianna Elmi** – Deputy Secretary General of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention



## Section 1 Understanding the route

### The original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™



## The original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™:

### Our starting point

The brand name Via Alpina refers to a network of five walking trails across the eight countries of the Alpine region, covering more than 5000 km and divided into 342 day stages. The Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ is one of these routes, crossing the three countries of Germany, Austria and Italy.

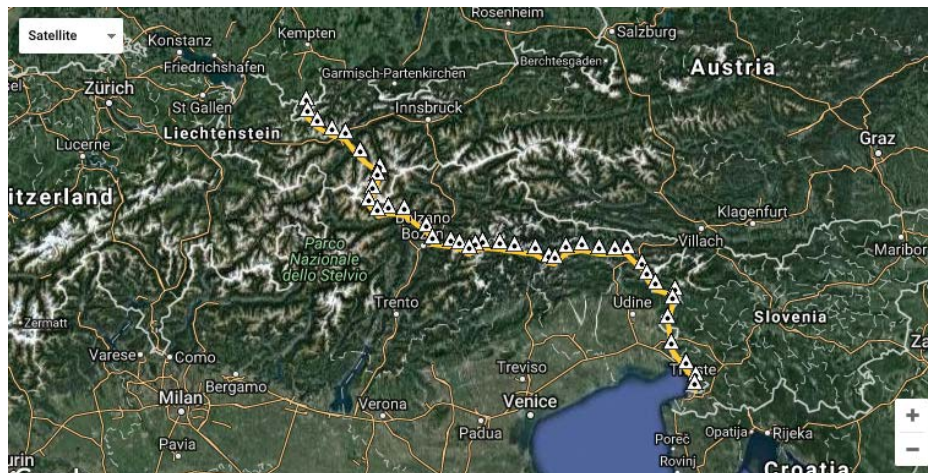
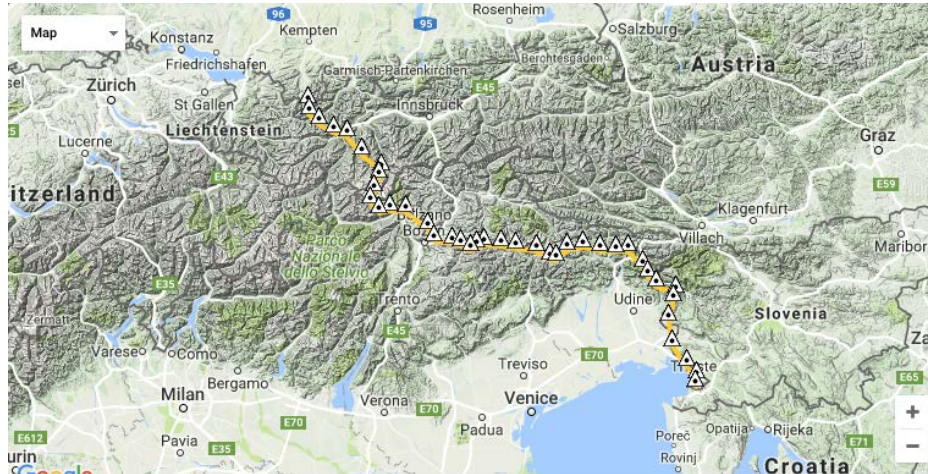
The Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, together with the other four Via Alpina trails, was conceived in 1999 by the French association Grande Traversée des Alpes, with the support of the Alpine Convention. Within the framework of the European programme Interreg Alpine Space, the five Via Alpina trails were identified, marked and promoted. In 2002 the Via Alpina was officially launched and recognised by the Environment Ministries of the eight Alpine countries, while in 2007 a second Interreg project helped to further develop the trail and its promotion, also including a first mapping tool.

Since 2014 the Via Alpina Yellow Trail, together with the other Via Alpina trails, has been managed by the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps, CIPRA, which supported the SilViAlp project from its early stages. A website is available with a description of the trail and a digital map ([www.viaalpina.org](http://www.viaalpina.org)).

The status quo before the SilViAlp project started was an existing route with 40 stages from Trieste to Oberstdorf (south to north), and a length of about 720 km, corresponding to a total hiking time of 260 hours. Some promotional material was already available to publicise the trail: a travel guide with descriptions of the stages developed during the Alpine Space project and a book (out of print), edited by Bruckmanns Tourenführer, entitled "Via Alpina – Gelber Weg: Von den Julischen bis in die Allgäuer Alpen". The existing digital map needed an update, both in terms of content and GPS data.



At this point the adventure of the SilViAlp Consortium started. It involved a team of eight project partners with very different skills, who agreed on working together to improve the quality of the digital information and to design digital tools suitable for the senior target group. These updating activities, as well as the innovation in digital tool development were carried out after a detailed analysis of the route.



Source: [www.viaalpina.org](http://www.viaalpina.org)





# Indicators of the status quo

The Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ is not a new trail designed for the senior target group. It is rather a trail with 17 years of history, although with scarce popularity among hikers. To decide how to tailor the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ to the needs of the senior target group, one project partner, Ovid Jacota, CEO of the tour operator Hauser Exkursionen, decided to hike along the entire route during the summer season 2015.

As a result of this hiking adventure, Mr Jacota developed a panel of indicators to evaluate the Via Alpina Yellow Trail and its stages. The main criteria for evaluation were chosen based on his eighteen years of relevant experience as a developer of active holiday packages for hikers and trekkers.

Having in mind the senior target group and building on Project Partners' experiences on hiking routes and packages, the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ was analysed according to these main criteria:

- **Level of comfort**
- **Attractiveness and beauty of the landscape**
- **Cultural value**
- **Inspiring power**

Subsequently, the main criteria were divided into sub-criteria as follows, to assess the trail sections and stages in a more refined and comparable way:

- **Level of comfort**
  - Accessibility of the starting point of the hike
  - Length of daily hiking sequences/stages (e.g.: 4-hour hike better than 8 hours)
  - Altitude meters to be covered (e.g.: less than 800 – 1000 m up and down better than ascents and descents of more than 1000 altitude meters per day)
  - Degree of steepness of the ascents and descents
  - Availability of luggage transportation
  - Signposting
  - Surefootedness of the hiker needed in order to cope with the trail conditions





- Nature of the ground (e.g.: flat, solid earth ground easier to walk on than big, slippery rocks)
  - Degree of necessity for not suffering from giddiness or vertigo
  - Service stations along the way (e.g.: benches and tables, food availability, fresh water sources, etc.)
  - Overall rating for the accommodation
  - Possibility to wash clothes
  - Internet accessibility at the accommodation locations
  - ATM
  - Authentic food/locations with local food
  - Swimming pool/wellness
- **Attractiveness and landscape beauty**
    - Harmony of the route with nature
    - Free, clear view over big natural areas
- **Cultural value**
    - Presence of predominant themes and their valorisation
    - Local traditions encountered while hiking
    - Learning potential and effects/self-experience for the hiker

- **Inspiring power**

- Presence of elements that can inspire hikers before commencing the excursion:
  - » Perceived improvement in personal health
  - » Expectations of unique experiences for the hiker
  - » Perception of personal challenges
  - » Capacity to evoke self-reflection

Each of the mentioned sub-criteria was linked to an evaluation of each existing stage using a scale between -5 (extremely bad) and +5 (very good). The total score reflects the potential value of the different stages for senior travellers. It is reflected in the digital map displayed here.





# Experience-based impressions of the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™

I walked the Yellow Trail from Trieste to Val Senales from mid-June to July 2016. My hike was inspired by my commitment to the Project ALVINA ([www.progettoalvina.it](http://www.progettoalvina.it)), aimed at emphasising the role of science and culture in enhancing and promoting Alpine regions. The project envisages two solo hikes both ending at Edolo, Val Camonica (Brescia), where a branch of the Università degli Studi di Milano, entirely devoted to valorising, i.e. enhancing, promoting and adding value to the Alps and mountain areas, is located ([www.valmont.unimi.it](http://www.valmont.unimi.it)). When I started my hike, I was not aware of the project SilViAlp, dedicated to valorising the Via Alpina Yellow Trail. However, during my hiking experience, once I noticed this aim, I was glad to contribute my experiences and feedback to the success of the project.

As a professor at the Università degli Studi di Milano and not an alpinist or professional mountain hiker, my remarks simply reflect the impressions of any elderly Long Distance Walker (LDW).

**1.** Daily walks should not last 10-12 hours or more, and long distances certainly not be consecutive. LDWs are more concerned about their physical condition, reasonable walk duration, state of the paths, weather conditions, frequency of stage facilities, etc., than occasional trekkers. Very long stages, especially along the valley floors, should be divided. Furthermore, alternative options including public transport, bike availability or similar should be suggested.

**2.** Tracks should not necessarily entail detours aimed at reaching the best and/or panoramic locations while requiring a longer walk duration. In the case of clouds, fog, rain, thunderstorms, it is useless to reach the top of a mountain or crest and see nothing. Likewise, stretches of dirt tracks or even paved roads should not be demonized and avoided at any cost. Sometimes, diverting from a hard path to an easier, shorter and faster road can be appreciated by the LDW, in order to relax the muscles and the brain.

**3.** More frequent and better signing of the paths are needed. Available off-line maps are very helpful, but it is too risky to rely solely on them. The state of the paths and the location and opening times of the places to stay should regularly be checked, and when necessary signs indicating deviations, or web alerts should be provided.

**4.** Some tracks lead through renowned and highly frequented Alpine locations. It may often be the case that the LDWs have already hiked through those regions and prefer to see other places along the way, or simply wish to avoid extreme crowds, as occurs in August within some areas of the Dolomites.

**5.** Nights in a hut are often unique experiences. However, elderly and LDWs strongly appreciate a warm shower, a room with some privacy, good and nutritious food, a dry and warm place for wet clothes and shoes, quiet in the evening and during the night. Thus, whenever possible, it may be more convenient to provide a stop in a village on the valley floor rather than at an elevated height. Moreover, the LDW cannot

carry a too heavy rucksack and may benefit from the shopping facilities of the village.

**6.** WIFI is not optional for LDWs. They need it for communication, orientation, weather forecasts, logistic arrangements, etc. Some hut keepers deny access to the Internet to avoid trivial browsing and downloading, but usually this does not apply to a LDW.

For most of the above-mentioned constraints, one feasible solution could be the creation of an integrated network of trails rather than a single route.



**Marcello Duranti** – Professor of Biochemistry at the Università degli Studi di Milano.

# A telephone survey for tourism boards and municipalities

To understand the characteristics of the trail, besides the activity of hiking actively along the whole route, it was decided to address local stakeholders using a questionnaire. The structure of the questionnaire was created by adapting a scheme previously adopted to screen the municipalities along the Alpe Adria Trail, including the necessary adjustments.

The questionnaire addressed several topics: some general information on tourism flows in the area; the main tourist motivation; the available tourist services, with specific reference to those applying to hikers, and existing knowledge about, and marketing of the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™.

A list of institutions (municipalities or tourist boards) was drawn up and the survey was carried out by telephone. In the case of municipalities, majors or local ministries for tourism were selected, in the case of tourist boards directors or product managers were interviewed.

In total, 125 institutions (70 municipalities and 55 tourism boards) were addressed through a telephone call. Due to some

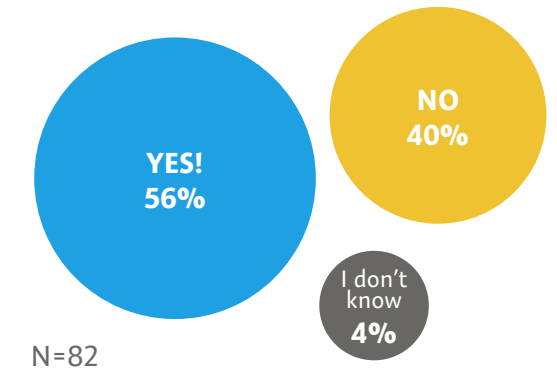
administrative and organizational changes, as well as some difficulties in contacting reference persons, the sample of questionnaires collected amounted to 82.

52% of these were municipalities and the remaining 48% tourism boards. Tourism boards were difficult to address in the southern part of the trail, due to a recent reorganization of the tourism system and a consequent change in management and territorial responsibilities.

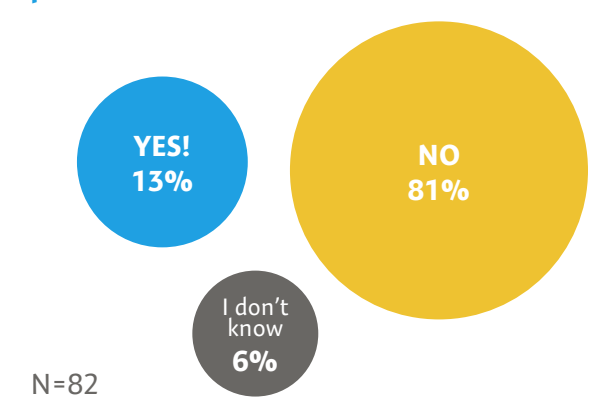
As far as the results are concerned, the questionnaires revealed that hiking tourists are an important segment, accounting on average for about 67% of all tourists in the municipalities or regions crossed by the trail. Generally speaking, hiking activity is quite widespread and, except in the case of cities, it is the most important travel motivation. The importance of hiking was also confirmed when it was verified whether some specific tourism offers are available for hikers, which was the case in 60% of responses.

Despite the presence of hiking tourists and the existing activities dedicated to hikers, only 13% of the respondents said they promote the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ (as a brand name) actively. In all other cases the trail is not promoted, or even unknown to municipalities or tourism boards (40%). This incongruence between the hiking vocation and the poor promotion as a brand represents both the weakness and the potential of the trail. A second potential for future developments of the route is the presence, confirmed by 41% of the interviewees, of luggage transport services, even if rarely connected to hiking tour offers. Additional information collected during the questionnaire, such as the name and address of natural and cultural sites helped to built the content of the interactive map, which was enriched by the inputs received. Moreover, the questionnaires worked as instruments to identify reference persons in municipalities and tourism boards, whose contacts were afterwards used to involve local communities during the on-site workshops and final conference.

**Did you know that the Via Alpina Yellow Trail crosses your municipality/tourist board?**



**Does your municipality/tourism board use the Via Alpina brand in communication and promotional activities?**



# Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™: A SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a useful technique for understanding the Strengths and Weaknesses of an organisation or product and for identifying both the Opportunities open to it and any Threats it faces. What makes SWOT particularly powerful is that, in a compact matrix, it can help uncover opportunities that are well placed and ready to be exploited. At the same time, by understanding the weaknesses of a business, threats can be eliminated before they cause the entire business/product to fail. Finally, using the SWOT framework also helps one to compare a business/product with those of its competitors, therefore offering opportunities to differentiate the product or offer and make it unique.

SWOT analysis in business and marketing is normally structured in a 2x2 matrix grid, representing two pairs of dimensions: Strengths and Weaknesses vs. Opportunities and Threats.

Strengths and Weaknesses represent the internal environment – the situation within the company/organization or product: for example, factors relating to products, pricing, costs, profitability, performance, quality, people, skills, adaptability, brands, services, reputation, processes, infrastructure, etc. These factors tend to describe the present situation. Opportunities and Threats represent the external environment – the situation outside the company/organization or product: for example, factors relating to markets, sectors, audience, fashion, seasonality, trends, competition, economics, politics, society, culture, technology, environmental, media, law, etc. These factors tend to foresee possible future developments.





Upon analysing the matrix grid, the project discovered that the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ is a rich trail that offers a variety of landscapes, cultures, languages and traditions, and therefore many different hiking experiences. Nevertheless, not all experiences can suite the needs of senior tourists, and the route tends to be discontinuous in parts and unknown within the hiking target group. Therefore, the main opportunity relies on the capacity to define an overarching topic that would help to bridge the immense variety of the route – which might be sustainability – the ability to define alternative routes where they are necessary, and finally the capacity to package and make these appealing as all-in-one packages. This implies the necessity to go beyond traditional track routing, for example selecting suitable trail parts among different regions according to their capacity to respond to senior tourists' needs, and finding new partners (e.g. transport providers) willing to bridge (mainly) the luggage transport gap.

To face these challenges and to develop a tourism product for senior travellers, which is suitable to meet their needs and capable of promoting and de-seasonalising tourism, the support of local stakeholders and public

authorities is needed. In order to avoid being blocked by a scattered offer based only on best practice municipalities, we are convinced that it is necessary to create a network of actors along the trail, who are willing to create a new product. These actors will benefit from exchange between each other and with SilViAlp's partners, and they will have access to further cooperation opportunities. In fact, the digital tool (map and App) developed during the project offers the possibility of free digital promotion of the trail as well as the local destinations through specific channels. Therefore, the project is a crucial tool to screen knowledge about the trail and to spread this among local stakeholders and consumers, in order to develop a successful tourism product.

Concerning the external opportunities and threats, we see digital communication as a key player for the marketing and planning of travel activities, also for the 55+ target group (and for the next generation of young "silver agers"). We are also convinced that local SMEs are addressing new development opportunities, particularly concerning climate change and the longer summer season. Their involvement will encourage foster regional economies, discouraging depopulation. We also see innovative opportunities for recruiting funds to maintain the



route, bearing in mind good examples of crowdfunding with other routes, such as the Via Francigena, where more than € 12,000 have been collected to ensure adequate signposting. Finally, we see good development opportunities thanks to cooperation with the existing Via Alpina International Secretariat, in charge of valorising the Via Alpina Trails for the last 17 years. A cross-fertilization of results and knowledge could provide a significant helping hand to the trail and its touristic future.

Notwithstanding the great opportunities that emerge from the project, we are aware of the fact that some threats could endanger the future of the trail and its success. These mainly refer to the political intention to continue working on, and investing in the trail, its maintenance and its valorisation, as well as the willingness to promote the route by tourism stakeholders. A strong commitment to maintenance and promotion could be a key success factor, and above all, could mitigate and prevent any damages caused by climate change and sudden precipitation events on the trail.



# Sharing projects to find answers: Stakeholder involvement to foster regional development

The charm of long peregrinations and hikes has persisted throughout the ages, although over time the motivations and styles connected with them have often changed. However, over the last few years, the concept has assumed a numerical dimension of great importance, involving a growing number of the population and new age groups, which also include “senior hikers”. Obviously, especially including this segment but not solely, the necessity for additional services has been growing. This is linked to the increase in the demand from those who hike long distances and like to focus on themselves within natural environments of great beauty. When these routes are organized and cross different mountain areas, they also represent elements that are concerned with, and sometimes generate a multitude of factors; these are not solely connected to the personal or group experience, but also to socio-economic factors.

For example, this is the case for the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, which, if appropriately promoted and managed, is able to generate concrete territorial impacts for the area. This is already happening today in the central-western part of the trail. However, within the eastern alpine area, the concept has met some difficulties in establishing itself, even though this part includes nature and landscapes, which are in no way inferior to the better-known territories, and actually often offer an even greater impression in terms of wilderness and tranquility. This is why the itinerary, as was underlined during the workshops of SilViAlp held in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, if adequately maintained, enhanced and valorized, can become the backbone of a project that focuses on the sustainable development of the territory. Such a project can connect accommodation, territorial management, tourism promotion and the generation of new services through the primary involvement of local stakeholders.



However, success can only be guaranteed over the short and long term by sharing the project purposes and results. This includes providing adequate answers to the territories crossed, as well as to the hikers who are searching for experiences and emotions in the highlands.



**Stefano Santi** – Director of Prealpi Giulie Regional Park, Italy



# Workshop experiences: Creating the network

SilViAlp partners organized five different workshops along the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ (San Vito di Cadore, Moggio Udinese, Bovec, Trieste and Karthaus) to present the SWOT analysis of the trail. One key question was how to encourage interested stakeholders to actively participate in the implementation process of the project, to achieve higher local engagement and harmonised results. This question was addressed by adapting stakeholder involvement methods, aimed at increasing the perceived value of participation and offering tangible results in the short term. Only tangible and value-creating results at different local levels of the long route can increase the overall reputation of the hiking trail and enable the lasting success of the tourism product.

## A “special” discussion for a “special” trail

More than 100 people, from several institutions, took part in the workshops, contributing to improving and enriching the SWOT analysis. Local stakeholders, such as tourism actors (DMO, Local Development Agencies), national and regional institutions, tourists, transport providers and alpine guide associations participated in five meetings. The variety of stakeholders involved was overwhelming. The workshops were an excellent opportunity to spread the acquired knowledge about the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ and to improve the content of the SilViAlp project by collecting experts’ feedback. The workshops allowed the theory to be transformed into practice, since working at a small scale enables the involvement and integration of relevant stakeholders and decision makers from different sectors. Apart from disseminating the achieved results, the workshops had the objective to design – together with the local stakeholders – the USP (Unique Selling Proposition) of the updated route.

Therefore, every workshop was introduced by a presentation of the completed project activities, and included a discussion about the unique thematic features and morphological characteristics of each region involved. As a complementary approach for transforming theory and experiences into practice, a dialogue process with local stakeholders from different economic sectors, alpine backgrounds, institutions, and touristic organizations helped to define goals and common actions to revitalize and diversify the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™. EU projects potentially allow this approach, which should also be used to make projects more concrete and verify the relevance of the findings in real-life circumstances. During the workshops, the project partner helios.bz recorded several interviews with participants, to register their impression about the trail, the project and more generally about developing hiking tourism. The result of these recordings is a video addressing the current challenges in hiking tourism, and investigating new potentials to promote culture, arts and lifestyles.





## What did we learn about the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™?

Participants agreed with the idea that the Yellow Trail™ is special when compared to other hiking trails and its own USP should be identified in order to achieve successful and effective marketing. Cultural expressions and natural beauty are distinctive features of the route. The Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site, together with other UNESCO WHS along the route (“Civiale Del Friuli” for instance) contribute to the unique cultural and natural excellence of the route. Notwithstanding the uniqueness of individual tourist attractions, there was a general consensus on the necessity to find a broad concept to address the route in general, since the Dolomites and the two other World Heritage Sites are all located in the southern part of the trail.

The concept of “non-religious pilgrimage” in a land of beauty might be a good compromise to find a soul for the update of the Via Alpina product.

Apart from discussions on the USP of the trail, the experience from the workshops has persuaded the Consortium that there is a strong necessity to improve accommodation facilities and booking systems. Nowadays, the hospitality system is expanding quickly due to innovative services

based on the sharing economy (“Albergo diffuso”, Airbnb, etc.). These innovative accommodation possibilities are a new challenge for the future, since they represent a chance to increase bed capacity without creating new infrastructure. At the same time, they are not always accepted by tourism stakeholders, because they are in competition with traditional accommodation facilities, without ensuring homogeneous quality standards.

Finally, the involvement of more than 100 stakeholders allowed wide-ranging data collection on potential attractions along the route, as well as overnight possibilities, local transport services and other facilities for tourists. Together with the questionnaire, this data source has been of great value to fill the digital interactive map with high-value content.



### What did we learn about Alpine tourism?

Workshops have helped us to better understand who is the real hiker/tourist on the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ and what were the main trends in Alpine tourism over the last decades. During the past 10–20 years, tourism destinations were mainly bound to surrounding countries and regions. Nowadays, hikers are mostly from abroad and often they arrive from more distant countries, even from overseas. They expect and are able to walk for long distances and they deserve high-quality services. Notwithstanding the high expectations, the tourists tend to spend less time planning in advance. Some adventurous travellers can even choose a destination and hotel at the last minute using apps. Not everyone is to be positioned within this extreme, and the more the distant from home, the higher the propensity to plan. However, even planning is becoming digital-dependent, due to international booking platforms. Apart from the short-term planning and higher access distance, another transition in contemporary Alpine tourism relates to the seasons. Seasons are changing and even the window of opportunity for walking along the route in late spring or early autumn is becoming larger. Hikers will go beyond traditional time-frames, especially if they are

not bound to regular holidays since they are pensioners. Today, many trips are planned with the help of a pre-packaged tour, or a guidebook focusing on a particular country. Nevertheless, hikers are probably busier than ever, and want to squeeze in as many amazing memories as they can without being constrained by these boundaries.

### What did we learn about EU projects and participatory planning?

As a complementary outcome, SilViAlp demonstrated that the dialogue process with populations and stakeholders from different economic sectors helps to define goals and common actions in the field of route management. EU projects potentially allow participatory planning approaches as tools to make projects more concrete and to verify the relevance of research approaches in real-life circumstances.

Participatory planning presents many challenges and involves a trade-off between efficiency and inclusiveness. Local communities need be involved in the development of a process for improving long distance hiking trails and need express their own views of economic, social and cultural values, even if these views do not coincide with the experts' view. Route development and management should therefore be

seen as a process of continuous exchange between different policy levels and the communities that are asked to undertake certain activities. Local development plans need to reflect community priorities, and these priorities need to be fed back up the ladder to the regional and national policy level. Therefore, to make the project's outputs durable, collaboration among all the institutions, touristic organizations, private stakeholders and cultural organizations is and will be important. The creation of a network will provide opportunities for all stakeholders, not only to share development opportunities concerning the route at national and transnational levels, but also to develop transnational cooperation and business processes together. Particularly along the route, it will be crucial in the future to strengthen cooperation at different levels and with key sectors such as agriculture, cultural events and tourism. New types of cooperation are needed. Regional cooperation is sometimes well developed, but links to the strategic level are often missing. At the same time, bottom-up seem to be more effective than top-down approaches, although a time-consuming, broad multi-level stakeholder process seems to be inescapable. However, combining both processes would be an extremely pragmatic strategy and has proven to be feasible and effective.

The successful integration of participatory principles into the decision-making process necessitates trust and the opportunity to make real use of stakeholder contributions. SilViAlp started from this principle and has achieved not only a good degree of inclusion of the specialized public during the 18 months of work, but also a high level of participation and commitment during the workshops. Finally, the workshops contributed to providing precious inputs for the business model development.



# A chance for development on the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™

The project SilViAlp aims to foster sustainable use of Alpine areas by ensuring they are perceived as an authentic and pure destination, both from a natural/environmental as well as from a historical/cultural perspective. For this reason, the project suggests reconsidering and promoting the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ in order to enhance the local uniqueness of its locations and inhabitants and the excellence of the local, handmade products, such as wine and food. This promotion should proceed by involving local communities in the design of touristic, cultural and naturalistic offers for different visitor and guest types, particularly for non-standard tourists.

The Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, as well as the entire Via Alpina Trails, is a project that is able to support and promote truly sustainable tourism correlated with slow mobility and a deep awareness of the locations. The combination of these factors generates a high potential to increase sustainable tourism flows and to extend traditional seasons, freeing the Alpine territories from

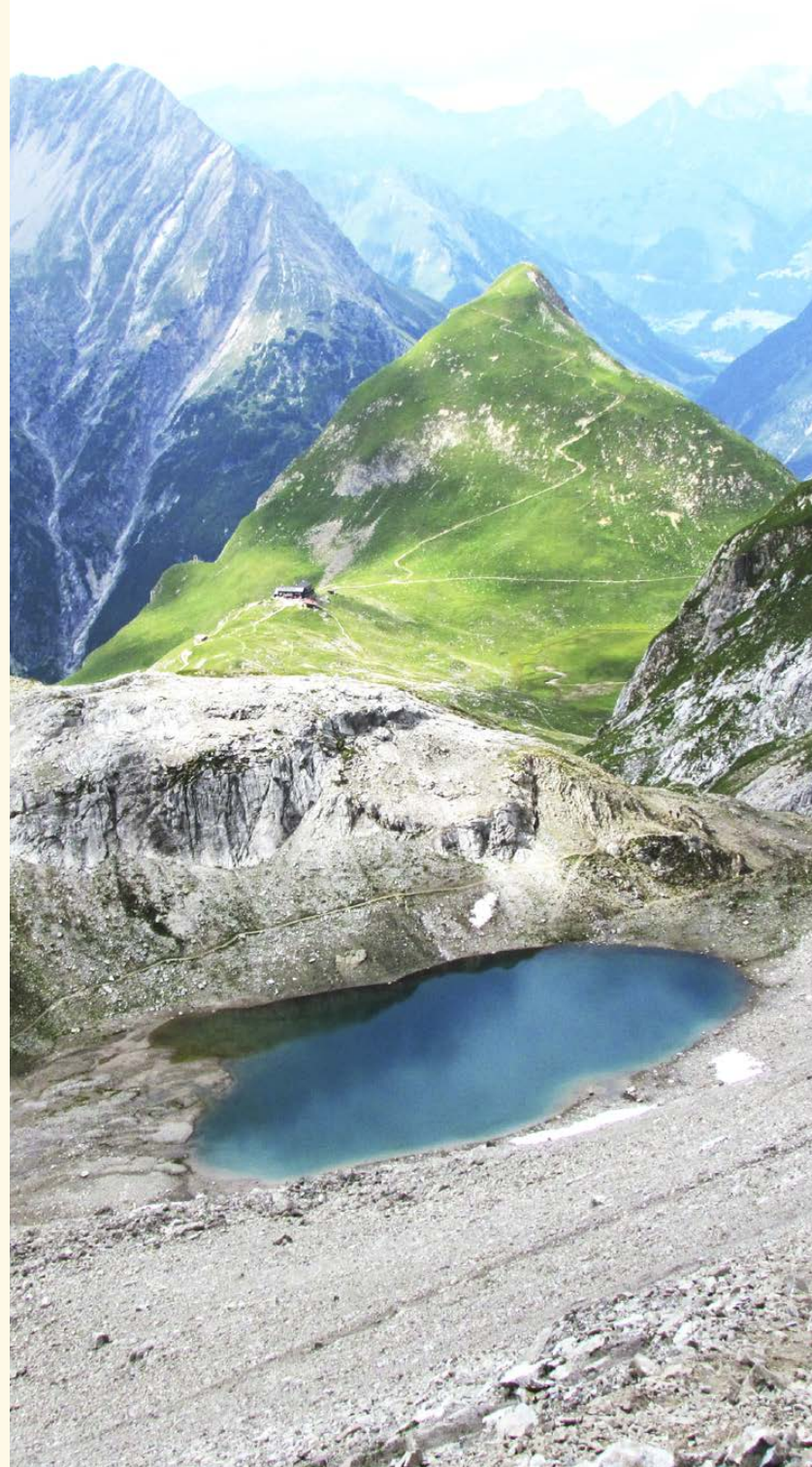
the usual dependency on the segments of summer trekking and winter sports. Unfortunately, the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, somehow frequented by European hikers, has been neglected, or even forgotten by the Italian partners, who played an important role during the implementation of the original project more than ten years ago. Today, recovering and increasing the use and possible economic gain connected to the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ within the Tri-dentine-Venetian-Friulian part, could foster its attractiveness, also with reference to the EUSALP initiative, or even considering its symbolic value concerning the borders between Italy and Central Europe, places and territories that have seen the transition from bloody battlefields to an exemplary model of peaceful coexistence. This aspect was already highlighted within the original Via Alpina project, but unfortunately underestimated both under the historical/cultural and economic point of view.

If its original character as a long distance hiking trail, which is perhaps currently too unaware of its surroundings, can develop

towards a dimension that is more inquiring and interested in the unique characteristics of the locations on the route and the people met, then the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ will be able to become, as it is certainly worthy to be, an exemplary model of evolved and sustainable tourism – even a place for our souls.



**Pierpaolo Suber** – Functionary at the Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy





## Section 2 Understanding the target

### The senior hikers



## Seniors and their travel behaviour

Life expectancy increased dramatically in the 20th century in most developed countries thanks to medical advances, better hygiene, health care, nutrition and increased safety awareness. It is estimated that more than 2 billion people on our planet will be aged 60 and older by 2050. This will represent 22% (or one out of five) of the world's population – compared with only 10% in 2000 – and these demographic changes will be seen across all continents (Patterson, 2006, p.2).

In Europe in 2010, 17% of the population was 65 years old or older, and this figure is expected to be close to 30% by the year 2060 (Demunter, 2012, p.7). Financially comfortable, with plenty of spare time and much better health, older people travel more than ever. According to these findings it is likely that in the future seniors will have a notable impact on the type of holidays that are undertaken and the destinations that are chosen.

There has always been a lack of consistency in using age categories to define seniors, particularly in tourism and leisure research. "The age groups specifically targeted when

studying older people have included a range of different ages, from 50/55 to 60/65 years and older depending on the specific study" (Patterson, 2006, p. 13). Tourism related literature usually

implements the age category 55+. Some authors state that "today's senior market differs greatly from the stereotypical mode of senior tourists of the past, and that it is a misunderstanding to think of senior citizens 55 years or older as weak, dependent, lonely, or physically or mentally limited, who only want consistency and predictability when they travel" (Chen, Shoemaker, 2014, p. 60). Moreover, they like adventures and new challenges and usually think of themselves as 15 years younger than they really are. A generation gap does exist between the most recent seniors and those of the older generation.

The main aim of older adults when traveling is usually connected to health objectives. They mostly prefer medically or educationally oriented trips where they learn something new and embark on different historical and cultural experiences, while their personal safety is guaranteed.



Older adults, especially due to their age, are more experienced, act rationally and are very demanding, even choosy. Since the 1990s the senior market has no longer been perceived as homogenous, and its diversity and complexity have been emphasized since that time. Several demographic and socio-economic factors seem to have favoured this trend of change, such as the growing number of seniors, higher life expectancies, early retirement, improved health, increasing prosperity, and more active lifestyles. Moreover, a high diversity of rich and poor, healthy and ill, educated and less well educated generate a further split into different groups of older adults that consider their age, physical condition, different income group, marital status, travel experience gained so far and travel interests in general.

### Seniors' categories

Peterson (2006), and Blackburn and Hunter-Jones (2007) state that different terms to describe the seniors or the older adults market exist in terms of their travel behaviour. They recognize various categories, such as the **silent generation**, **retiring baby boomers**, **young seniors/new-age seniors**, **empty nesters**, and the **baby bust generation**.

For example, the **silent generation** comprises people who were born between 1925 and 1943, and they have been described in fairly negative terms as lacking adventure, imagination and basically just "silent." Many of them are women and because of historical circumstances, they were humanitarians, pioneers in civil rights or feminist movements. Regarding their travel behaviour, the majority did not travel much at all. Since females dominate this generation, their highest preferences were cleanliness, safety, and environmental quality of air and water. Education was the next most important factor, suggesting that the possibility of learning while travelling was an important component of their travel activities. Patterson (2006), Moller, Weiermair, Wintersberger (2007), and Hudson (2010) state that the term **baby boomers** defines a generation of people born after the Second World War, in the years 1946 to 1961, during a time of higher economic growth and prosperity. In this period, fertility rates increased dramatically, making them the largest group of any age category in countries throughout the Western world. Baby boomers do not consider themselves as seniors in the usual context. They feel younger than their actual chronological age, and do not want to identify or mix with other elderly people.





Moreover, although this generation is greying, they are increasingly enjoying active lifestyles, participating in leisure activities such as swimming, walking, going to concerts and theatres, and following the trend towards eating out more often in restaurants. Baby boomers have also been described as generally well educated. Nearly 90% of them graduated from high school and more than a quarter of them have at least a bachelor's degree. This generation is generally financially better off with incomes above the average and a higher level of disposable income available for leisure travelling.

However, Hudson (2010) divides boomers into two segments: leading-edge and trailing-edge, each carrying a different portfolio of attitudes and interests. **Leading-edge boomers** were born between 1946 and 1955. For them, travel takes a central role in post-retirement reality and a decline in the frequency of travel does not occur until they reach their late 70s and 80s.

**Trailing-edge boomers** were born between 1956 and 1961, and they have been offered a plethora of credit cards all their lives and probably accumulated enormous consumer debt. Therefore, they have curtailed their travel habits compared to leading-edge boomers.



Nevertheless, for both groups, travel remains a significant component in their lives. They are more demanding, enjoying travelling to learn more about other countries, and continually looking for special interest travel as well as new innovative experiences. However, in all cases, they require courteousness, good value for money and quality services.

**Young seniors or new-age elderly** are those who belong to the age group 65/79 years, are retired and have thus entered the time-rich group. Unlike traditional elderly, similar to baby boomers, new-age elderly perceive themselves as younger in age, disrespecting their chronological age, and are skilful and knowledgeable consumers generally satisfied with their lives. Young seniors are more self-confident and more willing to accept change, which is reflected in their willingness to accept new products and services. They use their past savings to cope with current expenses and if they have no serious health problems, they like travelling and spend more on quality. In terms of their travel behaviour, young seniors seek new creative personal challenges and experiences that enhance their self-actualization, rather than price packages.

Moller, Weiermair and Wintersberger (2007) also recognize one more term in describing one group of older adults, called **empty nesters**.



They are defined as older people in an age group between 55/64 years, who are still working, but their children have left home and are no longer dependent on their parents. People without children who are in this age group should also be included. They have only a few financial debts and sufficient funds to finance their needs due to relatively high and stable incomes. They can afford luxury goods and although they take shorter trips, they travel more frequently.

Seniors’ travel behaviour

In relation to the travel behaviour of European seniors, research has focused on the needs and expectations of tourists aged 55 and over (Gheno, 2015, p. 8). No matter the country of origin or residence, or their education, when choosing their “company” for trips and holidays, the majority of respondents opted for travelling with a partner, followed by the company of relatives and family, as well as in groups with people they know. Most of the seniors prefer to travel abroad (51%) and as their favourite destinations they consider Spain, Greece, Latin America (especially Brazil), African countries and Italy. With regard to the average daily budget, the majority of respondents went for a budget limited to up to 100 EUR/per day (56%) and they prefer a low to mid-

dle length (4 – 7 days) for their holidays. Relatives, friends and the Internet seem to be the reliable sources of information that tourists aged 55 and over prefer when choosing their destinations. The majority of respondents prefer to have holidays in the summer, but a consistent percentage like to take breaks during the spring. The airplane is the number one way to travel, followed by the car. Concerning special tourist themes, the majority of replies favoured nature and culture, followed by health and wellbeing. Asked to rate the importance of sports and leisure activities while on holiday, the majority of respondents opted for hiking and swimming. European seniors appreciate and require security, clean and reliable sites and services, and better value for money. Moreover, they also like to be assured that toilets, pharmacies and supermarkets are available in their tourist destinations.

European commission actions and EU projects focused on senior tourism

Promoting tourism during the low season can stimulate economic growth and jobs in Europe. The European Commission has identified seniors and young people as groups that can travel easily during the low season. Reinforcing their contribution to

tourism could help to overcome the challenge of seasonality and contribute to the competitiveness of the industry. In May 2012, the Commission launched a pilot phase of a “Senior Tourism Initiative.” This pilot phase aims to define the framework conditions to enhance transnational travel during off-peak times for seniors in Europe, contributing to the competitiveness of the industry. In particular, strong partnerships between the public and private sector, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) could be set up to offer competitive packages.

Project	Coordinating organisation
European Senior Citizens’ Actions to Promote Exchange in Tourism – ESCAPE	Cyprus Chamber of Commerce & Industry (Cyprus)
Seniors Go Rural – SenGoR	Lauku Celotajs (Latvia)
European Senior Rail Travel Project	Eurail Group GIE (Luxemburg)
Facilitating Low Season Tourism Exchanges in Europe Encouraging Senior Citizens to Travel: SENTOUR CONNECT	International Social Tourism Organisation ISTO/eCalypso

Source: Based on the data available at <http://ec.europa.eu>

The European Commission aims to encourage the cooperation of all stakeholders involved in the senior and youth travel markets to make the most of potential opportunities to extend tourism seasons beyond traditional peak periods. The literature and previous studies or projects confirm that SilViAlp is suitable for some emerging targets in the senior age group: i.e. retiring baby boomers and young seniors/new-age seniors. These targets are interested in technology and innovation and at the same time they tend to have the required physical conditions to cope with a long haul trail.

## Smartphone instead of tv series

Seniors are becoming younger and younger, especially in terms of behaviour and thinking. Standing in the midst of life, they know exactly what they want – and what they don't want. Experiences, healthy treats and top-class service are at the top of their priority list, especially regarding travel. Communication has to be at eye level, respectful, high quality, easy and uncomplicated. This applies to online products as well as to printed media. Those who want to lure them with old clichés, boring advertising, trivial slogans, or too complex information, will experience a rude awakening. Instead of watching tv series they prefer grabbing their smartphones and sending selfies to their grandchildren. Using new media is part of the everyday life for most active senior citizens. They seek information over the Internet regarding their next travel destination; on the way they take photographs with their tablets and create online photo-books of their adventures. Using the new media, they are up to date and stay in touch with friends and family – wherever they are. Numbers prove it: In Austria 66% of 55 to 64-year-olds and 35% of 65 to 75-year-olds used the Internet in 2013, adding up to nearly one million users (Wenzel, Rauch, and Scarimbolo, 2008).

Ten years earlier it was 20% and 4.3%, respectively. In Germany, where over 25% of all over 60s use the Internet, for the first time in 2007 there were more "Silver Surfers" (5.1 million) than 14 to 19-year-olds (4.9 million) surfing the Internet. Meanwhile in Austria already 12% of Facebook users are 50 or older ([socialmediaradar.at/facebook](http://socialmediaradar.at/facebook)). For the 55+ the Internet has become part of their everyday live. They attach great importance to authentic information and contents presented in an easily understandable way and of the highest quality. They have time, but they don't want to waste it. Rich on experiences, they choose mindfully and come back when they like something. Online and offline.



**Anita Arneitz** – Independent Journalist  
for the magazine „Magazin 55plus“  
and Writing Coach





## Hiking over 55: Ready to enjoy nature, culture and quality offers

It is true that hiking can be enjoyed within each target age group. However, looking at the demographic figures within hiking studies reveal that the highest percentage of hikers are within the age group 40 to 60 years old (approx. 46%) and almost one quarter of active hikers are older than 60. The typical hiker is therefore aged 55+, has an above-average education, and is predominantly searching for nature and relaxation during hiking.

The following descriptions of the typical 55+ hiking tourist derive from the day-to-day business of two project partners with decades of experience in Alpine hiking: Wanderhotels, the main hiking-specific hotel chain in the Alps, and Hauser Exkursionsen, one of the most popular tour operators specializing in hiking in Europe. An old proverb says: "The one who travels a great distance, can look back far". In fact, elderly people use hiking most of all to remain fit. The motive to experience beautiful landscapes by foot remains a priority, but health motives are more important for seniors than for other target groups.

The different moral values and lifestyles of the "elderly" also translate into additional characteristics of the senior target group. For example, a senior hiker concentrates his/her activities on experiencing nature, on fascinating landscapes and on the environment, but tends to be more demanding in terms of accommodation. They place higher importance on quiet settings and comfort. Sleeping well and peacefully is one of the basic needs for this group. They do not exclude a tourism-intensive setting, but prefer natural and familiar accommodation facilities. Moreover, a very important attribute for the older hiker is the proximity of the accommodation to the long-distance hiking trail, or its location along the trail. The 55+ hiking tourist is a vacationer for whom relaxation and cuisine are very important, indeed an integral part of his/her experience. Therefore, offers that include relaxing elements such as a sauna, pool or massage are very popular among older hikers. Due to the age group, easy access to medical facilities and care is desired, as well as reliable and competent touring counsel-





ling, especially if covering a longer distance during one day is anticipated. Senior hikers are curious and they are interested in different expressions of natural and cultural beauty. This makes storytelling an important leverage aspect to act on when addressing them as a target group.

Due to increasing life expectancy and the availability of free time for older people, sporting motives are being replaced by themes such as “experience” and “enjoying nature”. Also within the hiking experience great emphasis must be placed on quality, which subsequently increases the necessity for renovating infrastructures and redeveloping services and programs. Shorter stages (daily distances) with lower height differences, appropriate and visible markings, up-to-date orientation guides (analogue and digital), efficient services for luggage transport and connection between entry and exit points, with public transport or organized hiking shuttles, as well as organized, attractive and comfortable long distance hiking packages, could motivate the 55+ target group to start a long distance hike. All these characteristics are crucial for developing the tourism product on the long-distance hiking route Via Alpina Yellow Trail™.





## Section 3 Designing the product

### The Via Transalpina



## A trail full of nature and human history

The Via Transalpina can be seen as an upgrade of the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, both in terms of GPS/digital technologies and in branding/marketing. The first step towards creating the Via Transalpina was the perception of the route as a classic north-south alpine crossing, starting from Oberstdorf, Germany, then leading through Austria, and after about 750 km, finishing in Trieste, Italy, covering approximately 50,000 meters in altitude (ascents and descents) and leading from the Alps to the Adriatic Sea. Once agreed on the trans-alpine nature of the trail from north to south, and based on the existing material and the interactive discussions with local stakeholders, the SilViAlp consortium defined on some needs and priorities to create a successful tourism product for senior hikers:

- Thematization of the route and organisation of the different attractions to enable the potential 55+ hiker to obtain coherent information about the hiking experiences;
- Development of a new brand the Via Transalpina, given the scarce effectiveness

of the existing brand and the legal limits in the use of the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ trade mark .

- Update of the GPS information to enable secure hikes, given the poor quality of the existing GPS data;
- Organisation of the route into weekly packages or slots, to satisfy the needs of those travelling less than one month;
- Development of portable GPS and App-based guides in order to respond to the curiosity of senior hikers and to compensate for the poor signposting along the route.

With the constructive help of different actors who participated in the project workshops, and shared lists of potentially interesting attractions and databases of geo-referenced points of interest, the following thematization of the multitude of attractions within the newly born Via Transalpina was compiled.



## Alpine Crossing

Leading from 3,000 m altitude to the sea through scenic valleys, picturesque forests, beautiful Alps and breathtaking ridges, the trail includes all the elements of an unforgettable alpine crossing, during which the 55+ hiker will immerse themselves within the marvellous landscape characterized by the unique alpine flora and fauna. Amidst the peace and serenity along the route, they will also have the possibility to meet other fellow hikers.

The trail also connects the past and the present, sometimes leading the hiker on old paths that were used even in ancient times, when the Alps were still an untapped, unforgiving area. During those times, the only people who could attempt crossing the mountain range were experienced travellers and locals.



## Natural Sites

The Alps are one of the last remaining areas in central Europe with truly pristine nature and hikers from all around the globe often travel great distances to experience the idyllic places that can be found throughout the region. On their hike along the Via Transalpina the visitors will find a multitude of different natural sites such as lakes, gorges, mountain peaks, nature reserves, waterfalls, ridges, dense forests, alpine pastures, mountain massifs and the fascinating rock formations originating from alpine erosion.



## Cultural Sites

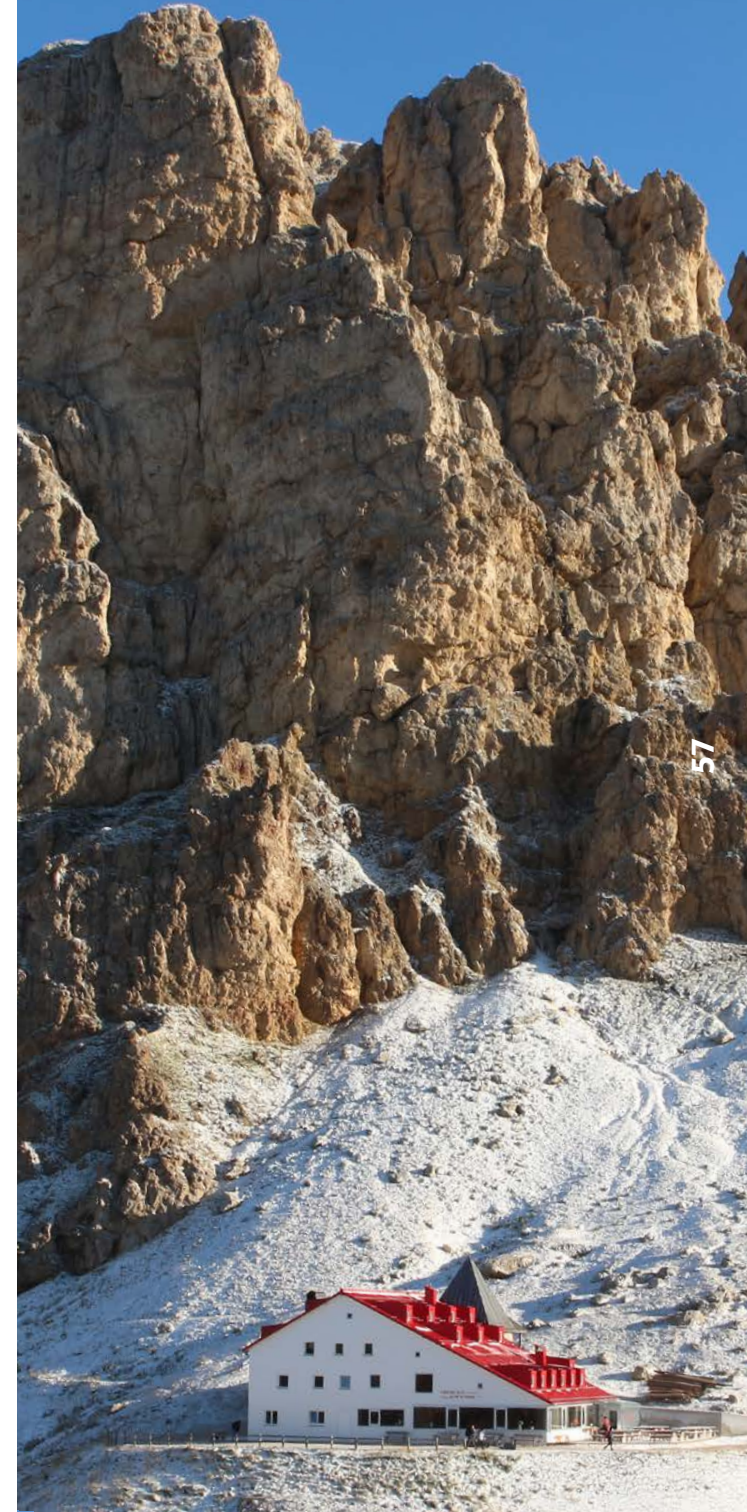
The cultural sites along the Via Transalpina are numerous and include sites dating back thousands of years, such as archaeological excavations from the Palaeolithic Age close to Vent. Furthermore, found within different stages are relics and buildings from ancient times and the Middle Ages, such as castles, churches, temples and cloisters, which confer precious insights into mankind's cultural evolution in the Alps. Prominent examples are Castle Biedenegg, Castle Wiesberg, Schloss Tirol, its museum and its homonymous town, which enable the 55+ hiker to experience the history and the present situation in Tyrol as a cultural and political entity.



## UNESCO World Heritage Sites

The first of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites along the Via Transalpina are the impressive Dolomites, which have been listed as an UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2009. Aesthetically the Dolomites (or “Pale Mountains”) are immediately recognizable due to their unusual colours and are often defined as the most beautiful mountains in the world.

In 2011 another site along the trail was awarded a listing within the UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the city of Cividale, with its significant symbol of Lombard power in Italy, the Lombard Temple. The Lombard Temple, which was probably built during the 2nd half of the VIII century, is one of seven groups of important buildings located over the Italian Peninsula and includes elements of Classicism, Longobard art and Carolingian art.







## First World War

Starting in 1915, the war between Austria-Hungary and Italy stretched along their respective borders, which included the Alps. Here, the war was like nowhere else, including a third, most treacherous adversary joining the confrontation: the rough environment of the mountains. In the initial stages of the conflict, a race was fiercely fought to occupy the higher positions. Old mountain paths had to be quickly adapted, war material had to be transported and heaved up to the newly built or hastily renovated old fortifications, and trenches were dug in the earth, snow and ice or blasted through rocks.

Along the Via Transalpina the 55+ hiker has the unique opportunity to explore many of the remains of the First World War, especially within the area of the Dolomites, close to the city of Gorizia and within the high plains of the Carso. Furthermore, the visitor will find many memorial sites, museums and monuments, which were erected to portray the atrocities of this era and exhort posterity to never forget the horrors of war.



## Alpine Lifestyle

Today the Alps are a habitable and populated region stretching throughout six European countries, where the alpine lifestyle, comprising the captivating traditions, the particular customs and the culinary arts, can be fully experienced by the 55+ hiker. For example, by following the theme trail “Via Monachorum” and visiting the village of Karthaus, the hiker will discover the spirituality of its monastery through dedicated tours, and experience the meditative atmosphere of the living environment of the monks in Medieval times.

Glimpses of serenity and wellbeing can also be found in the multitude of villages located along the Via Transalpina, where local traditions are often lived even today, bestowing their visitors with cultural impressions during religious processions, traditional parades, concerts and folklore festivals. Moreover, along the trail the hiker will also have the opportunity to taste homemade local specialties based on traditional recipes and innovative creations. The area of the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ includes three countries with their respective culinary traditions, from the traditional “Gasthaus” in Germany and Austria, to the “Buschenschanke” in South Tyrol, the Italian “Osteria” and the “Osmizza” in eastern Italy.



# The logo and the name of the updated trail: Via Transalpina

The Via Transalpina enables the hiker to experience natural and cultural Alpine beauty, crossing environmental and historical landmarks of particular prestige. One of the most important features of the Via Transalpina is the possibility to cross the Alps from north to south and reach the sea, immersed in a unique mix of landscape and cultural beauty. Therefore, the SilViAlp consortium developed a logotype for external communication which could transmit this mix of natural and cultural value at a glance, as well as the alpine crossing experience. An update of the existing trade mark Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, as well as adoption of the brand name was not possible, since the consortium of SilViAlp is a separate organisation from the International Secretariat of the Via Alpina trail. Moreover, the Via Alpina is not suitable for commercial uses, which might develop after the SilViAlp project's end.

Therefore, a new name and a new logo were created, with the support and approval of the Via Alpina International Secretariat.

Starting from the importance of the Alpine crossing thematic feature, the best name for the updated Via Alpina Yellow Trail was agreed to be "Via Transalpina." This name recalls the original Via Alpina, but uses the prefix "trans-" to underline the cross-regional perspective, which is peculiar to this route.

The logo was designed by the project partner helios.bz to reflect the features of the Via Alpina Yellow Trail in all its original and updated features. Since the beginning, it was agreed that the Via Transalpina logo should comprise the colour yellow. The use of this colour is generally somewhat problematic and not easy to use, due to the lack of contrast when used on white backgrounds. For this reason, helios.bz experts selected a particular shade of yellow that would suitably stand out to avoid readability problems. Another predominant colour in the corporate design is cyan. This colour refers to positive imaginary like the colour of the sky, nature, weather and wellbeing.

The last selected colour is dark grey (70% black). This colour was chosen to avoid the use of 100% black, which did not work adequately with the other colours and within the general graphic balance. The logo composition started from the concept of "Line and dots connection." The yellow line firstly communicates the idea of a route with stages, and secondly it draws the natural and cultural profile of the trail showing mountains, the bell tower, and the path. Even the order of these three elements is not random: it shows the true path profile, starting from the Alps, all the way towards the sea. At the typographical level, the font has been slightly changed by adding "dots" to some letters.

Finally, the logotype has been developed to not only suite the needs of the website, but also the particular features of the App for portable devices.





# GPS mapping and digital topographic map: A first step towards the Via Transalpina

## Initial situation

There were several problems with the existing GPS data, available on the official website for the Via Alpina Trails. The main problem referred to the data quality: only a few geo-referenced points for single stages were available to create the GPS track, and therefore the connection of the lines between the existing dots was not precise enough to guarantee safe navigation during the hikes. Furthermore, calculations of the distance and altitude difference based on this data were very often quite different from reality.

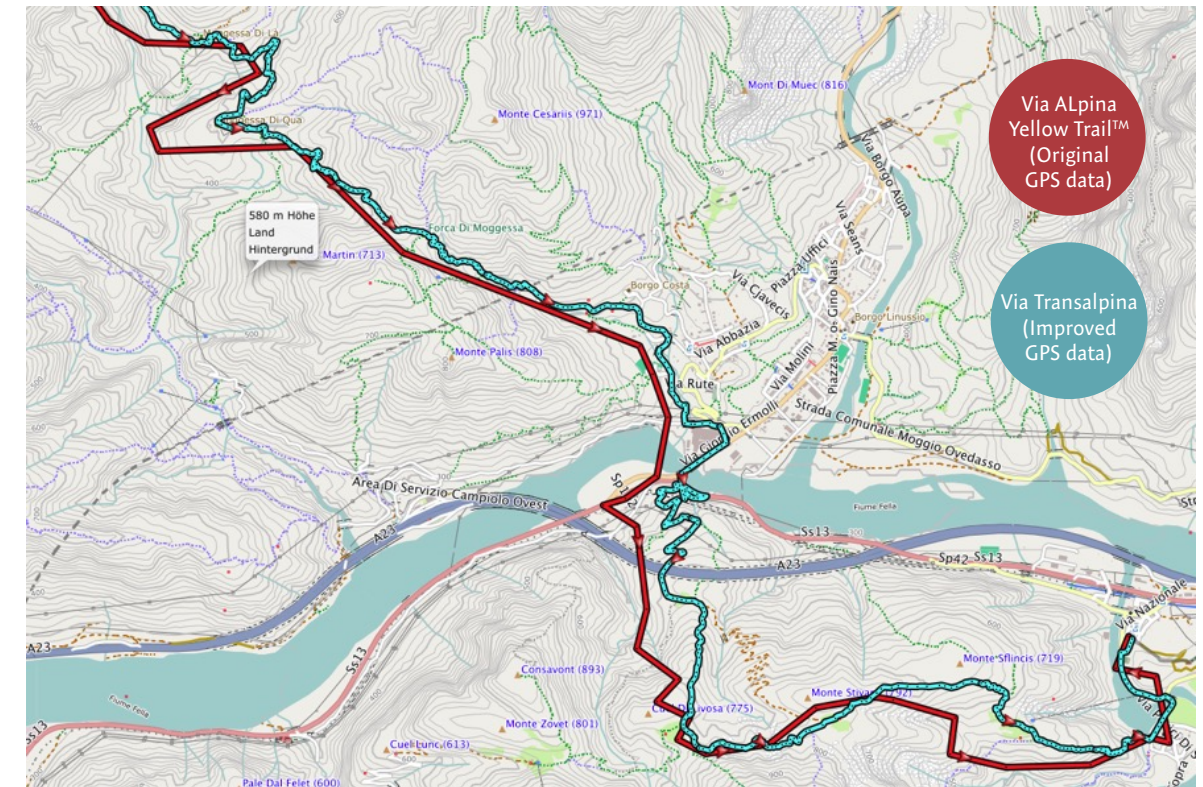
Another obstacle for hikers, especially less experienced ones, was the fact that the division into daily stages of the original trail did not take into account the average fitness of the target group. While the length (and technical difficulty) of some of the original daily stages were well within the physical capabilities of an average hiker, some proposed daily stages would have required the endurance of a fast trail runner, and were certainly not feasible for a “normal” hiker.

In addition to the low quality of the existing GPS data, in the project we also considered the fact that on many stages the physical signposting was heavily weathered or did not exist at all. Therefore, suitable technical equipment was needed to be sure the information was very accurate, also in order to partly compensate for the infrastructure deficit. The original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ was far from being adequately marked. A handheld GPS device or a Smartphone with appropriate software had to be used to find the way.

## Updating and adapting the trail

The solution to address these technical and organizational problems was to split the existing 40 stages into 100 shorter units. These shorter units are based on the distance between two accommodation facilities along the main route. This approach allows 55+ hikers to choose their daily stages freely by combining sections at will, based on their own fitness level. Moreover, it allows them to choose the accommoda-

tion facility that better suits their needs in terms of comfort, room availability, etc. Based on the creation of shorter stages, as well as the presence of access points, the entire route has subsequently been aggregated into five longer sections, which correspond to the following five thematic offers: Oberstdorf–Landeck, Landeck–Bozen, Bozen–Calalzo, Calalzo–Gorizia and finally Gorizia–Trieste.



Source: own elaboration

The technical production of GPS data of the original 40 stages of the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ was originally based on existing cartography material and aerial images. For the updated trail, the Via Transalpina, we used cartography available from Google, OSM, Sentres, the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen and Bing Aerial Images.



We used the following software tools for technically producing the updated cartography: Map toolkit, Garmin Base Camp, Touring South Tyrol, and Quantum Gis. To enhance the data quality, all GPS tracks were checked using available aerial images: Google Maps, Google Earth, Bing Aerial Images, Aerial Images by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen.

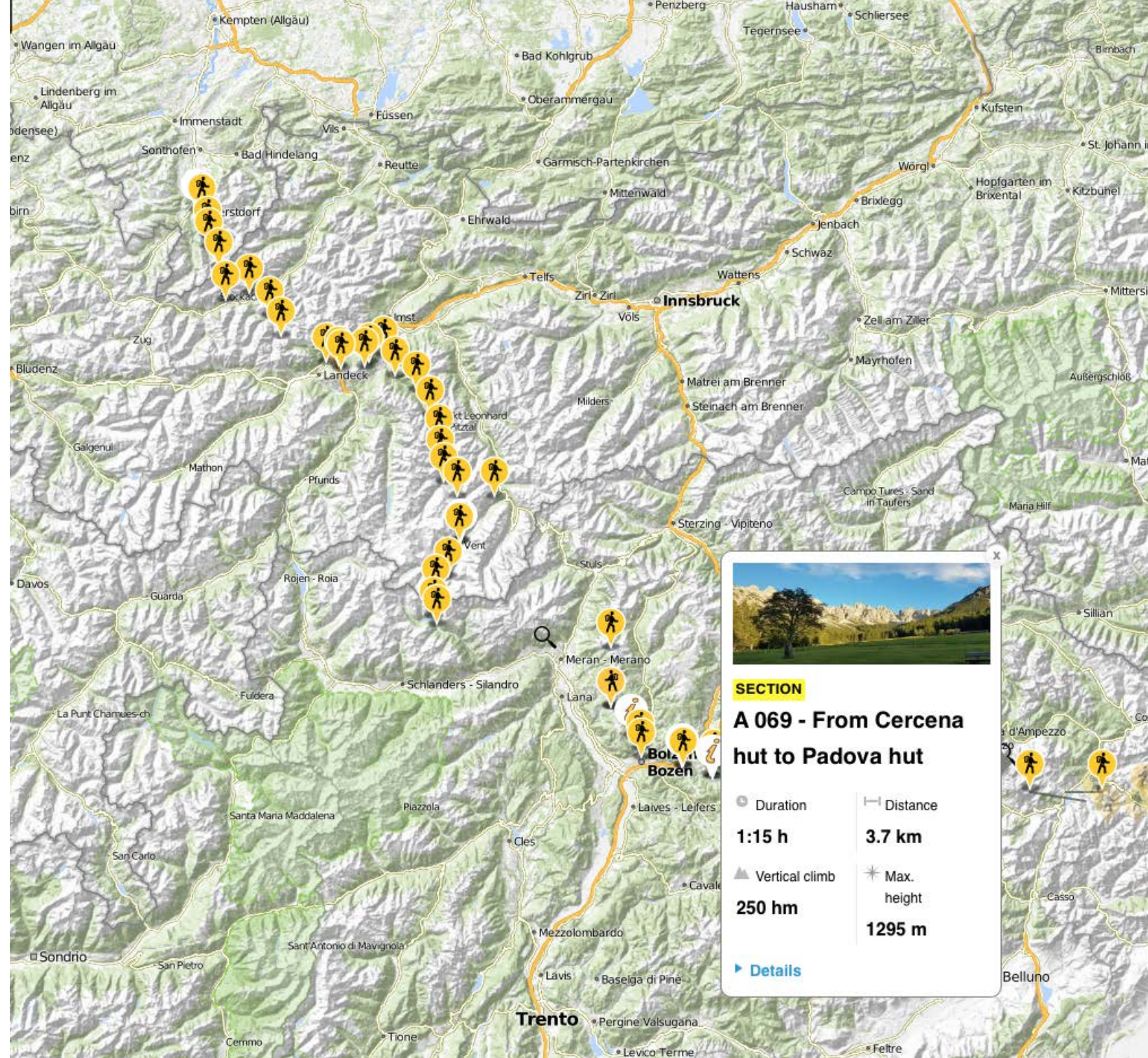
All acquired data, including GPS data, descriptions and pictures were entered into the database of the AlpineMap System ([www.alpinemap.it](http://www.alpinemap.it)). The AlpineMap System is an accessible online database for geo-referenced data (tours, Points Of Interest) that allows one to easily integrate data and maps into any website or export them to handheld devices (GPS device, Smartphone – Apps) or, by using a XML interface, to directly access the raw data in the original database. The most common use is to integrate OSM maps and content via simple Javascript into websites. According to these features, it was possible to collect and visualize not only the GPS data of the trail, (with descriptions of the stages, pictures of the trail, etc.), but also a series of accommodation facility data (exact location, contact details, descriptions, pictures) and POI data (geo-referenced data for sightseeing venues). These contents

are being continuously updated, based on interactions with local tourism stakeholders and hikers.

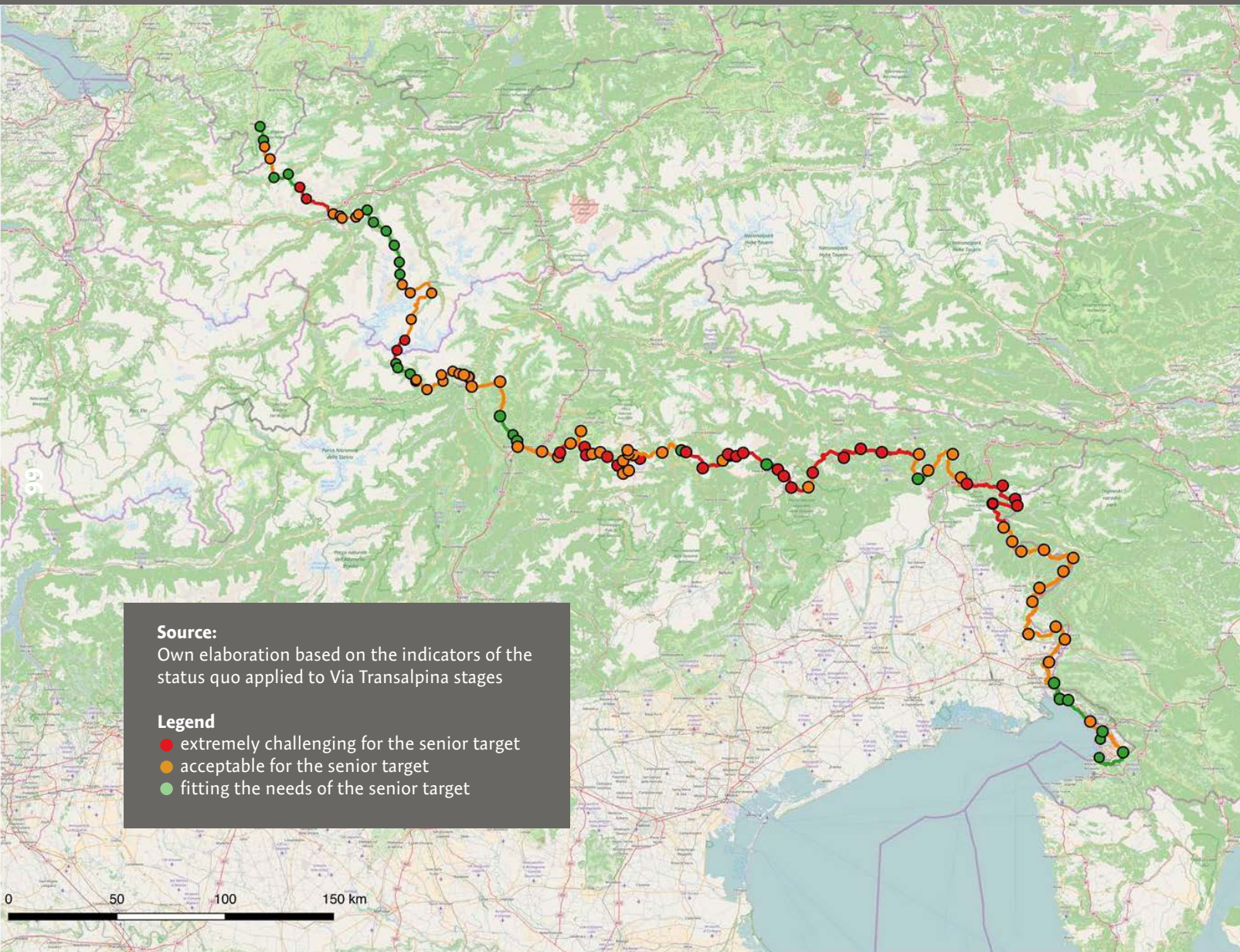
### The updated digital map

Using up-to-date technologies and software, accurate GPS data for the entire length of the Via Transalpina was generated. The quality of the GPS data was suitable for navigation along the trail, using handheld GPS devices or Smartphones. The accuracy of the data was concretely tested during the hiking experiences of Mr Jacota, explained in section 1 of this report.

As explained above, the newly organized GPS data with smaller stages allows 55+ hikers to follow their real needs and to be highly flexible during the planning process. Moreover, with the organization of stages into shorter units and the addition of all necessary information about accommodation and points of interest that arose during the project, the map will be a good toolkit to allow maximum flexibility while planning a personal route along the Via Transalpina. This result was presented during the SilVi-Alp workshops, in order to obtain feedback about the methodology and data quality from local tourism stakeholders.







The digital topographic map for the Via Transalpina is based on OSM (open street map). For the SilViAlp project, a specific rendering of OSM data was used. The rendering includes “shading”, a basic cartography layer based on an elevation survey via satellite. Moreover, the map includes hiking trails and hiking-relevant geographic denominations (mountain peaks, mountain passes, ropeways, etc.). Thanks to the Alpine Map System, additional touristic data are added to the map, such as natural and cultural attractions, train and bus stations and additional touristic services.

In addition, an offline map for Smartphones was developed. The problem is that Smartphones have only a limited storage space. Based on the GPS data of the entire Via Transalpina, map sections have been defined, that can be downloaded separately, thus offering the possibility to download only the needed sections of the map. This provides access to the hiking map even in areas not covered by GSM and avoids extensive roaming costs. Obviously map restrictions do not apply for the online version of the map.

Since most hikers will likely not travel along the entire length of the Via Transalpina, but rather walk some stages in different regions (for example the northern part from Oberstdorf to Meran/Merano or the Dolomites from Bozen/Bolzano to Cortina d’Ampezzo), the digital offline map can be downloaded for such specific sections of the Via Alpina (see above). This can save memory space on a Smartphone.



# A classification of accommodation facilities: Basic, Classic, Deluxe

An appropriate accommodation is the linchpin of every travel. There is a high variety of accommodation facilities for hikers along the Via Transalpina, in which they can relax and regain strength to prepare for the next day of hiking adventures. They can be mountain huts, regular three-star hotels, but even luxury and hiking-friendly hotels with wellness facilities.

Knowing the type of accommodation they will be overnighting in is a critical issue for hikers: they must be sure whether to approach a simple but fascinating mountain hut or a luxury five star hotel with wellness facilities.

For this reason, thanks to the expertise of the project partner Wanderhotels, and based on its experience as a specialized hiking hotel chain and as a co-developer of the Alpe Adria Trail, the SilViAlp consortium has developed three categories to classify accommodation facilities on the Via Transalpina. Details on their quality standards are given in the table.

## BASIC/STANDARD



- Accommodation:**  
Simple, clean inns, guesthouses, lodges, farms or mountain huts  
Capacity: min. 8 beds
- Facilities:**  
Clean room with private shower/WC or within mountain huts at least 1 WC + 1 shower for 4 beds
- Board type:**  
Sumptuous breakfast with regional products  
Dinner at nearby inns or restaurants
- Extras:**
- Dogs allowed
  - Map of the trail
  - Transport service
  - Luggage transport (optional)

## CLASSIC/MEDIUM



- Accommodation:**  
Good, clean inns, small hotels (from 2 to 3 stars)
- Facilities:**  
Clean room with private shower/WC
- Board type:**  
Sumptuous breakfast with regional products  
All the meals will be served in the accommodation facility
- Extras:**
- Dogs allowed
  - Map of the trail
  - Transport service
  - Luggage transport (optional)
  - Dry room for shoes and clothing
  - Single rooms or separate beds
  - Dog blankets
  - Medicine chest

## DELUXE/PREMIUM



- Accommodation:**  
Qualified/certified hiking hotels (from 3 to 4 S Stars)
- Facilities:**  
Spacious, nice room with private shower/WC
- Board type:**  
Sumptuous breakfast with regional products  
All the meals will be served in the accommodation facility; delicious, regional cuisine
- Extras:**
- Dogs allowed
  - Map of the trail
  - Transport service
  - Luggage transport (optional)
  - Dry room for shoes and clothing
  - Single rooms or separate beds
  - Dog blankets
  - Medicine chest
  - Dog baskets
  - Relaxation facilities (wellness, sauna, massages)



# Rediscovering youth's passions in the mountains: Hiking on the Via Transalpina

Walking to feel good, for the sake of discovery, gratified by the beautiful world around us: mountains, lakes, landscapes, mountain pastures and villages – all along the paths. Alpine trails, which in the past were simply an infrastructure for mobility, have now become one of the essential elements of Alpine tourism since they reassure hikers that they are following the right path to their goal.

The Italian Alpine Club (CAI), as well as Alpine Clubs in Europe and in the rest of world, were the first associations to valorize, in other words enhance the status and value of these paths, not only for the purpose of discovery and to study the mountains, but also to promote tourism.

By retracing these principles of cultural knowledge, the Via Transalpina represents hiking in areas of great interest, which allows people to visit places and sites that also provoke spiritual inspiration and powerful emotions.

One of the most interesting customer segments today is seniors.

Within the Italian Alpine Club, the phenomenon is booming: wanderlust, pursuing the passions of youth that have been set aside due to the obligations of everyday life, reconnecting with old friends and the desire to live in contact with nature, with the overall goal of spending pleasant and healthy moments; these are just some examples of the multitude of motivations of this target group.

The motivations that inspire senior citizens to hike in the mountains ideally coincide to some extent with those of young people. However, the approach of seniors towards the mountains differs because of greater experience, wider social connections and the capacity to involve enthusiasts within and outside of the CAI. There are several groups that organize trips, meetings and conferences.

The mountains and the paths are opportunities to meet and share similar passions. The mountain huts, bivouacs and other structures in the different participating countries have evolved beyond their original concept of mere shelters, and have

become places of stories, memories and lived experiences in the mountains. A salubrious lifestyle that keeps the mind fresh, allows one to stay curious and generates the desire to see more and live a healthy life.

Crossing the Alps and finally reaching the sea, the Via Transalpina represents a path that is accessible to all, where the hikers can collect a multitude of different, unforgettable impressions.



**Antonio Zambon** – President of the Italian Alpine Club FVG (Friuli Venezia Giulia)





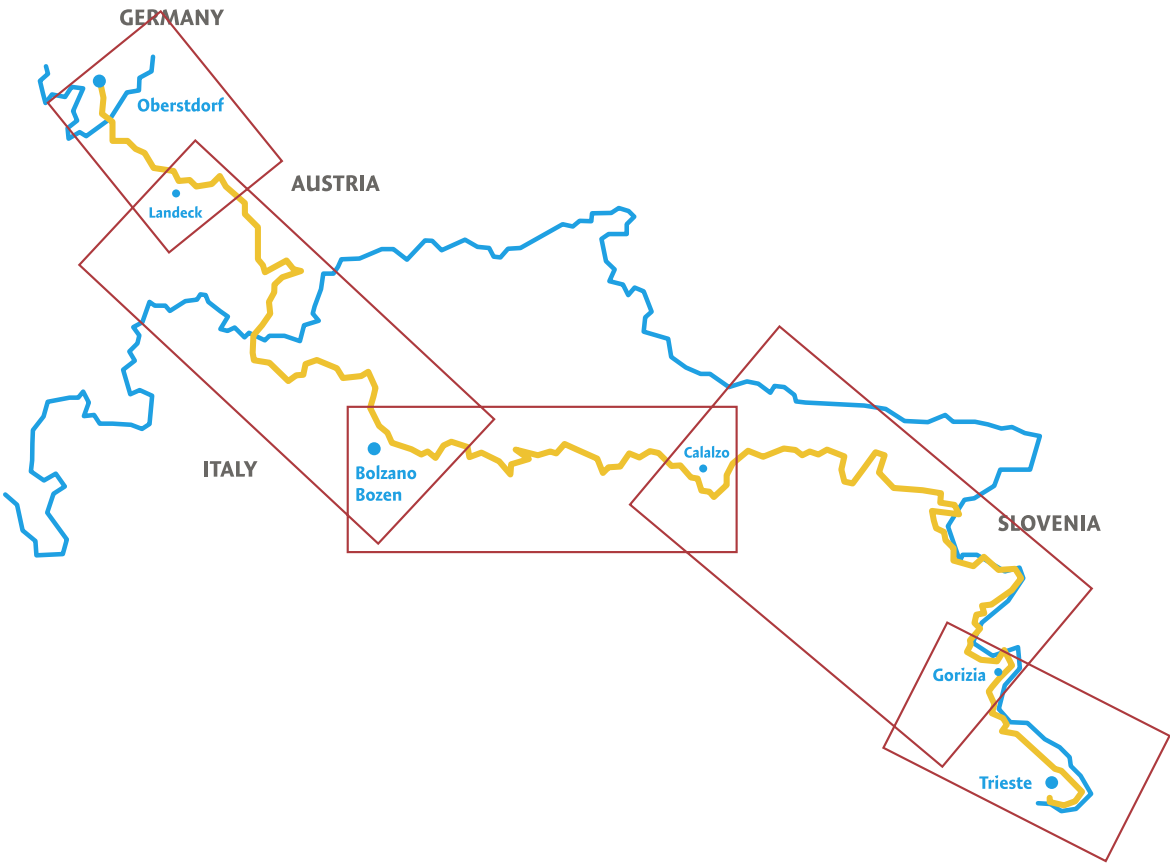
# The Via Transalpina:

## The different one-week sections

The study of the technical characteristics of the trail, the accessibility and the thematic offers was fundamental to organizing the trail into five main sections. These sections reflect the geographical accessibility by means of public transport, as well as the desire to group interesting thematic offers on site. At the same time, the idea to split the whole route into sections (each lasting about one week) allows hikers to plan shorter hikes or to organize a longer hiking experience based on thematic categories.

The five main sections of the route group the 103 updated stages into the following one-week segments: Oberstdorf–Landeck, Landeck–Bozen, Bozen–Calalzo, Calalzo–Gorizia and Gorizia–Trieste. Each section has its own uniqueness, as defined in the table below.

Sections	Themes
1. Oberstdorf – Landeck	Hiking Passion
2. Landeck – Bozen	On the Tracks of Ötzi the Iceman
3. Bozen – Calalzo	Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site
4. Calalzo – Gorizia	Alpine Wilderness
5. Gorizia – Trieste	Alpine Enogastronomy



Each individual stage within a section allows coherent visualization of the concept of a dynamic and alive route, where the hikers have the opportunity to gather unique impressions about a specific theme, while enjoying the activity of hiking itself. Furthermore, the different themes and corresponding landmarks provide tangible evidence of the viability and pulsating life within the mountain regions and their evolution during different periods of history.



# One route – many unique experiences

## Section 1: Hiking Passion

Oberstdorf – Landeck; 8 stages – 57 km

The section from Oberstdorf, Germany, to Landeck, located in Western Tyrol is known as the land of castles and palaces. It surprises its hikers with well-preserved medieval buildings where visitors embark on a journey into the past, discovering the glorious history of the region. Just a few of the highlights are Knappenwelt Gurgltal, Castle Biedenegg and Castle Wiesberg. This section, passing the High Alps of Allgäu, is one of the largest natural reserves in Germany and Western Tyrol. Immersed in untouched nature with its marvellous flora and fauna, it is the ideal area for the hiker to forget about everyday stress. Following the theme Hiking Passion, the 55+ hiker can easily find glimpses of the serenity and wellbeing of the rural idyll within the multitude of villages and museums, as well as at the numerous natural attractions, such as gorges, lakes and mountain peaks.

Coinciding with the popular Alp crossing E5, and partly overlapping with the long haul trail Adlerweg, this section gives its hikers the possibility to meet other hikers along the way and exchange valuable information, impressions and experiences, often leading to lasting friendships united by the same passion for hiking. Furthermore, a positive side effect of the concentration of long haul trails along the same route is the high quality of the infrastructure, such as well-maintained trails, clear signposting, a variety of accommodation possibilities, as well as good public transportation between the high number of entry and exit points.







## Section 2: On the tracks of Ötzi the Iceman

Landeck – Bozen; 31 stages – 162 km

Starting with a visit to the marvellous Castle Landeck, where the impressive history of Tyrol is displayed, and the ruins of Castle Schrofenstein, this section leads from Landeck to Bolzano, Italy. Thanks to its wide area and diverse altitudes, crossing the Texelgruppe Nature Park by foot gives its visitors the opportunity to discover the large variety of different types of vegetation and wildlife, and to experience the fascinating landscapes of the alpine mountain range. The Nature Park also comprises the territory of the Ötztal and Schnalstal Alps, two of the most significant watersheds and natural borders of the Alpine area, which in ancient times used to be crossed by hunters and shepherds. Also located within this area is the site where the world-famous naturally preserved mummy was discovered by chance in 1991: Ötzi, the Iceman. Along this section the 55+ hikers will pass the place of discovery of Ötzi near the Tisenjoch/Giogo di Tisa in the Schalstal Val/Senales Valley,

the archeoParc, which contains a museum about the age of the Iceman, and finally meet Ötzi himself in Bolzano, at the Archaeological Museum. Within this section the probability of meeting other hikers is very high, due to crossing and overlapping with other trails. Due to its easy accessibility and the flatness of the trail, day tourists and families are often encountered, especially on the last part of this section, in the area of Merano and Bolzano, where one can also enjoy a marvellous view over the vineyards and apple growing area of the Etsch Valley.



## Section 3: Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site

Bolzano – Calalzo; 26 stages – 131 km

During this section the visitors hike in the shade of the impressive Dolomites, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2009, which extend from the north of Italy, South Tyrol, Trento and Belluno to the Marmolada at 3,343 m above sea level. Composed of fossilized coral reefs and marine sediments, and due to their unique flora and fauna, the Dolomites are one of the most unique mountain massifs of the world. Not surprisingly, they attract thousands of hikers every year, enabling them to gaze at the most spectacular mountain scenery along the entire Via Transalpina. The unique geological features of the Dolomites are the subject of a multitude of different studies, whose insights are made accessible to the hikers through different facilities, such as the Geoparc Bletterbach, the Geo Museum, the Mineralogy Museum Monzoni, the Educational Trail of Arabba, the Museum Ladino of Livinalongo and the Geological Museum of the Dolomites. As well as being one of the most exciting areas to hike, this section is also characterized by the roughness of the Dolomites: the climate can change

drastically, with temperature differences of more than 20 degrees Celsius between morning hours and noon, even during summer. Hiking here can sometimes get rugged; therefore stable mountain trekking shoes are advised. This section is also highly frequented by short-distance hikers. On the frontline between Italy and Austro-Hungary during the First World War, the Dolomites have also been a fierce battleground of trench warfare, where wartime atrocities can be experienced even today. Especially along the trail towards the Passo Pordoi a multitude of ruins remain, such as trenches, tunnels and forts, which were installed to increase the survival odds of the soldiers. Moreover, the cruelty of the war is depicted at various sites, such as the German Military Cemetery Pordoi and indoor and outdoor museums.







## Section 4: Alpine Wilderness

Calalzo – Gorizia; 30 stages – 325 km

Along the section from Calalzo to Gorizia the hiker will discover the unique features of the alpine wilderness and the pristine nature of the eastern Alps. The valleys through which the stages lead include gorges, rivers, lakes and mountain peaks. Moreover, the route is characterized by different rock formations originating from alpine erosion. The combination of these attributes results in a complete immersion in nature and the perception of tranquillity and natural purity, which is also enhanced by the fact that the different stages of this section are not overrun by other hikers; one is more likely to encounter local inhabitants than tourists. Since this section is not heavily frequented, especially within its first part, the infrastructure is not overwhelming, resulting in a low number of accommodation facilities and relatively long routes. A variety of nature park centres and nature museums offer their insights into the biodiversity of this area and can easily be reached from the Via Transalpina. Along this section it is also possible to explore a multitude of

churches, temples and monasteries, such as the church Pieve di Gorto and the church of Timau, which confer a deep feeling of peace and spirituality to their visitors.

Enjoying the tranquillity and purity of the destination, hikers will find it difficult to imagine that the area also has a dark past. During the First World War, it was the location of fierce battles between the Italian and Austro-Hungarian army. Especially in the city of Gorizia the confrontations between the two sides were intense, Gorizia being a trench town. Proof of this can be seen in the numerous museums and at memorials, such as the First World War Museum in Gorizia and the memorial of Oslavia. Entering the city of Cividale, its visitors have the unique opportunity to experience the first Lombard duchy in Italy. Among many cultural sites within the city, the Lombard Temple, one of the most significant symbols of Lombard power in Italy, endorsed the city to be officially accepted as an UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2011.



## Section 5: Alpine Enogastronomy

Gorizia – Trieste; 8 stages – 73 km

The fifth and final section invites hikers to enjoy alpine wine and food within the multitude of local establishments and vineries along the stages, while admiring the drastic changes in landscape from an alpine scenery to the vastness of the Adriatic Sea. The section from Gorizia to Trieste also leads through the high plains of the Carso, letting its adventurers experience the rare beauty of the Trieste wine region. Its wine, which was already savoured in ancient times, has nowadays gained an even higher reputation through the development of different varieties such as Vitovska and Glera. In the immediate surroundings of the wine-producing area of Collio some of the most distinct wines of Italy are produced to this date. The landscape is characterized by a multitude of vineyards and farms, whose ancient methods of wine production can be experienced through organized tours.

Most of the section overlaps with the Alpe Adria Trail, allowing interesting encounters with other hikers. Moreover, more accommodation possibilities are available along the way than on the previous section. Although this area is popular among hikers, spirituality and tranquillity can be experi-

enced over the wide and easy to walk paths through foothills and forests. The well-known Bohemian-Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke already discovered the uniqueness and serenity of this area during his stay at Duino, where he started to write his famous “Duino Elegies”.

Additional highlights, which can be found at a reasonable distance from the trail, are the Skocjan Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As the largest known underground canyon in the world, they offer visitors a marvellous impression of this unique ecosystem, where Mediterranean, sub-Mediterranean, Central European, Illyrian and Alpine bio-geographical elements co-exist in harmony.

The province of Friuli Venezia Giulia was also not spared the horrors of the First World War, being the battleground of confrontations between the Italian and Austro-Hungarian army. Not to forget one of the great tragedies of mankind, and to remind the contemporary witnesses, traces of the First World War are displayed on the high plains of the Carso at outdoor museums, memorials, monuments and other exhibitions.





# Marketing and commercialization possibilities for the Via Transalpina

Long haul trails in the Alps and within other European natural regions are a current trend, and gaining high popularity. The increased interest of the hiker often focuses on particular trails, such as the E5, one of the most well-known long haul trails in the Alps, as well as the Dolomites High Route and the Tour du Mont Blanc. In addition, other popular long haul trails are the “Camino de Santiago” in Spain and “Rennsteig” in Germany. Notwithstanding the popularity of the phenomenon of long haul hiking, the marketing and commercialization of the Via Transalpina could prove challenging. The fact that the trail overlaps with other long haul trails, such as the E5 and the High Route of Merano, could decrease the perception of uniqueness of the route for the hiker, at least in the northern part of the trail. The quality of the trail, the different lengths of the stages and the heterogeneity of accommodation facilities are also challenges that have to be tackled in order to be

able to further adapt the Via Transalpina to the 55+ segment. Based on the information above, I anticipate that marketing and commercializing the Via Transalpina will present a number of challenging processes, during which the main approach should be “focus”. Above all, the low profile of the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ can be seen as its greatest opportunity. Especially the roots of the alpine history and its cultural landscape should be made accessible to prospective visitors so that they can be re-experienced by the hikers on the Via Transalpina. I therefore especially recommend focusing on specific parts of the Via Transalpina, the routes that characterize and communicate the peculiar soul of the hiking experience. The focus on all the paths that overlap with other trails, such as the E5 or the High Route of Merano, should be pursued to a lesser extent, meaning development should concentrate on stages with a particular character or atmosphere, or on those of

specific importance for the local population. Local people play an essential role by providing services such as guides and accommodation, and by shaping and communicating the history and present state of the cultural landscape through farming and dairying. Moreover, local inhabitants should be seen as ambassadors of their regional area by representing the history of their families and the unique lifestyle in the mountains, the local cuisine, the sustainable development within mountain regions, the shift towards the modern era, the cultural and historical traces of mankind within the Alps and much more. By designing a product based on the concepts of “human” and “nature” that can be interactively experienced by the hiker, it is possible to create a valuable alternative to the often overrun trails. This concept should also be the focus of the marketing approach. A few programs should be primarily centred within the core of the marketing campaign.

The marketing concept should be accurately calibrated between the tourist offices, tour operators and other sponsors. The Via Transalpina requires a coherent, specific and desirable image, in order to reach the final customers, who are specifically searching for an alternative to the ordinary.



**Manfred Häupl** – Hauser Exkursionen, Germany



# App and website

A mobile App for iOS and Android was developed to facilitate access to the route and to guide the hikers along their hiking experience.

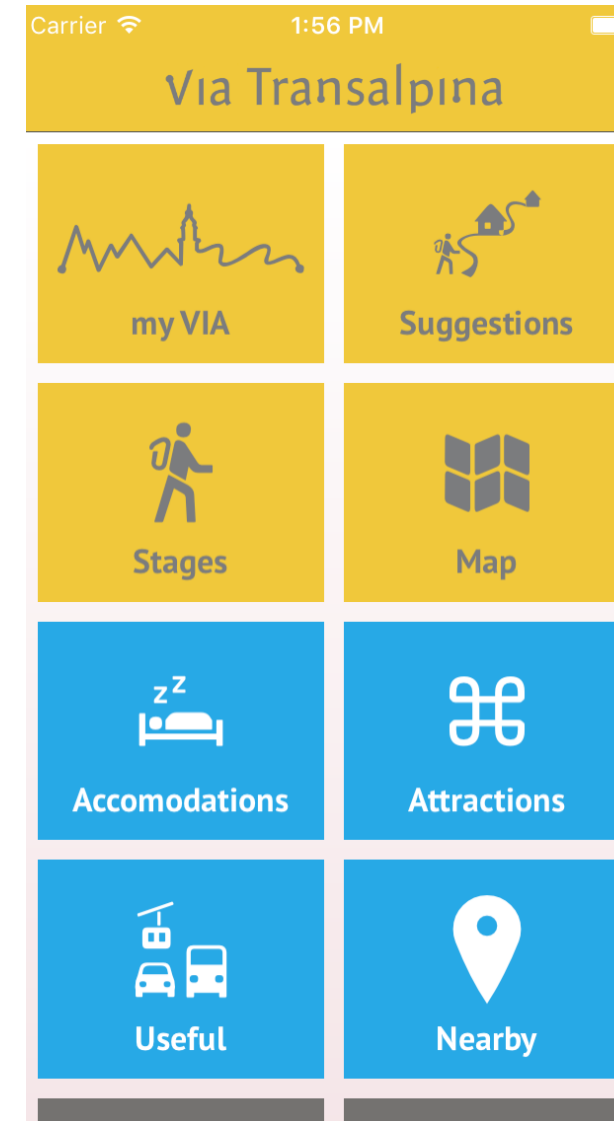
The Via Transalpina App is available for Androd and iOs and includes descriptions, GPS data and offline maps based on OSM. The app shows accommodation facilities and attractions along the trail, each of them geo-referentiated and up-to date. To facilitate route planning and guarantee safety on the trails, the App includes a weather forecast and information for emergency calls in the different countries crossed.

Finally, but more importantly, the App allows personalized planning of the route according to behavioral intentions of hikers or geographical and technical requirements. This means that every hiker can plan his/her own Via Transalpina based on the degree of fitness, the amount of hours he/she wants to spend hiking per day, the geographical area he/she is interested in.

Anyway, in case the hiker wants to rely on pre-planned packages, he/she can access the "Suggestions" section, in which the five weekly packages proposed in this brochure are presented.

The content of the App is shared with the one on the web page ([www.via-transalpina.eu](http://www.via-transalpina.eu)) dedicated to the promotion and communication of the Via Transalpina, which also includes downloadable digital maps of the trail.

The app is regularly updated via a DB connection and will be maintained for at least 3 years after the end of SilViAlp project.







THE ROUTE

ATTRACTIONS

ACCOMODATION

SERVICES

Via Transalpina  
supported by Via Alpina International Secretariat

GUIDES AND  
HIKING PACKAGES

DOWNLOADS

ABOUT

### The Via Transalpina long distance trail: Experience the Alps like you have never done before

The **Via Transalpina** is a long distance trail located in the Alps and is a classic north-south alpine crossing. Starting from Oberstdorf, Germany, leading through Austria and finishing after 750 km in Trieste, Italy, it covers approximately 50.000 meters in altitude in its entirety.

It allows you to experience a journey full of contrasts and encompasses a multitude of the most impressive mountain massifs of Europe: the Allgäu Alps, the Lechtal Alps, the Ötztal Alps, the Dolomites, the Carnic Alps and the Eastern Julian Alps.

Because of its segmentation into **5 main sections**, which are furthermore divided into **103 freely combinable stages**, the **Via Transalpina** is accessible to everyone who wants to experience a unique journey crossing the heart of the Alps.

Being a new trail which was developed from the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, the Via Transalpina has been modified in order



THE ROUTE

ATTRACTIONS

ACCOMODATION

< SERVICES >

Via Transalpina  
supported by Via Alpina International Secretariat

GUIDES AND  
HIKING PACKAGES

DOWNLOADS

ABOUT

TRANSPORT

LUGGAGE  
TRANSPORT

BIKE RENTAL

SAFETY AND  
HEALTH

ADDITIONAL  
INFORMATION

### The services for hikers along the Via Transalpina: Trouble-free hiking in the Alps

Discover the numerous services which will make your hike even more pleasant

Hiking in the Alps can be a very gratifying but also strenuous endeavor. In order to allow you to fully savor the unique and unforgettable experience of hiking within the alpine area, numerous **services for hikers** are available along the **Via Transalpina**.





## Section 4 Designing the model

### The future of the Via Transalpina



## A business model for the Via Transalpina: The focus on digital products

A business model embodies nothing less than the organizational and financial “architecture” of a business. It is not a spreadsheet or computer model, although a business model might well become embedded in a business plan and in income statements and cash flow projections.

Nevertheless, the notion refers in the first instance to a conceptual, rather than a financial, model of a business. It makes implicit assumptions about customers, the behaviour of revenues and costs, the changing nature of user needs, and likely competitor responses. It outlines the business logic required to earn a profit (if one is available to be earned) and, once adopted, defines the way the enterprise “goes to market.” But it is not quite the same as a strategy.

In the case of the SilViAlp project, the business model of the Via Transalpina is the final result of a long series of analyses of the product, the target group, the characteristics of local tourism supply and the vision for the Via Transalpina, its mission and strategic objectives.

The product resulting from the SilViAlp project on the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ is the Via Transalpina: an all-in-one product for individual travellers, with special attention for the needs of 55+ hikers in terms of effort, comfort, safety and learning opportunities. The all-in-one product is not sold as a package, but is offered on a website or a mobile App (for iOS and Android), with all booking references to complete the booking on external websites. Moreover, it can be configured in each detail by the end user, according to their interest in the geographical area, thematic offer or based on their degree of fitness. The high personalization allows one to adapt the existing route to fit individual needs, both in a technical and thematic sense.

This focus on personalization derives from the knowledge about the senior target group collected during the project, based on literature research, experts’ opinions, tourism stakeholders’ workshops and hikers’ feedback, and particularly from the fact that a segmentation only according to age (55+) is no longer meaningful for contemporary



seniors. Nowadays, correlation between the degree of fitness and age is low in the generation of baby boomers and young seniors. Therefore, given the fact that the route exists and the target is highly differentiated, there was a need for higher personalization to make the two match together. The configurability of the route according to the target's degree of fitness, as well as the possibility to personalize their own Via Transalpina depending on their own cultural or natural interests are therefore a very powerful tool to increase the accessibility and affordability of the route. The high personalization is achieved by splitting the trail into minimum geographical units (from one overnight opportunity to the next closest one), classifying each unit according to its degree of difficulty based on objective parameters, evaluating thematic highlights and developing a digital tool that enables customization of their "own" Via Transalpina according to the consumer's own needs. This idea, as a secondary result, maximises the occupancy of bed spaces, since minimum units correspond to the distance between two overnight possibilities and specific stages might be formed by grouping several units, depending also on room availability on site.



### A business model for what?

A delicate aspect to consider when presenting the business model is the organisational structure that is and will be in charge of implementing the strategic plan as well as the time frame of the SilViAlp project. In fact, the consortium of the project is working until the end of November 2016 and will also be in charge of implementing part of the strategic actions in the 3 years after the project ends, mainly with reference to digital tool optimization, marketing and updating. After this date, the effectiveness of the model, and eventually the evolution into a business plan, will depend on the internal provision or external recruitment of grants. Moreover, the SilViAlp consortium is not officially in charge of managing the Via Alpina brand, this being the mission of CIPRA International. Therefore, all strategic objectives that are beyond the purposes of the SilViAlp project (e.g. route maintenance, signposting, etc.) are not directly controllable by the consortium. The support of CIPRA International during the SilViAlp project has been continuous and highly significant. Yet this constant support does not ensure continuity in implementing concrete actions, which depend on the decisions of regional members of the Secretariat. Therefore, the business plan presented in this

report will focus mainly on the digital tools offered within the SilViAlp project designed to help visitors experience the Via Transalpina (i.e. on the App and website), and only when strictly necessary does it make reference to potential strategic objectives of the route as a whole. Nevertheless, it should be clear that the strategic objectives and the derived business model presented below are coherent with the overall aims of sustainable valorisation of the trail shared by the Via Alpina International Steering Committee.

### Mission and vision of the Via Transalpina

The business model is based on the mission and vision of the Via Transalpina. The vision that local stakeholders, as well as project partners and experts have shared is the following:

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*The Via Transalpina is a well-known, customizable, designed-for-all trail, which connects four Alpine countries, many cultures and a variety of Alpine lifestyles and landscapes.*

---

This vision is coherent with the original interpretation of the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, provided by the Via Alpina International



Secretariat in the guidelines for the use of the trademark. Here, the yellow route is described as the one containing “the history of men and the Alps”

The main barriers to overcome in order to make this vision real are **knowledge and supply quality barriers**. Knowledge barriers refer to the notoriety of the trail for local stakeholders and tourists, as well as precise information about the route and on other available facilities and tourist attractions; supply quality refers to signposting, and also the quality, capacity and comfort of hospitality services and the presence of additional services, such as luggage transportation.

According to these two main types of barriers, the mission of the SilViAlp partners is the following:

---

*Increasing the accessibility, the comfort and awareness of the Via Transalpina, as well as inspiring potential hikers to do the Transalpina Experience, crossing the Alps and their natural and cultural beauties.*

---

The mission is transformed into some main strategic objectives regarding accessibility, comfort and awareness raising about the



trail. Strategic objectives are expressed in a Balanced Scorecard, which enables one to distinguish between macro-objectives and micro-objectives, with detailed indications on how to monitor the achievement of goals through key performance indicators. The Balanced Scorecard represents a background study for the business plan, but for the sake of brevity, is not presented in this report.

### A value proposition of the Via Transalpina

The value proposition of the Via Transalpina, derived from vision and mission, can be expressed as follows:

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*Experience the variety of Alpine environments. Cross the Alps on your personalized Via Transalpina*

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The Via Transalpina allows a unique hiking experience on the trail, based on a detailed database of digital and GPS information, a high degree of personalization and a reliable App-based system to cover the distance between Oberstdorf and Triest.

Compared to other long routes, the Via Transalpina:

- Is a tailor-made route, which individual

hikers can organise at their will;

- Can be experienced as a long distance hiking trail, but can also be understood as a collection of shorter stages of hiking experiences, to be undertaken as weekly breaks in different timeframes, thanks to the updated classification of stages;
- Crosses a variety of landscapes, cultures and languages, which share the Alpine denomination, but are very different in their expressions;
- Accesses two outstanding World Heritage Sites, one based on natural values (the Dolomites UNESCO WHS), one based on cultural values (Civiale UNESCO WHS)
- Connects the highest Alpine peaks with the Mediterranean atmosphere of the Adriatic Sea.

### The target of the Via Transalpina

The target customer of the Via Transalpina is a hiker aged 55+, with a good or medium level of training. Using the traditional segmentation of the senior target group, this hiker is a baby boomer or young senior, who tends to be active in their lifestyle, familiar with digital technologies and interested in hiking. He/she is used to planning hiking holidays autonomously and uses a Smartphone in his/her daily life for communication and searching for information.



He/she is fascinated by natural beauty and by rural culture and this is the reason why he/she likes undertaking multiple hiking tours during the year. He/she often travels off peak season, since a quiet environment and wild nature are an added value to his/her hiking holiday. He/she normally hikes in a small group of friends, sometimes as a couple. When he/she considers taking a hiking tour, he/she collects all the relevant information on the Internet, and only rarely buys books or travel guides.

#### **The key resources and partners of the Via Transalpina**

The key resources for the Via Transalpina are all assets (natural, cultural, human) required to offer and deliver the value proposition to the customer segments. The presence of natural environments with a particular status (protected areas, World Heritage Sites) enhances the significance of the key resources for the customer. Human resources, in terms of inhabitants of the territories crossed by the trail, represent the highest potential for this customer segment, both because the Alpine environment is a populated mountain area with a long tradition in culture, language, dialects, manufacture, etc., and because traditions, expressions of local culture and manufac-

ture are at the heart of the interests of the target group. Moreover, digital technologies need to be considered as key resources for the success of the project, since they allow the personalization of the product itself. A last key resource for the success of the digital product is high-quality descriptive and illustrative material, which enables digitally visualizing what in reality is on site.

The key partners to transform the outcome of the SilViAlp project into a successful product are not only locally based stakeholders (public and private sector, tourism SMEs, transport operators, inhabitants, associations, etc.) involved in the product development and marketing of the trail, but also international stakeholders, such as the exiting International Secretariat of the Via Alpina managed by CIPRA International. The technology partner that develops and maintains the website and App is also crucial. Close contact between the technology partner and both local and international levels of stakeholders is fundamental to transfer the knowledge and tools developed within the project and give them a longer perspective.





## The key activities for the Via Transalpina

The key activities that should be undertaken for the success of the Via Transalpina product, its sustainable development and marketing include **awareness raising**, both in hikers' communities and in local stakeholders, as well as **management of the digital tools** (website and App), **identity management, marketing and communication**. The popularity of the trail among local tourism operators and Destination Management Organizations is quite low. Therefore, in order to transform the digital map and the mobile App into a success, the involvement of local stakeholders who are willing to promote the trail by embedding a personalized map in their own website will be crucial. The same strategic importance applies to international key partners, such as the Via Alpina International Secretariat, which should be involved in sharing the digital map on the official Via Alpina website, in order to avoid double (and not precise enough) information sources. Cooperation with the Via Alpina International Secretariat is also pursued in the identity management. There should be coherence between the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ in its original branding and the new product developed within the project, the Via Transalpina.

Ideally, the brand of the project App and website should be coordinated with the official one. Marketing and communication should take place with the support of digital platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram, with the aim of increasing knowledge about the trail, and also the tool to personalize it. Personalization, together with Alpine beauty, are the two main aspects to focus on in marketing.

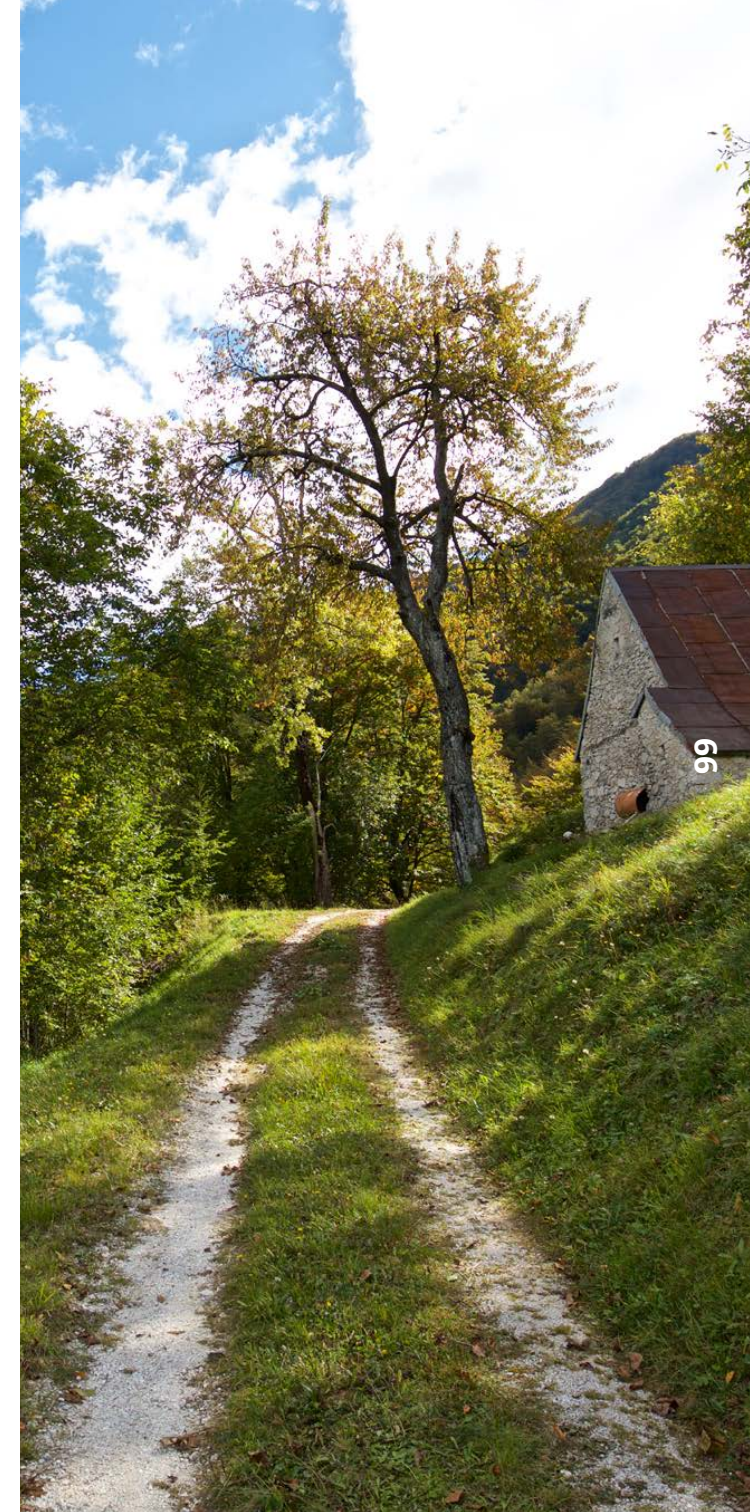
A further area of intervention refers to **infrastructure development**. This area goes beyond the strict needs of the digital product; nevertheless it is crucial to improve the quality of the overall hiking experience. Infrastructure development does not refer to new hotel buildings, but rather to increasing bed capacities where they are scarce, as well as to developing a smart and homogeneous system of maintaining and signposting the trail. More bed capacity might be achieved through innovative formulas such as the "Albergo diffuso" model. This is a particular accommodation system where ancient local houses, often furnished in a traditional way, are offered to guests under the coordination of a central reception service. An updated system for signposting should be pursued in accordance with local Alpine Clubs, in order to ensure safe hiking along the trail. Both infrastructural improvements are crucial to support

digital technologies, since these are highly relevant, but sometimes they need physical support, to guarantee a high-quality tourism experience.

## Customer relationships and communication channels for the Via Transalpina

*Customer relationships:* Customer relationships are established between the technology partner of SilViAlp and hikers, with the aim of collecting their travel experiences, as well as obtaining feedback on the maintenance of the route, possible additional points of interest, and new functionalities of the App. The website, the App and the dedicated Facebook page are all instruments to create a community of interested hikers, which allows not only bidirectional relationships with the information provider, but also consumer to consumer exchanges of feedback, inputs and suggestions.

*Channels:* The value proposition is delivered to customers through digital communication and the distribution of the Via Transalpina App. Consumers (hikers) create the Via Transalpina product mainly through digital media platforms, particularly through the App and the website. The direct involvement of users is possible through comments, which, according to the principles





of web 2.0, allow continuous development and updates of the information as well as community building among hikers. Moreover, the digital map is expected to be embedded into tourism boards' and accommodation providers' websites, so that the product is widespread among different highly visited websites. The Facebook page works as additional digital source to promote the website and the App, and should be a source for inspiration for potential hikers. Therefore, the use of amazing pictures and the sharing of existing topics of discussion along the route work as an additional inspirational source.

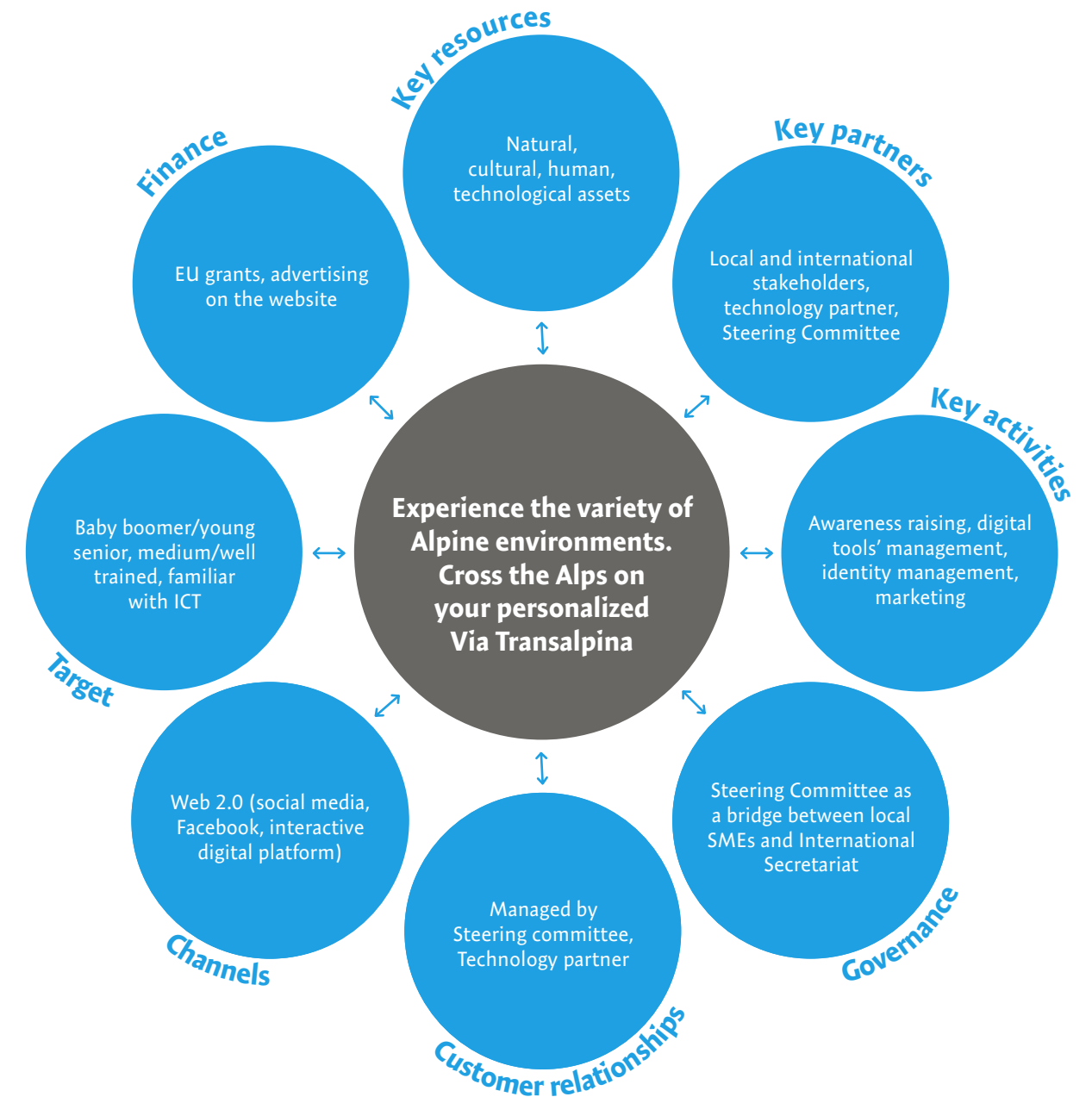
#### Governance system behind the Via Transalpina

The governance of project partners and local/international stakeholders of the Via Transalpina is quite complex. As far as project activities are concerned, the technology partner has committed to managing the digital platforms (App, website) for free during the three years after project closure. Moreover, the Lead Partner (Eurac Research) will continue to coordinate the Steering Committee of the project for three years, with the voluntary participation of the remaining project partners. This pool of experts should form a team to support the

Via Alpina International Secretariat, bridging the gap between international institutions and local tourism stakeholders and enhancing business opportunities along the trail. Once the project is finished, it is important to define a framework for continuing the project work and integrating results into the International Secretariat network.

#### Financial issues on the economic sustainability of the Via Transalpina

**Finance:** The creation, testing and launching phase of the Via Transalpina map and App were financed by the project grants, amounting in total to about € 250,000. After project closure, maintaining the digital tools as well as promoting and updating the App (corresponding to a staff cost of approximately € 5,000 per year) will partly be covered through internal funding by the technology partner of SilViAlp and partly through the introduction of advertising banners into the website. The Steering committee will continue working on a voluntary basis.



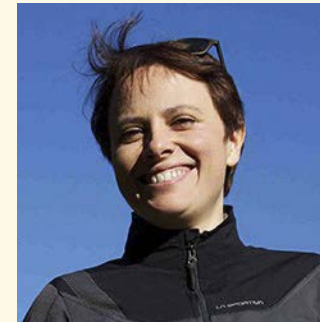


# Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site and the Via Transalpina: Mutual learning from good practices

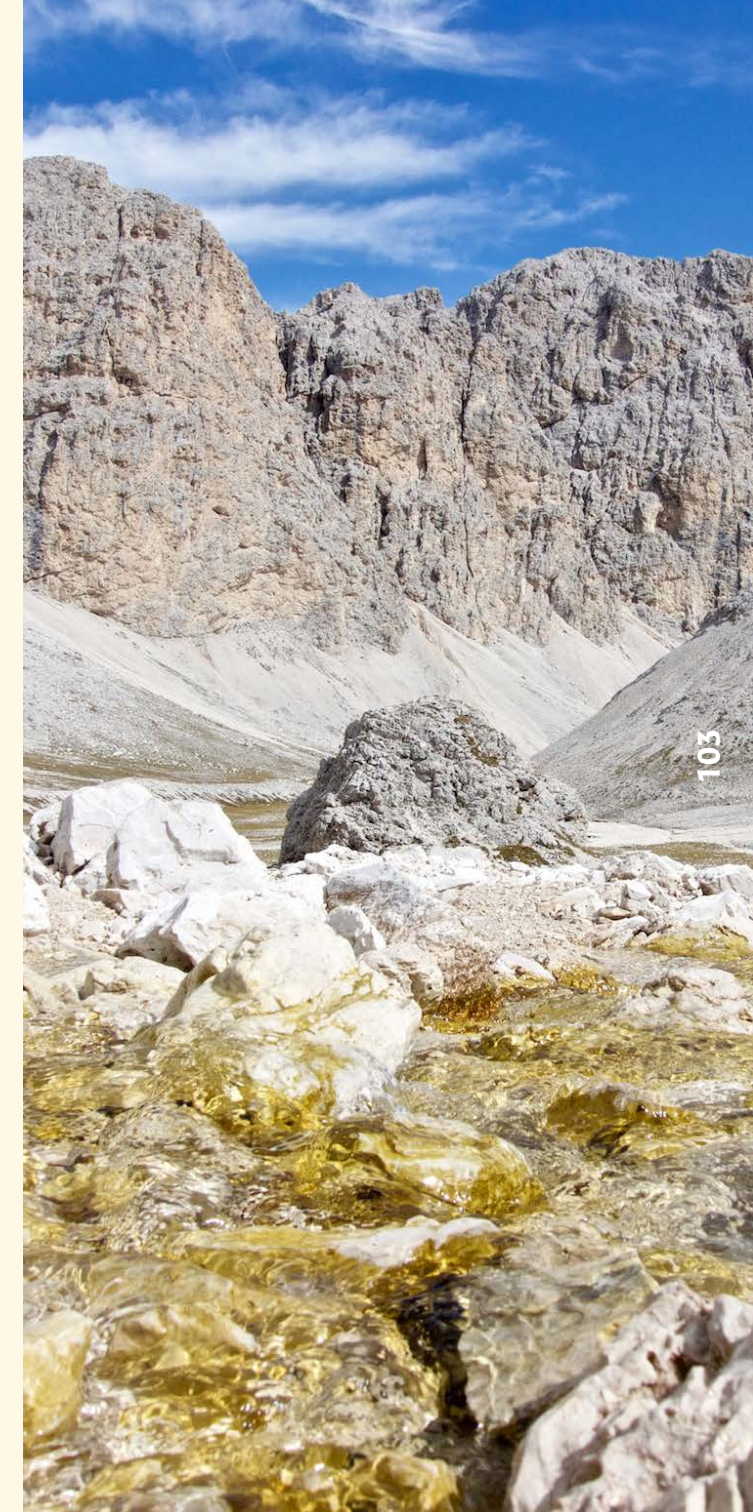
The Dolomites are one of the most densely populated mountainous regions in the Alps, and also one of the leading tourist destinations in the world. On 26 June 2009 the UNESCO listed the Dolomites as a World Heritage Site (WHS) for the aesthetic value of its landscape and the scientific importance of its geology and geomorphology. The 142,000 hectares that make up the UNESCO WHS form a kind of archipelago spread over a vast Alpine area, and falling within the boundaries of five Italian provinces (Belluno, Bolzano/Bozen, Pordenone, Trento and Udine) comprise considerable institutional and administrative diversity. The Dolomites UNESCO WHS is crossed by the Via Transalpina and enhances its value through amazing views during the hiking experience. Crossing the Dolomites, hikers can experience the best mountain peaks of the Dolomites area. The Dolomites are important to the development of the Via Transalpina not only for the landscape beauty, but also for the unique governance structure and network management.

These issues are addressed within the Overall Management Strategy (OMS of the Dolomites UNESCO), which includes UNESCO-related topics, subjects indicated by the World Heritage Committee and matters of local importance that came to light during a participatory process (#Dolomites2040). During 11 meetings in the valleys touched by the UNESCO World Heritage Site, a series of workshops similar to those of SilViAlp were held to involve the heterogeneous stakeholders of the various component sites in strategic decisions. Public administration bodies, municipalities and mountain communities, collective ownership organisations, mountain sports clubs and associations, ski lift management companies, mountain huts' owners and managers, farmers and animal breeders, and cultural organizations and tourist industry operators were all involved in designing their vision for the future of the Dolomites area. The OMS is therefore based on stakeholder participation and signals a transition from a model of conflict among stakeholders

in competition to a model of cooperation within a common network, where the natural environment is central to social and economic issues. WHS listing is a golden opportunity for the area to try out innovative policies for conscious growth that foster the concept of natural heritage as a living environment. The OMS is a voluntary collective agreement, rather than a mandatory set of rules and it is a set of strategies and objectives that can be tailored to the different places and verified over time, based on a process that embraces mediation and compensation between those involved. The Via Transalpina therefore permits people to walk in the heart of the Dolomites in a sustainable manner; the Dolomites UNESCO WHS embodies a good example of strategy development for sustainable tourism along the trail.



**Marcella Morandini** – Director of the Foundation Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site





# Hospitaleros voluntarios on the Camino de Santiago trail: The voluntary-based hospitality model

The Camino de Santiago was declared the first European Cultural Itinerary by the Council of Europe in 1987. Almost thirty years have passed since the First International Congress of the Camino de Santiago, held in Jaca (Huesca) took place. During this occasion representatives of the Church and civil associations, most of them founded especially for the occasion, gathered to celebrate this achievement. At that time, the route – which crossed the Pyrenees by Somport (Aragon) and Roncesvalles (Navarra) – had already been marked with yellow arrows to Santiago de Compostela (Galicia) by Elijah Valiña, a priest of O Cebreiro (Lugo).

From the beginning it was perceived as necessary to facilitate the transit of pilgrims by creating shelters, since it was clear that „there is no path if there are no pilgrims“ and pilgrims need shelter for the night at the end of each stage along the route. It was necessary to sensitize local authorities

(municipalities and parishes), in order to encourage them to offer some minimally equipped space with beds and toilets to pilgrims.

Some of the associations that nowadays comprise the Spanish Federation of Friends of the Camino de Santiago – FEAACS – collaborated from the beginning: signalling pathways, searching for shelters (some built by themselves), hosting pilgrims in spaces belonging to the city council or the parish.

The presence of shelters along the Camino de Santiago was deemed as indispensable, since it allowed the pilgrim (or traveller) to regain strength and heal their wounds in order to resume the hike the next day. Accordingly, it was deemed necessary to have a hostel at the end of each stage, not after more than 30 km (except for individual cases). This limit was due to the load carried by the pilgrim, the difficulty of the terrain and the need for security in a broader sense.

Hospitality by hospitaleros of FEAACS is provided by volunteers, who work for free for several nights and manage a shelter without receiving anything in return. These services are provided only according to the principles of closeness and empathy with the pilgrims, regardless of religious creed or travel modes. The FEAACS, without having planned a clear idea of what kind of shelter it wanted for pilgrims, and ignoring completely the lucky success of the Hospitaleros voluntarios, launched a model of innovative and spontaneous hosting which received increasing international valence.

The success of voluntary hosting along the Camino de Santiago might be a best practice to consider for the Via Transalpina, where some parts of the route have limited accommodation capacity.

With the increase in flows that may occur after the introduction of the Via Transalpina map and App, this model could be considered for implementation, based on the initiative of local or transnational organizations.



**Maria Angeles Fernandez Fernandez** – Former President (2010-2016) of the Spanish federation of the associations on the “Camino de Santiago”, Spain



# Lessons learnt and project replicability

SilViAlp's high quality lessons are principles extrapolated from multiple sources, during hiking, the participatory processes, the research on existing initiatives for senior tourism, and finally the preparation of the business model. The knowledge acquired on route management and the working schemes adopted for SilViAlp can be adapted and replicated in new scenarios along the Via Alpina Trails and in other hiking trails. Below are listed the main lessons learned during the project.

**1. A hiking route can only be studied after hiking on it.** The most powerful analytical tool during the project SilViAlp was hiking itself. This helped with understanding the technical challenges of the trail, but also revealed the most attractive landscapes and the most interesting attraction points, the most suitable accommodation places and the variety of culinary offers. Without the hiking experience and the evaluation of the trail through adequate indicators, there would have been no feeling for the possible organizational, management and technical challenges that may need to be faced.

## 2. There is no route without hikers.

On the one hand, to achieve success and to ensure a good maintenance status, a route needs to be hiked. On the other hand, information and adequate technical devices are basic elements for hikers to start a long hike. In this sense, SilViAlp has clearly made a huge contribution to increasing the accessibility of the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™. Workshops during the SilViAlp project have also helped us to better understand who is the real average hiker along the Via Alpina Yellow Trail™. Nowadays, hikers are the real experts of a route and they rely on digital technologies to face daily challenges while hiking. Digital technologies allow continuous planning of the journey (e.g. room availability check, weather forecast, etc.) and reduce the necessity of advanced planning. Even in the case of a rough plan, hikers will increasingly rely on mobile Apps for last minute decisions. Nevertheless, the SilViAlp workshops also revealed that some seniors are not familiar with digital technologies or are not willing to use them. A next step after the end of the project is therefore planning to update printed material







to promote the route for this sub-target. A last aspect concerning hikers' needs relates to off-season offers. Seasons are changing, seniors have a highly flexible time budget, and the window of opportunity to walk along the route during shoulder seasons is becoming bigger.

An increasing effort needs to be made in terms of guaranteeing minimum services even in shoulder seasons, especially in the most remote areas.

### 3. Senior hikers are not all the same.

Literature and previous studies or projects confirm that SilViAlp might be the right project for some of the emerging targets within the senior age group: retiring baby boomers, young seniors and new-age seniors. These targets may be interested in technology and innovation and at the same time they may have the right physical conditions to hike along a long hiking trail. Indeed, baby boomers do not consider themselves as seniors in the true sense. They feel younger than their real chronological age, and do not want to identify or mix with other older people. Moreover, although this generation is greying, they are increasingly enjoying active lifestyles, and travel remains a significant component of their lives. They are more demanding, enjoying travelling to learn more about other countries,

and continuously looking for special interest travel as well as new innovative experiences. Young seniors seek new creative personal challenges and experiences that enhance their self-actualization, rather than bargain price packages. The new-age elderly are more independent and they would be less receptive to trips where everything is "done for them" than other groups of older consumers. In order to achieve an increase in senior tourism on the Via Transalpina, personalisation and experience design will be crucial issues.

### 4. Tourism facilities are necessary, but not enough.

Good tourism facilities (comfortable accommodation, well-maintained routes) are basic requirements for hikers, especially for senior hikers. Without them, it is very difficult to attract the target. Nevertheless, the competition among routes is increasing and a good basic infrastructure is not enough to achieve success. There are plenty of "must hike" routes, e.g. E5, Alte Vie, etc., and hikers will choose which trail to hike based on several factors, which go far beyond the simple existence of basic infrastructure. A Unique Selling Proposition (USP) needs to be identified for the route, to achieve better positioning of the trail among the hikers' community. In the case of the Via Transalpina, the



uniqueness relies on the rich combination of natural and cultural beauties. In relation to the USP proposition, the tourism Via Transalpina is created by aggregating different stages at one's convenience. Basic infrastructure (trail difficulty, access by public means of transport, accommodation facilities) is helping to shape the product, but the interactions with local farmers or shepherds add additional value to the hikers' experience. Moreover, reliable and comprehensive information is crucial to increase the perception of safety along the route, to minimise unpleasant surprises while hiking. Storytelling and integrated information on the route can therefore make a difference, especially for non-package travellers.

**5. Routes are not patchworks.** Routes are made up of large numbers of micro-destinations, each of which is potentially willing to integrate its hotspots into the main trail's attraction. Nevertheless, the idea to squeeze each hotspot on the route into the final tourism product would not lead to success. Analysing a route implies understanding its USP not as the arithmetic sum of local attractions, but rather as a general, all-embracing topic to describe the experience of hiking. Therefore, the creativity lies in the ability to create a new,

macro-identity, which somehow comprises the local micro-identities, but nevertheless has an outstanding value per se. The task is complex, but not impossible. Starting with a SWOT analysis of the whole trail and sharing it with different local stakeholders proved to be a good method to achieve a new vision for the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, which goes far beyond the sum of its marvellous attractions and creates the Via Transalpina.

**6. Transnational networks require local work.** Collaboration among all the institutions, touristic organizations, private stakeholders and public bodies is crucial to keep the route alive. Only if a good territorial network is ensured, can a transnational cooperation process grow. The workshops during the project provided excellent opportunities to stimulate the needs and interests of all sides. The original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™, as well as the updated Via Transalpina, need local roots and transnational perspectives. Integrating the route into the local tourism offer and persuading tourism operators to use the digital map as a tool to enhance hiking tourism is a crucial aspect for the success of the trail. Therefore, after the end of the project, the Consortium intends to keep sharing good practices, studying the tourism demand and supply,



networking stakeholders, and monitoring the target group's needs. The Steering Committee of SilViAlp, committed to work on a voluntary basis for 3 years after the end of the project, will strive to create a connection between local instances (and particularly addressing the needs of tourism SMEs) and transnational institutions (with specific reference to the International Secretariat).

**7. Marketing is crucial to achieve success.** The main challenge, after creating a well-structured tourism product on the Via Alpina Yellow Trail, is the ability to attract new hikers. A marketing plan tailored to the needs of the target group is therefore crucial to raise interest and spread information about the Via Transalpina and the newly available digital tools. If the launch of the mobile App and website are not accompanied by a good marketing strategy, the risk of ending up with an unknown Via Transalpina in a few months is very high. To avoid this outcome, a series of articles should be provided to specialized magazines and a digital marketing budget invested in order to address tailored user groups.



#### 8. Routes are cooperation chances at the EU level.

A route that crosses different EU nations is a chance to create bridges and cooperation opportunities among different cultures. Product development activity, more than on other levels of cooperation, enhances the creation of a network of stakeholders, including SMEs. Senior tourism addresses a target that still needs to overcome linguistic and organisational barriers to travel across Europe at ease. The screening of the infrastructural stock, as well as the offer of high-quality and tailor-made digital services along the whole trail may help to overcome these barriers and encourage both transnational cooperation between tourism stakeholders and visits abroad for senior tourists. Both levels of interchange create interesting dynamics to increase territorial cohesion at the EU level.

**9. Success in route management requires continuity.** Route management is a complex task. Not only because long routes cover a variety of territories with different cultures, languages and organizational settings, but also because the challenge of keeping these complex networks alive is based on collective will, on effective governance systems, and on transnational funding capacity. It became clear at the start of the SilViAlp

project that one of the main critical issues facing the original Via Alpina Yellow Trail™ after its creation was a lack of continuity in promotional and maintenance activities after the former Alpine Space projects ended. Indeed, also after the end of the SilViAlp project, continuity in financial and operational activities will be required to ensure success of the digital products and an increase in the number of visits, especially in the most remote areas.

#### 10. The Via Transalpina is a model for other trails.

The analytical and product development methods encountered in SilViAlp are both worth implementing in other trails. The analytical part, based on hiking, assessing the trail through standard indicators and stakeholder involvement, and ending with the SWOT analysis of the route, provided a first draft of the development opportunities for the route and the challenges to be faced. The product development part, based on smaller trail units, thematic offers and longer sections, produced a business model, which defines a vision, a mission, a value proposition and some strategic objectives for the route as a whole. Having a clear picture of the starting point and the point of arrival is definitely the most important issue in route development.





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