

# Exploring Geotourism in Lake Constance: A Qualitative Study of Expert Insights

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## Abstract

This scientific article explores the concept of geotourism, which encompasses tourism focused on a region's geology and the preservation of its resources, as well as its ecological and cultural aspects. Over the years, academics from different countries have redefined and interpreted geotourism in various ways. Nevertheless, National Geographic's definition defines it as "tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of the place being visited." The article's main focus is to identify characteristics that are associated with tourism in the Lake Constance region by conducting 30 expert interviews from May to July 2022. The open-ended questions will address the characteristics attributed to the Lake Constance region as a tourism destination. The results of the interviews will undergo qualitative content analysis to identify the various characteristics and characteristics attributed to Lake Constance. The findings will offer information for the future marketing campaigns aimed at promoting the Bodensee region. The hierarchal code sub-code model analysis generated six categories and nine sub-codes with a total coding of 408. The participants were asked about their age and gender, and their perception of the region's geographical boundaries. The expert interviews also evaluated the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of tourism in the Lake Constance region, applying the SWOT analysis method. Overall, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the perception of Lake Constance as a tourism destination by analyzing the interviews' responses.

Key words: Geotourism, Lake Constance, Expert interviews, Qualitative content analysis

JEL Codes: A10

## 1. Introduction

Geotourism is a relatively new concept that researchers in the tourism sector have started to explore. In recent years, geotourism has become more popular again.

Tourists from different countries have always been drawn to geological features. Iceland's natural attractions were a big reason for tourists to visit it in the late 18th and early 19th century. Hose says that geological tourism in England started in the late 17th century. It was probably around the same time in other countries as well. But geotourism is still a young concept. Hose was the first to use the term "geotourism" and defined it in the early 1990s as:

Tourists will have a better experience if they have interpretative and service facilities that can help them learn more about the geology and geomorphology of a place (and how they relate to the development of Earth sciences."

In the last twenty years, the concept has been understood differently by many scholars from various countries, and their understandings vary greatly from each other. While researchers in the United Kingdom and Australia focus on the landscape and geology, National Geographic describes geotourism as "tourism that maintains or improves the geographical character of the place being visited," which covers the environment, culture, and aesthetics, as well as the locals' well-being. This definition of geotourism sees it as an ecotourism practice that protects the cultural and ecological features that make a destination unique. Later, National Geographic worked with local groups to publish Geotourism MapGuides, which feature over twenty different travel destinations around the world and offer information to tourists about more eco-friendly activities and places to stay that can be found there, enhancing each area's distinctive character and ultimately benefiting the quality of life for its people. Boley and Nickerson argue that the National Geographic articles they cited were important in making geotourism popular as a way to promote responsible tourism development. Researchers caution that broadening the concept of geotourism beyond the study of geology and the conservation of its resources might weaken its effect. According to Newsome and Dowling, defining geotourism in this way is essential in order to achieve the goals of geotourism, such as geodiversity preservation and tourist education. Newsome and Dowling's definition of geotourism from 2010 is still one of the most commonly used.

It's a way to visit natural areas that is mostly interested in the geology and beauty rather than the wildlife.

It inspires awe and interest about the Earth, which in turn motivates people to visit geosites, protect geodiversity, and learn more about earth sciences. You can achieve this objective through the use of geosite visitor centers, geo-trails and viewpoints, guided tours, and geo-activities."

Dowling classifies geotourism under the "geological" term as a specific type of travel experience, while the "geographical" definition views it as a philosophy of exploration similar to ecotourism. Dowling argues that in the context of geotourism, these two perspectives are not incompatible and must be brought together. As defined by Newsome

and Dowling, "geologically based, ecologically educational, delivering visitor satisfaction, sustainable, and being locally beneficial" best describes geotourism.

Hence, geotourism employs an ABC method, which asserts that the Abiotic components (geology and climate) influence the Biotic components (flora and fauna), which in turn define the Culture aspects (such as people's lives). It is essential to gather and disseminate this data in order to take into account geoheritage and its influence on other aspects of a region when developing a new geotourism destination.

The definitions of geotourism have converged in recent years, with an emphasis on ecological sustainability.

Mounties surround the whole Lake of Constance region. Although it presents challenges from a logistical standpoint, the area was able to develop into a high-tech, self-promoting hub because to geotourism. Nowadays, the Lake of Constance is mostly promoted for the quality of its products and activities, rather than its proximity to any other destination. A reservoir for greater Stuttgart, the Reichenau as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, apples, wine, fish, the Zeppelin, Cigarette (high-tech boats), the Bregenz Festival, the Seenachtsfest of Constance, and the Reichenau as a water reservoir. It follows that the name "Lake of Constance" functions as a self-promoting trademark.

The aim of this study is to identify the characteristics that are attributed to Lake Constance as a tourism location. For this purpose, 30 expert interviews will be conducted with randomly selected tourists. The opinions and impressions of experts are to be collected in order to gain a better understanding of the perception of Lake Constance in order to be able to optimally support possible future marketing campaigns for the Lake Constance region. From the knowledge gained, it would be possible to create an identification figure of the Lake Constance region that supports marketing campaigns.

## **2. Methods**

A total of 30 expert interviews will be conducted to obtain a wide range of opinions and perspectives. The experts will be randomly selected tourists in the Lake Constance region who will be on site from May to July 2022 (01.05.2022 to 31.07.2022).

The research question of the present article is thus: "What exact characteristics are assigned to Lake Constance as a tourism region?"

The interviews are conducted with open-ended questions to give the experts the opportunity to express their opinions freely. The questions are asked in such a way that they focus on the characteristics which are attributed to Lake Constance as a tourism region. The responses are recorded and transcribed to be analyzed later.

The analysis of the data is carried out through a qualitative content analysis in order to identify the various characteristics and characteristics attributed to Lake Constance. The results are then divided into categories and presented in the form of a report.

The MaxQDA 2022 software was used to analyze the interviews at hand. In the software, 6 categories and 9 subcodes were formed, and a total of 408 codings were formed. For an overview of formed categories and codes, see Figure 1 below.

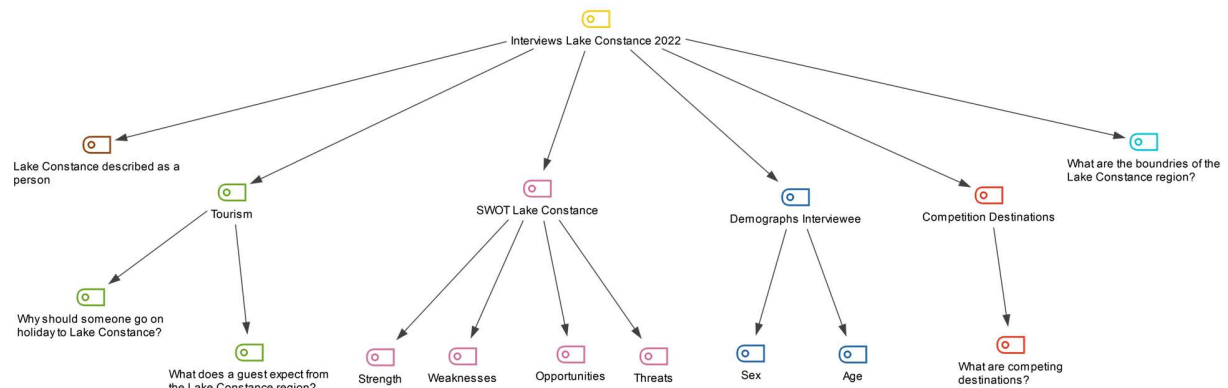


Figure 1: Hierarchical Code Subcode Model Analysis Lake Constance Interviews 2022

During the interviews, the participants were asked questions about the Lake Constance region in general, as well as specific questions about tourism in the Lake Constance region. The answers were recorded and the interviews were transcribed afterwards in order to prepare them for analysis.

The participants were asked about their age and gender, as well as asked to describe the Lake Constance region in its geographical boundaries. The participants were also asked why someone should go on holiday in the Lake Constance region and what they think this guest expects from the region in terms of tourism. The participants were also asked which other tourist destinations are in a competitive situation with the Lake Constance region. In addition, the participants were asked about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of tourism in the Lake Constance region in order to be able to create a short strategic assessment of tourism in the Lake Constance region according to the management method SWOT analysis. (Schawel et al., 2012)

Guided interviews and qualitative content analysis are used as methodological sources to ensure a systematic and structured approach. The results are interpreted and presented according to the principles of qualitative research.

The qualitative content analysis is carried out according to Kuckartz. (Kuckartz, 2018)

The available data from the expert interviews can be characterized as follows:

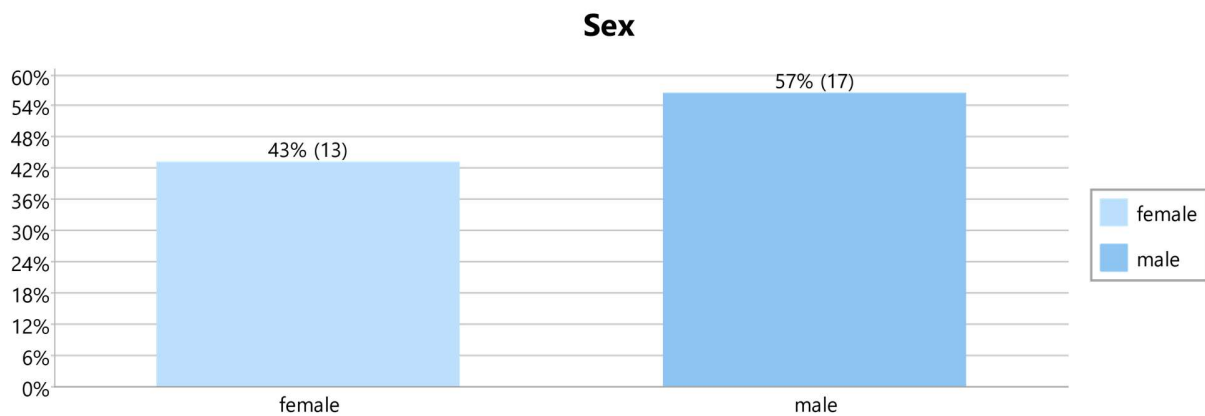


Figure 2: Sex of Probands Expert-Interviews

As can be seen in Figure 1, 13 women and 17 men were interviewed.

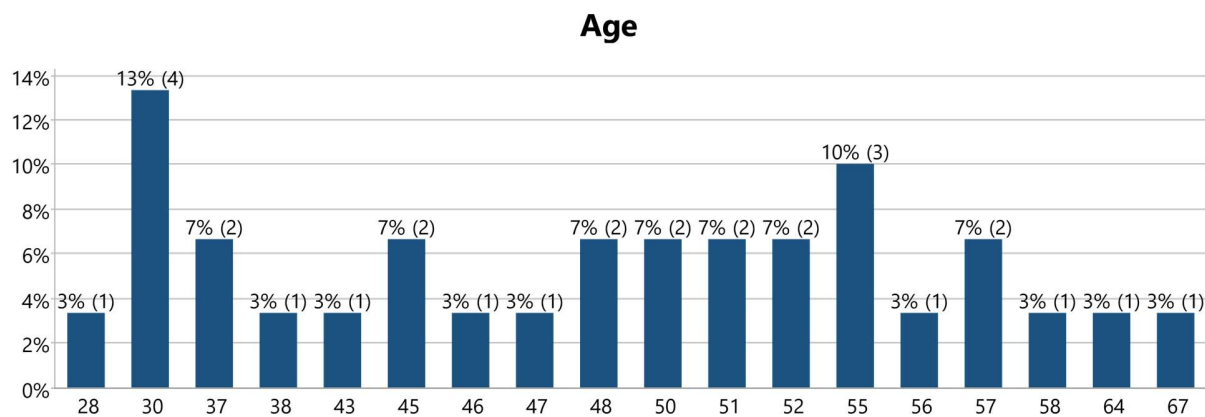


Figure 3: Age of Probands Expert-Interviews

The present age structure of the subjects of the expert interviews covers a range of 39 years. The youngest subject is 28 years old, the oldest 67 years old. Two masses in the age structure can be seen at the age of 30 years (4 subjects out of 30) and 55 years (3 subjects out of 30). The other subjects are largely evenly distributed across the entire range of age structures.

Due to the limited number of interviews and the uneven distribution of gender and age of the participants, the present study does not generalize the results. Since this is a qualitative analysis, the representativeness and generalizability of the results is unimportant. The aim of the study is to gain a deeper insight into the opinions and views of the subjects.

It can therefore be summarized that the results of the study cannot be transferred to the entire population, since the number of participants was limited and their composition was not representative. However, since this is a qualitative study, it is not necessary for the results to be representative. Instead, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of participants' opinions and views.

### 3. Results

In this chapter we present the results of the analysis of the interview questions:

**Question: Why should someone go on holiday in the Lake Constance region?**

Lake Constance offers a variety of leisure activities in a small area, including outdoor activities, cultural events and good food. The landscape is beautiful and there are many possibilities for excursions. There is a calm atmosphere and the air and water quality is good. There are fair prices and there is something for everyone, whether you want to relax or be active. The inhabitants are warm and open. Lake Constance is a place for rest and relaxation in a dreamlike landscape.

**Question: What does a guest expect from the Lake Constance region?**

A guest expects many sights, a good infrastructure and a good price-performance ratio from the Lake Constance region. In addition, there should be friendly staff and a high level of water sports. The landscape should be clean and well-kept, there should be beautiful campsites, restaurants and hotels with lake views and clean beaches. Hiking and cycling routes as well as cultural offerings are also important. Rest and relaxation in nature, good food and fresh fruits and vegetables are expected. The gastronomy should be good and organized day trips for families should be offered. It should not be crowded and there should be plenty of recreational opportunities.

**Question: What are competing destinations?**

The places mentioned are competing destinations in tourism. The Black Forest is the most frequently mentioned and often occurs in combination with other places, such as South Tyrol, Bavaria or Lake Zurich. Other popular destinations include the Baltic Sea, Lake Maggiore, the Allgäu and Ticino. Tyrol, the Palatinate, the Vosges and the Salzburgerland are also mentioned. There are also some lakes that are considered competing destinations, such as Lake Chiemsee, Lake Starnberg or Lake Tegernsee. The Mediterranean Sea and the Mecklenburg Lake District are also mentioned.

**Question: What are the strengths of tourism at Lake Constance?**

The strengths of the Lake Constance region are its internationality, the bundled offer, the safety, the culture, the feeder and the education. The holiday offer, the landscape, the water quality and the safety are also strengths. The region offers a wide range of education, landscape and water quality as well as tourism and leisure activities. The business location and agriculture are also strengths. Nature conservation, tourism and agriculture are closely linked. The region is very vigorous and attractive as a holiday and recreation area as well as a nature reserve. The cities are attractive and well-kept and offer boat trips and offers for all ages. The region is a destination for every target group and offers very good water quality, flora and fauna as well as a beautiful landscape. The proximity to the Alps and the cultural sites are also strengths.

**Question: What are the weaknesses of tourism on Lake Constance?**

The weaknesses of the Lake Constance region lie in the church tower mentality and the lack of internationality, as well as the transport connections and environmental pollution. The infrastructure and the handling of tourist crowds are also problematic, as are the intensive

agricultural use and urban sprawl. There are too many people and a large crowd, but also constant construction sites and detours. The expansion of the road network and the improvement of infrastructure are urgently needed to reduce pollution and waste.

**Question: What are the opportunities for tourism on Lake Constance?**

Opportunities for the Lake Constance region lie in climate change, demographic change, the landscape, enjoyment and stories. Internationality, globalization, sustainability, environmental awareness and tourism also offer potential. The diversity of the region should be preserved and strengthened by high-quality, professional tourism. Nature reserves should be developed and protected in order to preserve flora and fauna. Rules and prohibitions are intended to protect the landscape and wildlife from tourists. Renewable energy and organic farming can be reconciled with tourism. The purification of drinking water and the protection of the lake and the surrounding area from tourists are also important aspects.

**Question: What are the risks for tourism on Lake Constance?**

The risks for Lake Constance in the field of tourism are manifold. Climate change and associated diseases, weather conditions and pollution pose a threat. The shortage of skilled workers and rising inflation are also risk factors. Internationalization is progressing slowly and there is no common denominator. Plagues such as insects and diseases, as well as terrorism, are other risks. Urban sprawl and overpopulation lead to congestion of the area and affect nature conservation. Mass tourism and reckless tourists deteriorate water quality and increase the risk of flooding. Global warming and habitat changes as well as the extinction of flora and fauna are further risks.

**Question: How would you describe Lake Constance as a person ?**

The descriptions of the personification of Lake Constance are very diverse and differ in gender, age, character and hobbies. Some describe Lake Constance as masculine and feminine, rough and quiet, old and ponderous, while others describe it as young and full of life. Clothing varies from muted earth tones to elegant and practical outfits. Hobbies range from swimming and hiking to boating and golfing. Some describe Lake Constance as vulnerable and multifaceted, while others describe it as dominant and self-confident.

## **4. Discussion**

The Lake Constance region is a popular tourist destination due to its unique blend of cultural, recreational, and natural attractions. The region covers three countries: Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, making it an international destination with a range of activities and sights accommodating different traveler needs. The Lake Constance region offers tourists a chance to vacation away from big cities, allowing them to relax and enjoy nature. The study's findings point out that tourists are interested in learning about the history, culture, and environment of the area through different educational activities, tours, and museums.

The study's use of qualitative content analysis to identify and categorize the features of the Lake Constance region attracted tourists is a strength. The method allowed for in-depth exploration of the data and helped to identify themes and patterns of tourists' perceptions

of the region as a destination. By interviewing 30 experts, the study reduced the risk of overlooking important aspects of the Lake Constance region that may not be visible to the untrained eye. Conclusions drawn this way are more likely to be reliable and valid compared to those based on observations alone.

The study results have potential to be of value in the field of geomarketing in developing marketing campaigns targeting tourists interested in geotourism. Sustainable tourism practices are essential in preserving the unique features of the Lake Constance region. Such practices also enable the tourism industry to grow responsibly, thus benefiting the local economies and the people living in the region.

One limitation of this study is that the research was carried out at a specific period, which may not be representative of the tourist population visiting the region throughout the year. Consequently, the study results may not be generalizable to all tourists visiting the region. However, the study's findings align with current trends in geotourism, which emphasize the importance of sustainability, the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and a focus on experiences beyond mass tourism attractions.

Future research could involve a larger sample size, covering different tourist groups, seasons, and types of travel, such as adventure, wellness, and cultural tourism. Follow-up research could investigate the impact of marketing campaigns that emphasize Lake Constance's unique features and contribute to sustainable tourism practices.

To conclude, the study findings contribute to the literature of geotourism, by emphasizing the unique features of the Lake Constance destination as a mix of cultural heritage, recreation, and natural beauty. Additionally, the results highlight the importance of sustainability and responsible tourism practices in geotourism marketing. The study's limitations were noted, and the potential for future research to expand on the study's findings was discussed.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the characteristics and perceptions of tourists in the Lake Constance region. The region's natural beauty, water-related activities, cultural sites, and regional cuisine were identified as its main strengths, which could be used to attract more tourists. However, the study also revealed some weaknesses, such as the lack of awareness about sustainable tourism practices and the competitive nature of the tourism industry. These insights could be useful for the development of future marketing campaigns that highlight the unique features of the region while addressing its limitations.

Moreover, the study demonstrated the effectiveness of qualitative content analysis and guided interviews in providing a deeper understanding of the perceptions and expectations of tourists. By interviewing a diverse range of tourists, the study was able to obtain a wide range of opinions and perspectives, which enriched our understanding of the Lake Constance region and its potential for tourism development. The findings of this study could be used



not only by tourism marketers but also by policymakers to develop strategies for the sustainable development of the region's tourism industry.

However, the study had some limitations, such as the small sample size and the limited duration of the data collection period. A larger sample size and longer data collection period could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics attributed to the Lake Constance region as a tourism destination. Additionally, future studies could focus on the perceptions and expectations of different types of tourists, such as solo travelers, couples, or families, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the region's potential appeal.

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of understanding the characteristics and perceptions of tourists in the development of effective marketing campaigns and sustainable tourism strategies. The findings of this study could serve as a foundation for further research and contribute to the long-term development of the Lake Constance region as a vibrant and unique tourism destination.

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