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**Article**

## Developing ethical consumer personas for the tourism industry: A means-end approach

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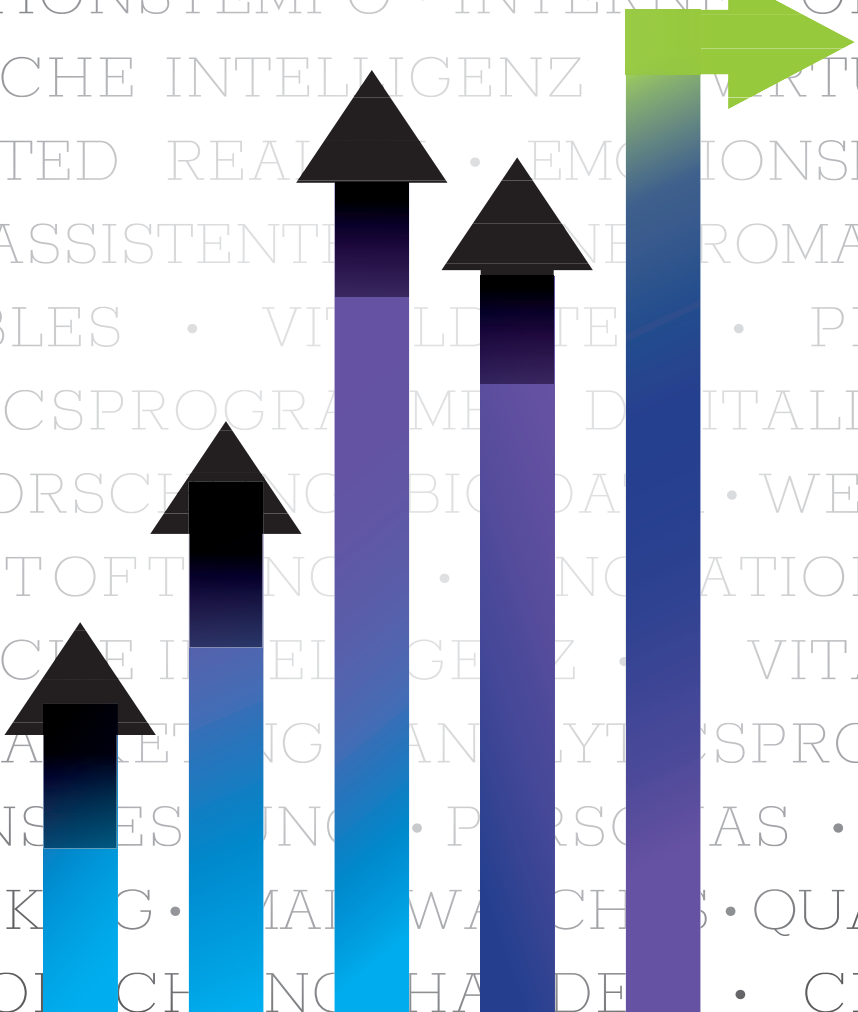
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# Vorwort

Die **Marktforschung** ist ein vergleichsweise **junges Fachgebiet**, das in seiner Entwicklung bereits eine **Vielzahl von Veränderungen** erfahren hat. Kaum eine Disziplin verändert den eigenen Methodenkanon aufgrund technischen Fortschritts so häufig wie das Handwerk der Marktforschung. Seit dem Aufkommen des Internets hat sich dort das **Innovationstempo**, wie in anderen Marketingdisziplinen auch, **deutlich erhöht**.

In den vergangenen Jahren waren die **Digitalisierung** sowie **Big Data** wichtige Themen. Technische Innovationen wie **Chatbots** werden zumindest testweise zunehmend eingesetzt. **Künstliche Intelligenz**, **Virtual** und **Augmented Reality** sind weitere Techniken, die das Potenzial haben, die Marktforschung nachhaltig zu wandeln. Die Vernetzung im **Internet of Things** kann der klassischen Marktforschung Konkurrenz machen, indem auch ohne klassische Marktforschung Nutzerdaten gesammelt werden. Auch **Sprachassistenten** können dazu eingesetzt werden.

Die **qualitative Marktforschung** profitiert ebenfalls von der Digitalisierung. So können **Smartphones** mit ihren integrierten Kameras dazu eingesetzt werden. Der technische Fortschritt beflügelt die Forschung unter dem Schlagwort **Neuromarketing**. **Eyetracking und Emotionsmessung** wird **via Webcam** möglich und bringt das Marktforschungslabor in nahezu jeden Haushalt. Einfache Hirnstrommessungen finden über Kopfhörer statt und mit Hilfe von **Smartwatches** und **Wearables** werden Vitaldaten von Menschen zum festen Bestandteil der Forschung. Last but not least sind **Google und Co.** zu nennen, die mit ihren **Analyticsprogrammen** der etablierten Marktforschung Konkurrenz machen.

Diese und weitere Veränderungen wollen wir in dieser Ausgabe von „PraxisWissen Marketing – German Journal of Marketing“ unter dem Titel **„Innovation in der Marktforschung“** analysieren. In acht Beiträgen werden der **Einsatz humanoider Roboter** in der Marktforschung, **qualitative Forschungsmethoden** wie etwa der Einsatz von **Gesichtserkennung** sowie des **Eye Trackings** näher untersucht. Es gibt ein Fallbeispiel aus dem **Handel**, in dem Erkenntnisse des **Neuromarketings** berücksichtigt werden sowie eines aus dem **Tourismus**, in dem **Personas für das nachhaltige Reisen** vorgestellt werden.

Wir bedanken uns ganz herzlich bei allen Autorinnen und Autoren, den Mitgliedern des Herausgeberbeirats und allen anderen Personen, die an der Entstehung dieses Werks beteiligt waren.

Berlin im Oktober 2020

Andrea Bookhagen

Andrea Rumler

# Inhalt

- 7** Einsatzpotenziale humanoider Roboter in der Marktforschung – eine explorative Analyse unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Fallbeispiels Pepper  
Kathrin Reger-Wagner  
Günter Buerke
- 21** Die Anwendung von Gesichtserkennung im stationären Einzelhandel und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Kaufbereitschaft  
Christina Koch  
Marcus Simon  
Klaus Mühlbäck
- 41** Developing ethical consumer personas for the tourism industry: a means-end approach  
Steffen Sahm
- 53** Neuromarketing – Grundlagen, Best-Practice-Beispiele aus dem Handel und kritische Würdigung  
Gerd Nufer
- 69** Text versus Speech versus Video – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Verwendung gesprochener Sprache im digitalen Marktforschungsinterview  
Holger Lütters
- 87** The photo-based qualitative interview – potential applications to market research and current challenges  
Anne-Katrin Kleih  
Mira Lehberger  
Kai Sparke
- 99** Empathic market research: The added value of eye tracking data for affective computing UX research  
Alexander Hahn  
Katharina Klug  
Florian Riedmüller
- 111** Automatisierung qualitativer Marktforschung mit Künstlicher Intelligenz  
Annette Hoxtell

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## Developing ethical consumer personas for the tourism industry: a means-end approach

**Steffen Sahm**

This paper introduces a method to develop ethical consumer personas for the tourism industry based on personal values as a motivational construct influencing consumer decisions in tourism. These personas, i.e. archetypes of ethical consumers, advance previously developed shades of ethical tourists ranging from soft to hard, more or less committed (e.g. Swarbrooke and Horner 2007) differing in their interest and actual ethical behaviours. The interest in consumer personas surfaces in reports on consumer goods companies (Janke, 2019) or the Slovenian Tourism Board (2016) who work with their own developed consumer personas and personas discussed in the literature on design thinking (Uebernickel et al 2015).

**Steffen Sahm** has been working as marketing project manager and freelance marketing consultant for several years before entering academia as a lecturer in marketing and tourism. The academic environment triggered his decision to start his part-time doctoral journey at the University of Gloucestershire, which is expected to be completed in 2020. [steffen.sahm@gmx.de](mailto:steffen.sahm@gmx.de)

## 1. Ethical consumer behaviour in tourism

The awareness and interest in environmental, climate-related and social issues (summarized as ethical issues) grows among consumers in Germany (Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und nukleare Sicherheit und Umweltbundesamt 2018). Similarly, ethical issues such as environmental degradation, biodiversity, climate change, and social issues such as human rights, social justice or poverty are salient in surveys revealing German holidaymakers' awareness and interests in those issues. For example, 28 percent of German vacationers express interest in sustainable (social and environmental) vacations (FUR 2014) and 57 percent state that their vacations shall be socially and/or environmentally benign (FUR 2019). Further, ethical issues and consumer behaviour have recently drawn attention of several professional marketing trade magazines (Göpfert 2019; Hermes 2019; White et al 2019).

On the other hand, ethical concerns and/or interests of consumers only translate to a minor extent into actual ethical tourism behaviour (Kreilkamp et al 2017), e.g. only two percent of German holidaymakers compensate flight emissions or only 23 percent state that they consider ethical issues among other criteria in their vacation planning (FUR 2019).

Expressed attitudes, interests or concerns towards ethical issues among consumers need to be taken with caution since concerns, interests or attitudes are not always ethically motivated. Ethical consumers are motivated beyond self-interest (Harrison, Newholm and Shaw 2005) and they consider other humans, the environment or animals in their consumption decisions. On the other hand, even ethical consumers/ tourists differ in their commitments and intensities of how ethical issues are considered and translated into vacation choice and behaviours. What stronger ethical consumers unite is their commitment, personal responsibility and personal ethical values such as social justice, environmental protection, equality, animal or human rights. Empirical evidence reveals how such commitments and personal responsibility are related to personal ethical values and how those influence ethical consumer decisions in tourism, e.g. the choice of vacation organisation, type of vacation (e.g. hiking, cycling, volunteering, slow tourism), choice of destination, mode of transport, accommodation or vacation activities (e.g. Hanna 2011; Malone 2012; Weeden 2008).

Personal values as "desirable end-states of existence" (Gutman 1982) or desirable goals (Schwartz 1992) are a stable motivational variable that influences ethical consumer decisions, an individual's attitudes, beliefs, intentions, preferences and choice criteria (Reynolds and Gutman 1988; Schwartz 1992; Woodruff and Gardial 1996). Compared to personal values, ethical concerns, interests or attitudes only translate to a small extent into actual ethical behaviour (Dolnicar and Grün 2009; Hares et al 2010).

On the other hand, next to ethical values, an individual holds other personal values such as hedonistic, traditional, power or security values within an individual's so-called values system (Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992). From an empirical perspective, the challenge is to gain insights into an individual's values system and the hierarchical ordering of single values within such a values system. Single personal values may conflict (Rokeach 1973) in an individual's values system, consequently individuals prioritize single personal values (Schwartz 1992).



As a consequence, the challenge of empirical research is to identify which personal values as desirable personal goals are fulfilled by vacations. Means-end approaches and the laddering interview technique are able to carve out personal values by revealing how those influence consumers' vacation decisions.

## **2. Means-end-Theory and the laddering interview method**

Means-end theory is an umbrella term (Gutman 1982) for approaches that explain consumer behaviour by focussing on the consequences of consumption acts. From such a perspective, products or services are means to some further ends such a short-term benefits or even the fulfilment of personal values. Consumers purchase goods and/or services to satisfy a need, solve a problem, and fulfil life goals or personal values (Olson and Reynolds 2001).

Means-end based research yields insights why consumers deem certain product attributes important (Reynold and Gutman 1988) by connecting product attributes to benefits such as convenience, security or status, and these benefits further to personal values. Such relationships between product attributes, consequences and personal values are depicted in so called means-end chains. Consumers either seek desirable consequences (benefits) or avoid negatives ones (reduce risk or stress, avoid losing money/time) (Gutman 1982). Those consequences are situation-specific and are often influenced by higher-order stable personal goals or personal values as motivators (Weeden 2008; Woodruff and Gardial 1996). As personal values are ordered hierarchically within an individual's values system, this hierarchical ordering defines which consequences are deemed important (Gutman 1982). On the other hand, not all consumer choices are influenced by personal values but are merely influenced by situation-specific benefits consumers seek (e.g. Gutman 1982). Thus, personal values only influence such behaviours that are related to maintain or enhance self-esteem (Rokeach 1973, p. 14).

### **2.1 Eliciting product attributes, consequences, personal values: the laddering interview**

Semi-structured laddering interviews are able to reveal means-end chains between product attributes, consequences and personal values. The following data analysis describes how ethical personas are exemplarily developed based on laddering interviews conducted in a preliminary study.

The soft laddering interview method allows the researcher to maintain a natural flow of the interview and to adapt the interview procedure to consumers' actual vacation plan-

ning processes and the sub-decisions involved (e.g. destination choice, choice of accommodation). This soft laddering approach yields what Revella (2015, p. 25-27) calls “buying insights”, essential for developing buyer personas: what triggers an individual to go on vacations, benefits or rewards that are sought, internal and/or external barriers, the customer journey, and how consumers compare and evaluate alternatives to come to their final choice. The following laddering interviews are based on actual past vacations of interviewees, not running risk of socially desired answers or generating general attitudes which have been identified as weak predictors of actual behaviours. Basing research on actual behaviours takes into account the context and complexities of consumer decision making, including barriers, twists and turns and all relevant sub-decisions in vacation planning.

Participants for the interviews were recruited via the social media website Xing by selecting consumers with an interest in sustainable vacations, responsible holidays, and members in ethical organizations (e.g. WWF, Greenpeace) following previous research in tourism (e.g. Hanna 2011; Malone 2012; Weeden 2008) with self-proclaimed ethical consumers.

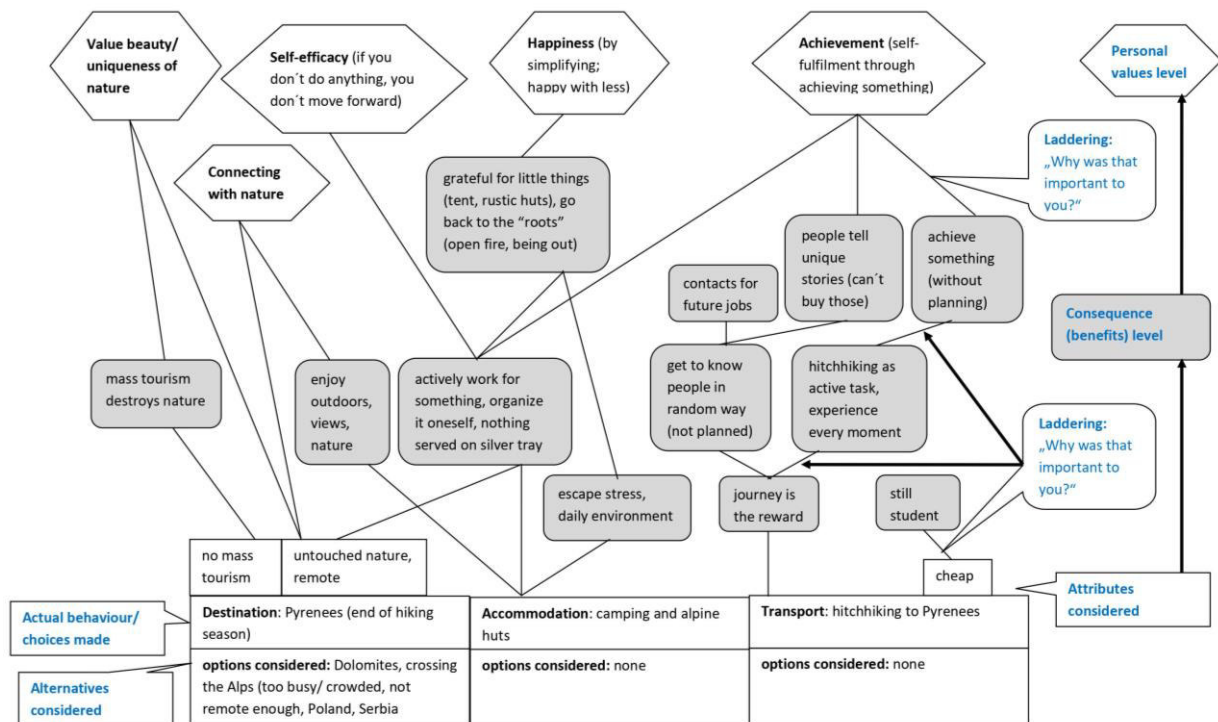
Before starting the interviews, the areas of interest were defined covering previously identified decisions in which ethical considerations played a role (e.g. Hanna 2011; Malone 2012; Weeden 2008): organization of trip (package, self-organized), mode of transport to and at the destination, accommodation and activities. The challenge of researching consumer decisions in tourism is that for each sub-decision (e.g. mode of transport) several alternative categories exist, such as hotels, hostels or camping as accommodation categories. Ethical considerations can both influence the choice of these categories as well as the alternatives and their attributes within one category such as which hotels and criteria had been compared.

After explaining to participants the aim of the research and confidentiality, the interviews started by asking interviewees to recall their last vacation, e.g. when and with whom they went and what triggered the decision to go on vacations. Based on this context, interviewees described the planning process and the pre-trip decisions made, which options they considered and on which product attributes (e.g. price, location, brand) they compared alternatives. Based on the named alternatives and their attributes (e.g. climate or reachable by train as destination attributes), the interviewer starts the laddering technique by asking for each given attribute “*Why is/was that important to you?*”. The answers yield the consequence level of means-end chains that consumers associate or desire from those attributes. Based on the elicited consequences as a result of the first why-question, the interviewer proceeds “*Why was that important to you?*” leading from the consequence level to higher, more abstract motivational constructs such as personal values. This procedure continues until the interviewee is not able to provide further explanations or answers “*I don’t know*”, “*just because of this*” or shrugs his/her shoulders. In this case, this first ladder ends and the researcher turns to the other previously named attributes and consequences following the same procedure. To keep an eye on all named attributes and consequences by interviewees, the researcher needs to take field notes. Interviewees often name several product attributes and consequences, and for each of those, ladders need to be produced although not all ladders reach the personal values level, but end at the consequence level.

Further, some interviewees answer by starting with naming benefits of single choices such as highlighting comfort aspects of hotels. In such cases, so called-downward laddering is applied asking interviewees “What aspects/attributes make a hotel comfortable” to ladder down towards the product attribute level of means-end chains.

## 2.2 Data Analysis

After transcribing the interviews, the researcher codes for product attributes, consequences and personal values and links those concepts in means-end chains. The results of each interview are then depicted in a hierarchical value map (Reynolds and Gutman 1988). Fig. 1 exemplifies an extract of a hierarchical value map highlighting the choices made, attributes considered, consequences and how ladders reach the personal values level.



**Fig. 1** Excerpt of a Hierarchical Value Map (source: author); see appendix for complete hierarchical value maps.

These means-end results both offer a basis for a benefit segmentation (focus on mid-level consequences) and segmentation on personal values. The focus of the following analysis is on personal values as the basis for personas development, which offers several advantages. First, personal values remain stable over time. Second, empirical evidence shows that although seeking the same benefits, e.g. authentic encounters with locals, tourists differ in their personal values. Some tourists seek authentic encounters with locals driven by personal values of stimulation (new, stimulating experiences), others because of ethical values such as contributing to the local economy. Diverging personal values between tourists or between hosts and tourists may cause

conflicts (Kosnik 2013). In other cases, tourists are motivated to meet others with the same ethical values, e.g. volunteers.

Thus, as the focus is on personal values to construct personas, the words of interviewees on the consequence level were kept in order to provide a better understanding of their subjective meaning. At the personal values level (depicted as a diamond in fig. 1), personal values were coded by the author based on the answers of interviewees and checked against the personal values provided by Schwartz (1992) and Weeden (2008).

Based on each hierarchical value map, personal values are summarized and conclusions drawn as to an individual's values priorities. Both summary and values hierarchy of each interview are then compared and used to develop the following exemplary personas.

### 3. Ethical personas developed: The Ethical World Traveller and the Pioneer

Three test interviews yielded two personas differing in the intensity of ethical values influencing pre-trip vacation decisions, the main motivating personal values, and how those influenced interviewees' last vacation's sub-decisions. The personas have been defined as Pioneer and Ethical World Traveller.

Ethical values such as contributing to the local economy of the destination, social justice, equity and respecting animals and nature are salient in The Ethical World Traveller's accounts as becomes evident in the hierarchical value map (see appendix). Pioneers place less priority on ethical values, whilst achievement, independence, autonomy and stimulation values dominate. The following statements stress the differences of how the prevalent personal values surface:

**Ethical World Travellers:** *„I'm part of this beautiful world, want to explore, discover, respect it and contribute to its conservation by taking responsibility“*

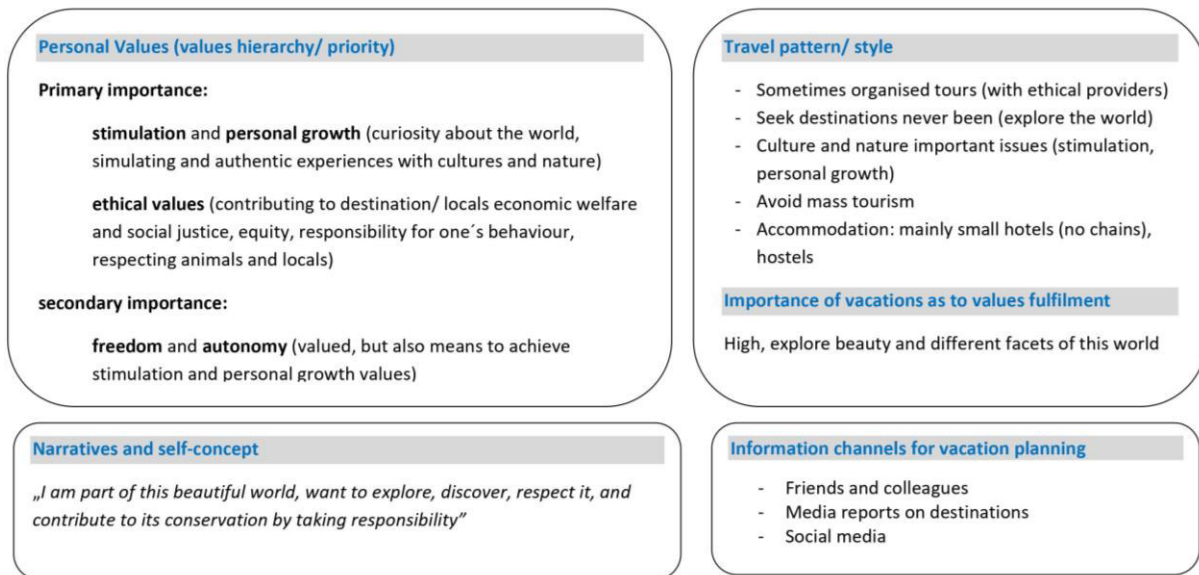
**Pioneers:** *„Explore the world your own way, you are the master to discover remote, pristine spots - If you can buy it, anyone can have it, as such it has no value for me“.*

**The Ethical World Traveller:** Ethical World Travellers place importance on personal values of authenticity, freedom to explore the world (cultures, nature) and stimulating authentic experiences, which contribute to personal enrichment and growth. Of similar importance are ethical values, which both motivate and constrain vacation decisions. For example, the Ethical World Traveller actively and volitionally wants to contribute to and support ethical issues (e.g. social justice, equality by supporting the local economy, sustainable projects and tourism providers with ethical values, respect animals) and further restrain from unethical activities (e.g. not travelling to countries with human rights violations). Further, the Ethical World Traveller does not want to support multinational companies and thus pays the lowest price for airline tickets. For the Ethical World Traveller, happiness is linked to experiences triggered by seeing beautiful nature and animals related to ethical values of beauty of nature. Similarly, hedonic benefits of

relaxing are related to ethical values of connecting with nature and valuing the beauty of nature.

The characteristics of the Ethical World Traveller's, his/her personal values, importance of vacations for values fulfilment and information sources for vacation planning are summarized in the following persona template:

## Persona: the Ethical World Traveller



**Fig. 2** Characteristics of the Ethical World Traveller

Compared to the Pioneer, the Ethical World Traveller places less importance on values of freedom and autonomy.

**The Pioneer:** Pioneers strive for untouched nature, authentic cultural experiences. They chase unique stories, and hence organize their vacations individually with a focus off-the-beaten track. These motivations are driven by the personal values of achievement, independence, autonomy and self-efficacy achieved through mastering one's own challenges („do it my way“). Such personal values are salient in one account in which hitchhiking is associated with non-monetary exchange relations and the belief that money can't buy experiences and unique stories. Hence, if something can be bought, anyone can have it and thus does not fulfil achievement values.

The fulfilment of these values together with personal values of an exciting life, stimulating unique experiences and authenticity lead to pride and an enhanced self-esteem reflected *„you look into the mirror after such a trip and you are just proud“* after having been outdoors for some weeks. Similarly, being the first (tourist) in remote areas stimulates authentic experiences and unique stories that ease future conversations with others and enrich the Pioneers narrative repository. As such, Pioneers are constantly searching for destinations with traditional cultures and pristine nature.

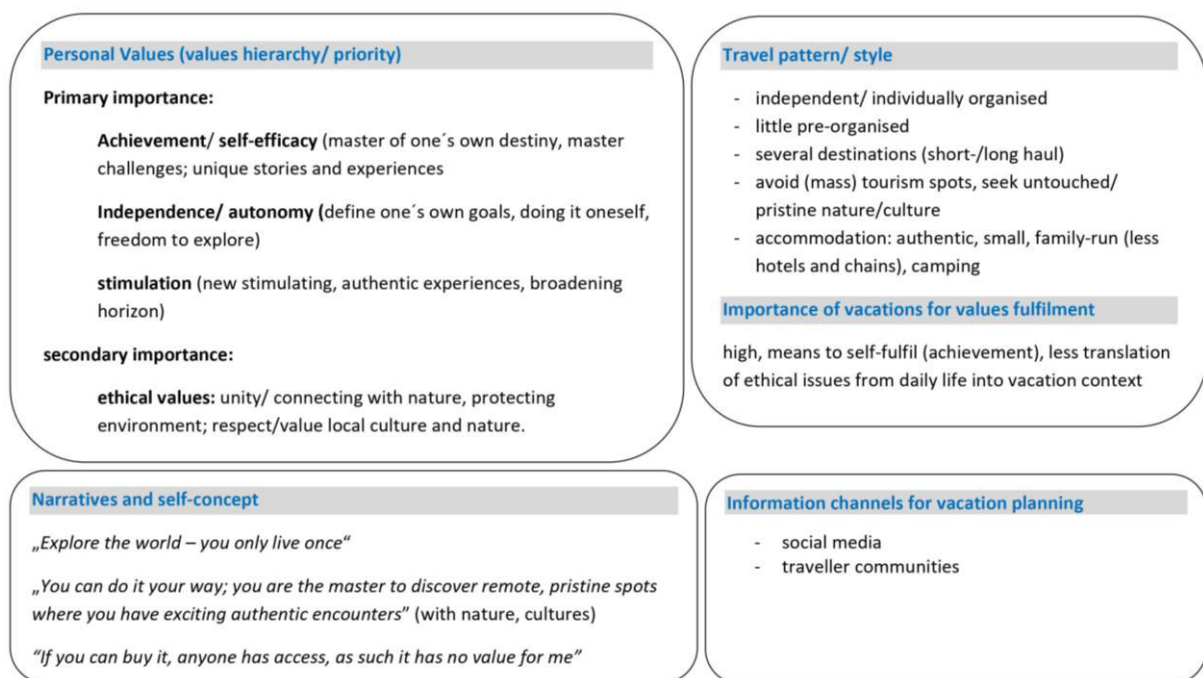
For pioneers, ethical values are of secondary importance in their vacation patterns, although they show ethical lifestyle elements in their daily life such as using public



transport or purchasing organic food. Ethical values of pioneers surfacing in their vacation patterns are respecting, valuing and connecting with local culture and nature and mainly influence their behaviours at the destination. Their negative attitudes towards mass tourism are not so much based on ethical grounds (mass tourism threatens what is highly valued, such as nature, culture). Rather, those negative attitudes towards mass tourism are due to a lack of benefits associated with mass tourism (authentic encounters, unique stories) and thus inhibit the fulfilment of personal values of independence and autonomy, similarly evident in the Ethical World Travellers accounts.

For Pioneers travelling represents a consumption field for values fulfilment, others than ethical values. Thus, hardly any trade-offs in favour of ethical considerations are made for the mode of transport. In some cases, Pioneers compensate their flight emissions as it is the only positive action one can take. The Pioneers characteristics carved out from the laddering interviews are summarized in fig. 3.

## Persona: the Pioneer



**Fig. 3** Characteristics of Pioneers

## 4. Summary, challenges and limitations

The previous analysis expands on the existing personas development in tourism such as the Slovenian Tourism Board's (2016) personas including the “green traveller” by elaborating the heterogeneous characteristics and behaviours of consumers holding ethical values. Both Ethical World Travellers and Pioneers show different extents of how personal ethical values influence their vacation choices and behaviours. For both,

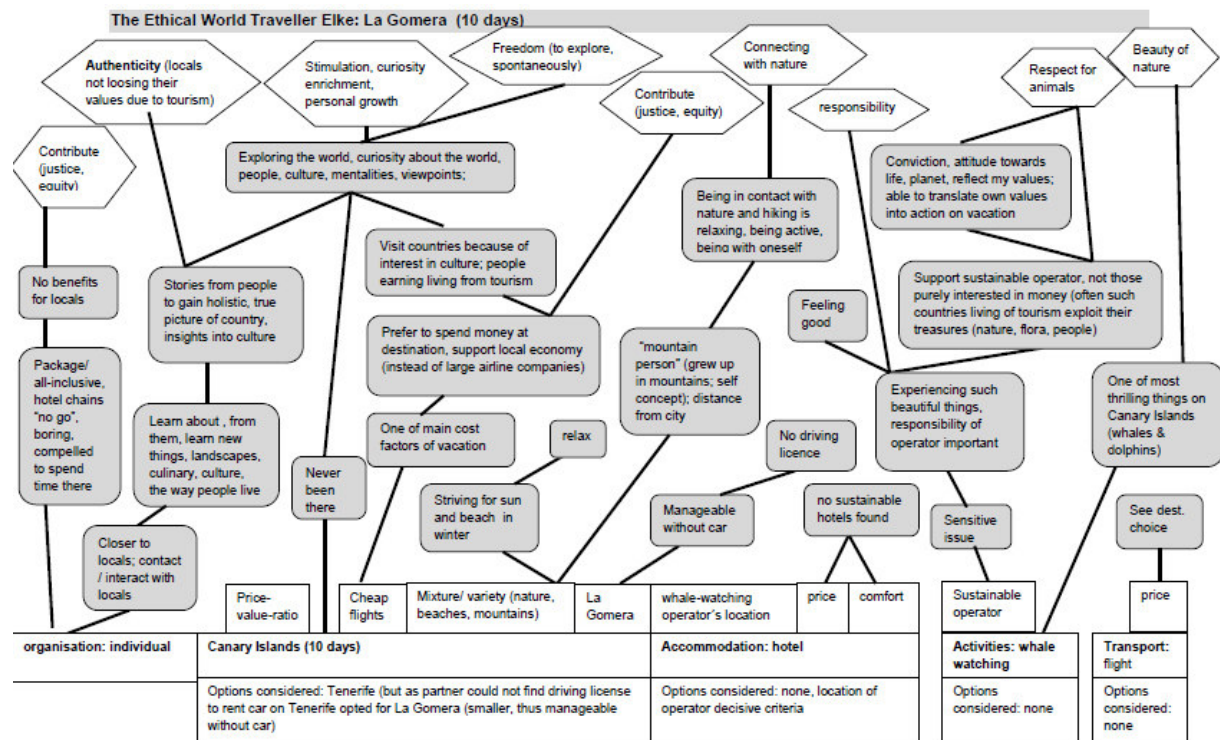
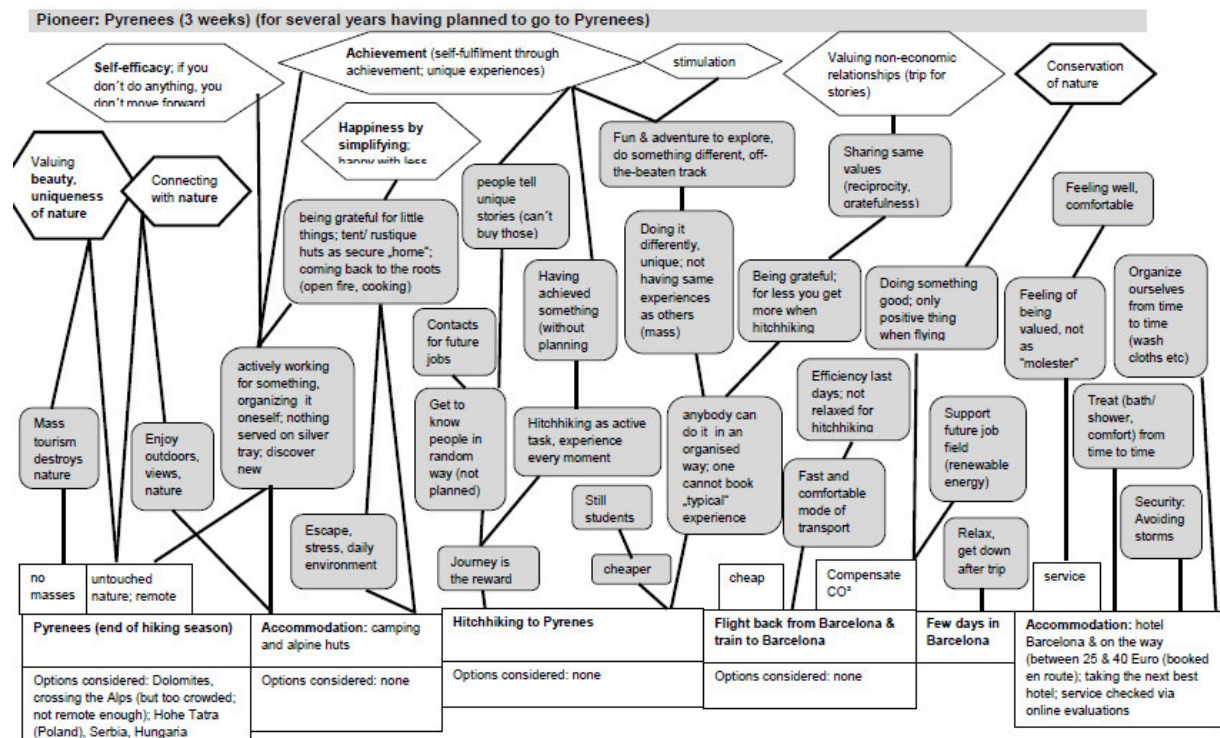
travelling is an important consumption field for values fulfilment. Both travel independently, but for different reasons: the Pioneer because it is the only way to pursue achievement values doing it his/her own way, the Ethical World Traveller to contribute to ethical related issues, personal development and enrichment through authentic cultural encounters and a better understanding of cultures. Furthermore, remote, untouched, pristine destinations are means for the fulfilment of achievement values for Pioneers, but less for Ethical World Travellers. The Ethical World Traveller values authentic experiences, but not necessarily made in remote spots and off-the-beaten-track. Both personas and their values reveal the positive emotions related to fulfilling personal values. The fulfilment of or complying with one's personal values is related to maintain or enhance self-esteem.

This article has illustrated how personas can be developed on the basis of laddering interviews and resulting means-end relationships between attributes, consequences and personal values. The focus of the article is on the laddering method and how personas can be developed on the basis of personal values. As the laddering method is exemplified by three interviews, the results are not meant to be representative or cover all personas with ethical concerns or values. Laddering interviews have further been conducted to develop a hierarchy of product benefits elements by Bain & Company (Almquist et al 2016), explain motivations of Japanese backpackers' and package tourists' (Watkins and Gnoth 2010) or responsible tourists (Weeden 2008). Furthermore, the laddering technique is discussed in the literature on design thinking to reveal customer needs and motivations (Uebernickel et al 2015, p. 128).

Although laddering is suitable to elicit means-end chains, some low-involvement products may be less suitable for laddering and not reach the top level personal values (Gutman 1982). This aligns with comments that a persona approach (Revella's 2015, p. xxii) is mainly suitable for products where buyers are medium to highly involved. Especially the vacation sub-decisions relevant for values-fulfilment revealed highly involved Pioneers and Ethical World Travellers characterized by conscious, time intensive comparison of alternatives and vacation choices and a long planning horizon.

Several requirements need to be considered when conducting laddering interviews. First, the interviewer needs to establish trust and rapport without running the risk of provoking socially desirable answers or interviewees feeling uncomfortable or under pressure by the continuous "Why was that important?" questions. In order to build trust and allow interviewees to talk open and freely, the interviewer needs to stress that the interviewee is the expert, must stay interested, show curiosity towards the interviewee and must not run the risk of already knowing the answer (Revella 2015, p. 95). In order to circumvent those risks, training and practice of the laddering method is necessary. The interviewer needs to feel comfortable with silent situations, as in some occasions after a few moments of silence, interviewees may come up with further insights (Revella 2015, p. 94). Further, in some occasions the why questions lead interviewees entering a defence mechanism which may threaten a free flow of speech. In these cases, the interviewer needs to turn to other attributes or consequences and start laddering from there.

## Appendix: Complete hierarchical value maps





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## Keywords

Consumer personas, means-end theory, laddering interviews, ethical consumer motivation

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