



Via Alpina evaluation – Summer 2005
From collected data to formulated recommendations
International synthesis

- Countries involved: Austria, Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland and Slovenia -

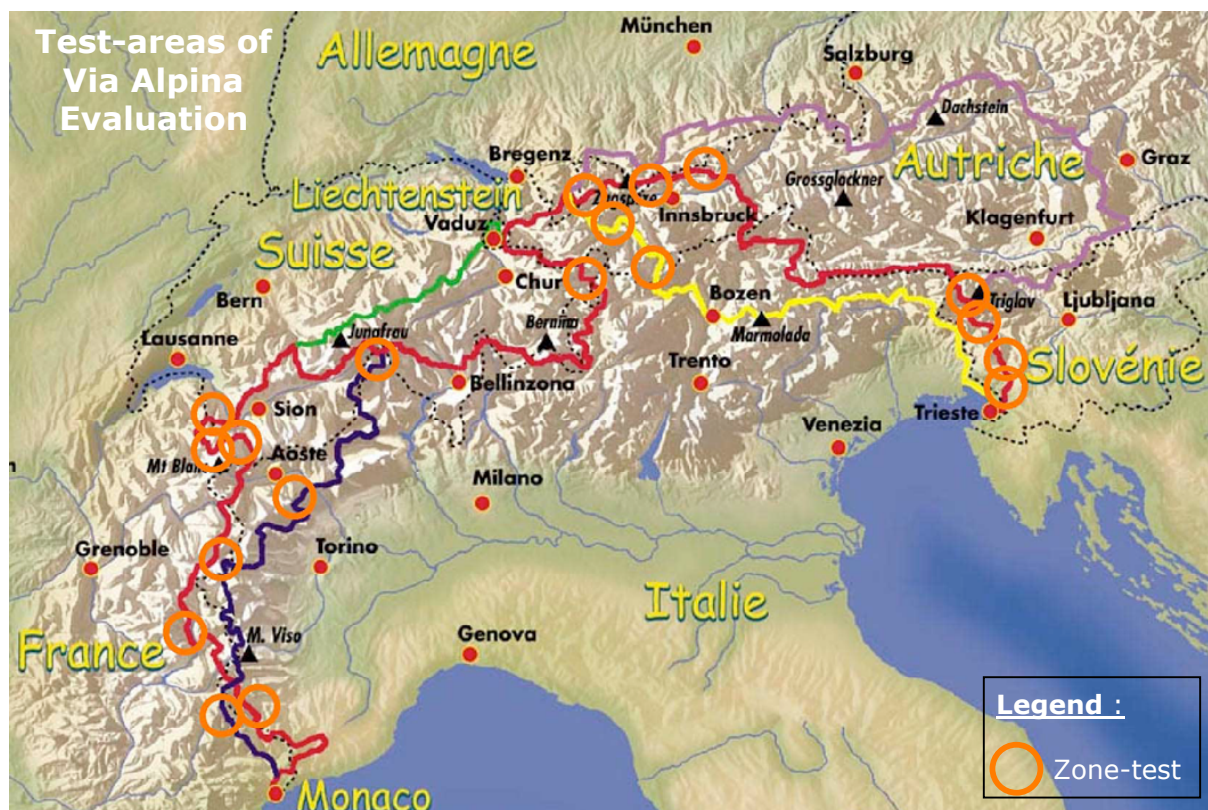
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1. Questioned test-areas and obtained data at the international level.



The important number of data - collected at the international level - have led to the results described on the following document. The evaluation process that took place during summer 2005 led to: **117 interviews** of local actors and **680 questionnaires** of visitors.

This document is the synthesis of precise and complex results, obtained from national and local levels, and generalized into the international level. National syntheses are more detailed, and are available from the concerned evaluation team and experts.

2. Main results concerning visitors :

The following results presented in this part only concern : Austria, France, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland.

♣ What kind of economic potentials for Via Alpina ?

In order to determine the information channels through which Via Alpina could be known, it is important to quote that the **main sources to choose a destination remain the previous visits, by word of mouth and the Internet.**

> *In Italy, 25% of the interviewed people chose their destination because of a previous travel.*

If hiking remains with a large majority the main activity of the interviewed people, it is not the only practiced activity during the stay. **A trend of multi-activities can be stated where cultural activities have great importance!**

>. *In Austria, 34% of hikers declare to combine cultural activities with hiking.*

Finally, a majority of the interviewed hikers prefer consuming local products to branded goods. **So, the Via Alpina objective consisting in generating local and economic returns could be partially reached.**

> *In Slovenia, 76,4% of visitors attest to prefer the consumption of local goods to branded ones.*

♣ What kind of tourist behaviors from visitors ?

The territories through which Via Alpina goes seem to offer entire environmental information. **Actually, most of interviewed people have been heightened and are also interested in the environmental issue: the "intelligent hiking" introduced by Via Alpina is on the right track.**

> *In France, 75% of the interviewed people consulted or at least saw environmental information during their trip. Moreover, 75% of them are interested in this problematic.*

However, car remains the main means of transport : hikers do not choose **soft mobilities as a means of transport – they do not get this into their mentalities**. Some pilot projects of Via Alpina are currently being defined; they could deal with this thematic to make this kind of behaviors evolve.

> *In Switzerland, car represents 75,8% of the means of transport used to go to the starting point of the trail.*

♣ How do visitors perceive Via Alpina and the Alps in general ?

Even if it is quoted, Via Alpina represents a negligible share of motivation for departure: **levels of the Via Alpina awareness and knowledge remain very low**. However, as there is no approach of active communication, the results show that a relevant potential of the project exists.

> *In Italy, 23% of hikers know Via Alpina and 43% have discovered it during their stay.*

The tourist attendance essentially remains an attendance of relative proximity. **It does not seem that an alpine mobility of visitors is emerging yet: the marketing and communication strategy of Via Alpina will be necessary to make these behaviors evolve.**

> *In Austria, the interviewed hikers with a large majority come from two countries: Germany for 60,76% and Austria for 24,05%.*

3. Main results concerning local actors:

This qualitative approach has been implemented on all the test-areas of the map (see above).

♣ What is the identification of the Via Alpina approach by local actors ?

Globally, Via Alpina is too little known by local actors: **a lack of contacts, of direct exchanges between local actors and the person involved in the implementation of Via Alpina (for example the national coordinators) has been stated**. As local actors do not correctly identify the Via Alpina approach, the expected effects (defined by the global objectives of the project) are not easily perceptible at the local level. **Local actors often categorize Via Alpina project as an institutional project, without any direct and concrete actions on and for territories, on and for local actors.**

♣ How do local actors perceive the functioning logic of Via Alpina ?

At the same time as the lack of direct exchange, one of the main weaknesses, analyzed by the evaluation, points out the logic of actions of the project. **The project is too much oriented to the top-down logic, and not enough to the bottom-up one.**

It is often difficult for local actors to appraise temporal scales of actions of the Via Alpina project. **Discussions and negotiations phases between partners are necessary for a project of an international dimension. Nevertheless, those phases are neither perceived nor understood by local actors, which gives the feeling that the project stagnates.**

♣ What kind of potentialities for Via Alpina ?

However, the Via Alpina potential is real, and local actors find an interest in it once the project and its goals have been explained. **Nevertheless, there exist various perceptions of the project interests according to the tourist state of the destination, to the level of local development and to the local structuring.**

4. Main recommendations and general remarks formulated by the evaluation group :

The following recommendations essentially come from the working meeting held in Geneva on the 25th of January 2006.

♣ Making Via Alpina, its concept and its products, more understandable for the general public:

A more precise study, led by the Austrian group of evaluation, revealed that the website was significant and notorious. The Via Alpina website has to be considered as an authentic added value, and as the means of communication of the project. Another possibility to raise the fame of the project consists in the development of awareness actions towards youth i.e. bringing schools to go on the Via Alpina to make practical works. **It turns out to be an emergency and a necessity to increase the efforts of promotion and to avoid weakening the Via Alpina potential (experts qualify the potential as very important).**

♣ Increasing the legibility of Via Alpina to local actors :

The results of the evaluation highlight a significant deficit of the project fame concerning local actors. But Via Alpina remains a network and cannot keep on existing if the local actors themselves do not use and take it over. **Developing this local knowledge of the project belongs to the current priorities, before that counter-productive effects appear.** A large part of the energy of the project should be affected to the making of concrete and legible actions for pilot-projects and/or pilot-areas. Another solution consists in the implementation of partnerships with the private sector in an objective of profitability.

Moreover, it seems essential that national coordinators take the results of the evaluation over and promote them. The double objective here is to make local actors aware and also to give an account of the opinions and reactions expressed during the interviews.

♣ A better definition of the Via Alpina "offer"/"product" :

If the communication around Via Alpina appears to be essential, it must also promote the symbolic dimension of the project, which is its main strength. This communication will have to develop a specific tourist philosophy based on the notion of nomadism, especially in order to give a specific objective to the itinerary through culture and not through the number of covered kilometers. **Via Alpina should propose another way of hiking i.e. a different approach of the classic long-distance trail, and should especially promote the heritage. Consequently, it is relevant to define the specific characteristics of Via Alpina especially in comparison with the existing itineraries.**

In order to clarify the communication and the promotion strategy, the selling and promoting channels will have to take into account the aspects and the motivations of nature and culture, as well as the problems of sustainability, to preserve the whole added value of the project.

- ♣ A better definition of Via Alpina as being a development project:

For a better definition of the links between Via Alpina and the local scale, **the implementation of an "internal" marketing** towards the professionals of the tourist industry is an urgent step to carry out.

Then, the top-down approach remarkably present in the project should be mixed with the bottom-up logic, in order to enhance a stronger cohesion with the local scale, so that partnership opportunities emerge more easily.

Finally, **in the development of actions, national coordinators will have to be conscious of the variety of interests according to the different territories. This awareness is important to adopt strategies of actions that are differentiated according to local needs, and also to give locally sense to the project.**