

Megatrend hiking and trekking? – A narrative synopsis of market research data, media reports and further presumable indicators

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In the last few years, hiking and trekking have attracted large media attention as modern trend sports. Furthermore, in the few scientific publications on this market segment, a high significance has been assigned to hiking. The widely consistent media opinion has been adopted in academia without any examination. The assumption of the hiking trend has not yet been reviewed, despite the financial support by regional and tourism politics for the development of hiking tourism destinations in Germany and in the Alps. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to verify the trend thesis by a narrative review of available studies of market research institutes. In Germany, private institutes – not official statistics – conduct representative, demand-side surveys at the place of residence. So, data are commercial and are not subject to disclosure requirements.

Data research began with web pages of market research institutes specialized in tourism and named in the relevant literature, and ended with backtracking market research results cited in scientific publications and German daily and weekly newspapers. All surveys representative of the total population and, in some way, available to the public have been considered for the analysis of the significance and the development of hiking and trekking. Based on those German market research data, this paper shows that hiking is indeed an important leisure and holiday activity. However, its popularity is declining rather than growing.

The study also contains a narrative synopsis of media reports and developments of markets that are related to hiking and trekking. The descriptive analysis of media coverage is based upon an unsystematic monitoring of print media, and a systematic examination of the online archive of two German newspapers with nationwide coverage. The following hiking and trekking related markets have been chosen: firstly, tourism trade fairs and their special themes – they have been studied using the example of the three most visited fairs, secondly, the market for sports goods that has been analyzed by market research data, and thirdly, tourism destinations. The importance of the hiking and trekking segment for the marketing of tourism destinations is shown descriptively using German and Austrian examples. The developments found there were the opposite of the “real” hiking and trekking developments. In connection with the repositioning of stagnating traditional destinations, hiking and trekking attract growing attention. The paper closes with recommendations for tourism service providers and some methodological conclusions on handling secondary data and indicators.