Erle Drejer
Nora Kastellet

Designing for Sustainable Rural Tourism in Lower Mustang, Nepal

Master's thesis in Industrial Design
Supervisor: Martina Keitsch
Co-supervisor: Joachim Svela and Nora Pincus

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Master's thesis

◻ **NTNU**
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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Lower Mustang is a rural and remote region in Nepal, characterized by several small mountain villages. The local economy primarily relies on agriculture, supplemented by tourism as a significant source of income. The area's appeal to tourists lies in its distinct nature and culture. The culture shares many similarities with Tibetan traditions, and the Himalayan mountain range surrounds the area. This combination attracts a broad specter of tourists, where the majority are trekkers and pilgrims. However, most tourist activity evolves around three specific villages, leaving the remaining villages unvisited. Despite the residents' wishes to attract tourists, they struggle to find an efficient way to do so. Concurrently, some tourists are interested in visiting these secluded villages to get unique and authentic experiences but are unaware of them because of a lack of information.

The thesis objective is to attract tourists to the secluded villages in Lower Mustang in a manner that benefits both the local communities and the incoming tourists. We aim to do so in an economically and socially sustainable way by creating job opportunities and revenue for the local communities while preserving the local culture. Therefore, the project targets a specific group of adventure tourists seeking unique experiences in remote locations. The desirable outcome is, therefore, not to attract many tourists but rather to achieve a controlled and gradual increase in tourism.

The thesis uses methods from service design and human-centered design. During the first part of the project, we built a theoretical fundament covering design methodology and other relevant subjects like branding, visitor experience design, and business model theory. We further conducted interviews, observations, a survey, and workshop exercises in Norway to supplement our theoretical knowledge with practical insights. However, the primary focus of the insight process entailed a 5-week field trip to Nepal. During the trip, we consulted with local villagers, tourists, and other tourism stakeholders in Lower Mustang. The field research involved interviews, observations, and concept testing. Through these activities, we aimed to develop a concept that draws tourists to the secluded villages without damaging the local culture and everyday life.

A hiking trail concept was developed as a response to the lack of information about the secluded villages, the local communities' desire for visitors, and the tourists' wish for unique experiences. The concept comprises a digital platform, brand strategy, on-site experiences, and a business model, and it aims to attract visitors to the remote villages. The digital platform and brand strategy strive to inform tourists about the experience opportunities in Lower Mustang and persuade them to seek them out. Upon arrival, visitors can enjoy memorable experiences that must correspond to the expectations made from the website. Furthermore, the business model aspires to create benefits for the local community in the long run by making a feasible implementation plan. By realizing the trail and the surrounding strategy, visitor numbers could increase, resulting in more job opportunities and possibly a better economic situation in the villages. Additionally, tourists would get easier access to unique cultural experiences. Resultively, we could contribute to a system that benefits both locals and tourists.

Sammendrag

Regionen Lower Mustang i Nepal kan karakteriseres som et landlig fjellområde hvor det finnes flere små landsbyer. Økonomien her er først og fremst avhengig av jordbruk, men turisme er også en betydelig inntektskilde. Turistene i dette området dras gjerne mot den unike kulturen og naturen. Kulturen har mange likheter med Tibetanske tradisjoner, og området er omkranset av Himalaya-fjellkjeden. Denne kombinasjonen trekker til seg et bredt spekter av turister, hvor flesteparten er turgåere og pilegrimer. En observert tendens er at turismen hovedsakelig utvikles i tre av områdets landsbyer, mens de resterende landsbyene forblir ukjente for besøkende. Til tross for innbyggernes ønsker om å tiltrekke seg turister, har de enda ikke lyktes med å finne en effektiv måte å gjøre det på. Parallelt, er flere turister interessert i å besøke ukjente steder hvor de kan få unike og autentiske opplevelser, men er uvitende om de aktuelle landsbyene grunnet mangel på informasjon.

Oppgavens mål er å trekke turister til de bortgjemte landsbyene i Lower Mustang på en måte som kommer både lokalsamfunnene og turistene til gode. Vi ønsker å gjøre dette på en bærekraftig måte hvor det skapes jobbmuligheter og inntekter for lokalsamfunnene, samtidig som den lokale kulturen bevares. Prosjektet sin hovedmålgruppe er derfor en liten gruppe turister som ønsker unike opplevelser på avsidesliggende steder, såkalt "opplevelsesturister". Målet er dermed ikke å tiltrekke et stort antall turister, men å oppnå en kontrollert og gradvis økning i turismen.

Oppgaven bruker metoder fra tjenestedesign og brukersentrert design. Den første delen av prosjektet gikk ut på å bygge et teoretisk fundament som dekker designmetodikk og andre relevante emner, som merkevarebygging, opplevelsesdesign og forretningsmodellteori. Videre gjennomførte vi intervjuer, observasjoner, en spørreundersøkelse og workshopøvelser for å supplere teorien med praktisk innsikt. Hovedfokuset i innsiktsdelen lå imidlertid på en 5-ukers ekskursjon til Nepal. Under turen oppsøkte vi innbyggere, turister og andre med tilknytning til turisme i Lower Mustang. Feltarbeidet innebar intervjuer, observasjoner og testing av konsept. Målet med innsiktarbeidet var å kunne utvikle et konsept som trekker turister til de mindre landsbyene uten å virke ødeleggende på lokal kultur og hverdagsliv.

Som et svar på den manglende informasjonen om landsbyene, de lokales ønske om flere besøkende, og turistenes ønske om unike opplevelser, utviklet vi et konsept for en tursti. Konseptet omfatter en digital plattform, merkevarestrategi, opplevelser på stedet og en forretningsmodell, med et samlet mål om å trekke besøkende til de avsidesliggende landsbyene. Den digitale plattformen og merkevarestrategien skal informere turister om hva slags opplevelser som finnes i Lower Mustang og overbevise dem om å oppsøke disse opplevelsene. Etter ankomst kan besøkende nyte opplevelsene på stedet, som må leve opp til forventningene de har fått fra nettsiden. Videre sikter forretningsmodellen på å skape fordeler for lokalsamfunnet i det lange løp ved å lage en gjennomførbar implementeringsplan. Realisering av turstien og den tilhørende strategien kan føre til økte besøkstall, noe som igjen skaper flere jobbmuligheter og potensielt en bedre økonomisk situasjon i landsbyene. I tillegg vil turister få lettere tilgang til unike kulturopplevelser. På denne måten kan vi bidra til å skape et system som gangner både turistene og lokalsamfunnet.

Preface

The Master's thesis is part of SAMAJ Trans-disciplinary Education for a Sustainable Society – a collaborative project between the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway, and the Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Nepal. In the NTNU course Design 9, we did a preparatory project for our thesis, exploring sustainable tourism in Lower Mustang, Nepal. For our Master's thesis, we continued the project and developed a concept that aims to sustainably increase tourism to the area. We have used methods and tools from service design and human-centered design to conduct insight and present our findings and solutions.

Master's thesis for students Erle Drejer and Nora Kastellet

Tourism in Lower Mustang

Lower Mustang in Nepal attracts many tourists due to its religious sites, unique culture, and hiking opportunities. Tourists mainly visit three of the villages in Lower Mustang, and bypass the other villages in the area. Many locals in the secluded villages want to participate in the tourism industry. At the same time, many tourists wish for more authentic cultural experiences, which could be provided in the excluded villages. The project will therefore focus on connecting tourists and locals, drawing travelers toward the unknown villages.

In the Design 9 course, we worked separately on tourism projects in Lower Mustang. For the Master's thesis, we will use our existing work and knowledge to develop a concept to help locals in secluded villages get involved in the tourism industry. During the thesis, we want to discover and develop ways to facilitate tourism in the secluded villages in Lower Mustang. Understanding what draws tourists to the villages and how the locals can handle increased tourism will also be a crucial part of the project. To do this we will use our previous research as a knowledge base and further investigate knowledge gaps and new relevant directions for the project with the help of design tools and methods. The goal is to create specific concepts and prototypes that can be tested and iterated during a field trip to Lower Mustang this spring.

Tasks
- Analyze, structure, and prioritize existing research
- Cover potential knowledge gaps in the research
- Comparative analysis of existing concepts and solutions
- Investigate concepts and solutions
- Research ways to test concepts and solutions in a different cultural context
- Decide on concepts that can be tested, and plan test methods
- Co-creation, testing, and iteration of concepts during a field trip to Lower Mustang

The thesis is carried out according to the "Guidelines for master's theses in Industrial Design".

Main supervisor: Martina Keitsch

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Submission deadline: May 29, 2023

NTNU, Trondheim, January 9, 2023

Martina Keitsch   Sara Brinch
Supervisor   Head of department

Table of Contents

Introduction

This chapter covers the following topics:

- Project description and objective – an introduction to the tourism situation in Lower Mustang and our approach to improving the situation sustainably.

- Method and process – a description of the main design approaches used in the thesis and a timeline showcasing our process.

1.1 Project Description and Objective

Project Fundament

Lower Mustang is a Nepalese region in the shadow of the Himalayas and south of the Tibetan Plateau. Tourists in Lower Mustang can admire astonishing views, trek between charming villages, visit holy pilgrimage sites, explore local culture and lifestyle, and hike amongst towering peaks. (Kharel, 2017). Lower Mustang attracts visitors ranging from trekkers and pilgrims to motorbikers. However, most visitors only visit the three villages of Jomsom, Kagbeni, and Muktinath (see map page 18). The smaller, secluded villages are often overlooked and remain unvisited. Many local residents have stated that they wish to participate in the tourist industry but fail to attract tourists. At the same time, some tourists seek more authentic experiences, which the smaller villages could provide.

A SAMAJ Project

The Master's project is part of SAMAJ Transdisciplinary Education for a Sustainable Society – a collaborative project between the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway, and the Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Nepal. The project incorporates sustainable development goals in education and research, believing that transdisciplinary education may contribute to a more sustainable society. SAMAJ involves co-design, contextual case studies, and fieldwork in Nepalese and Norwegian communities (NTNU, 2023). In the NTNU course "Design 9", we conducted separate projects about tourism in Lower Mustang as part of SAMAJ. This project is a continuation of the two previous projects, as they had the same working scope.

The Starting Point of the Project

The local community and SAMAJ have proposed a hiking trail between secluded villages and a digital platform for booking homestays to attract more tourists. The project was initially suggested a few years ago but was paused due to the Covid 19 pandemic. However, the project was reintroduced in the autumn of 2022 and became our Design 9 thesis. Our field trip to Lower Mustang confirmed that tourists mostly visit the few mentioned villages and that many residents want to participate in tourism to increase their income. Some tourists showed interest in authentic experiences away from commercialized routes and were dissatisfied with walking on main roads with car traffic. Our research also found that a lack of online information is one reason why tourists do not visit the small villages. These findings indicated a demand for a hiking trail outside the trafficked road and a digital information platform. A full-stack booking solution was considered premature, but a digital plat-form reaching tourists in the early planning phase seemed necessary.

Thesis Approach

Our thesis objective is to attract tourists to the secluded villages in a manner that benefits both the local communities and the incoming tourists. The research part of the thesis will focus on understanding how to achieve a successful hiking trail and identifying the needs and desires of tourists, while the design part will suggest a concept based on these findings. The focus area is a hiking trail providing authentic experiences. It should contribute to economic and social sustainability by creating job opportunities and generating revenue for the local community while preserving local culture. Homestays will be included to give an income source to the local communities and a way for tourists to experience the local culture. A digital platform providing information will be central to enlight and inform tourists in the first place. Since this thesis is part of a long-term collaboration through SAMAJ, a part of the solution will be to clarify how our deliverables can be used for further development of the solution. Two students from the Design faculty have agreed to take on the project as part of their Design 9 thesis this fall. Due to the broad scope, we recognize the need to narrow down and prioritize what tasks should be addressed first.

Tiri

Kagbeni

Jhong   Chonghur

Jharkot   Muktinath

Lubra
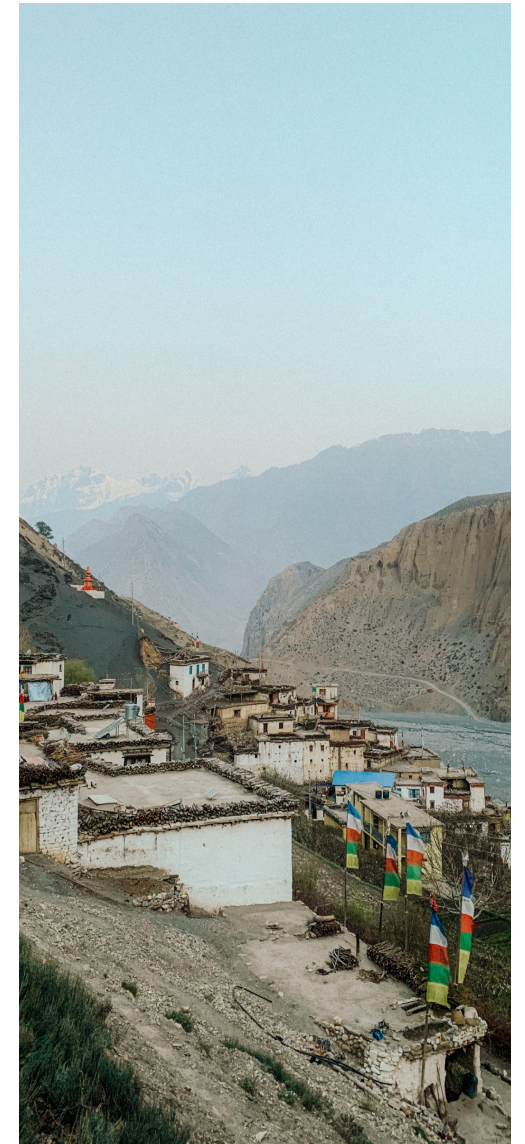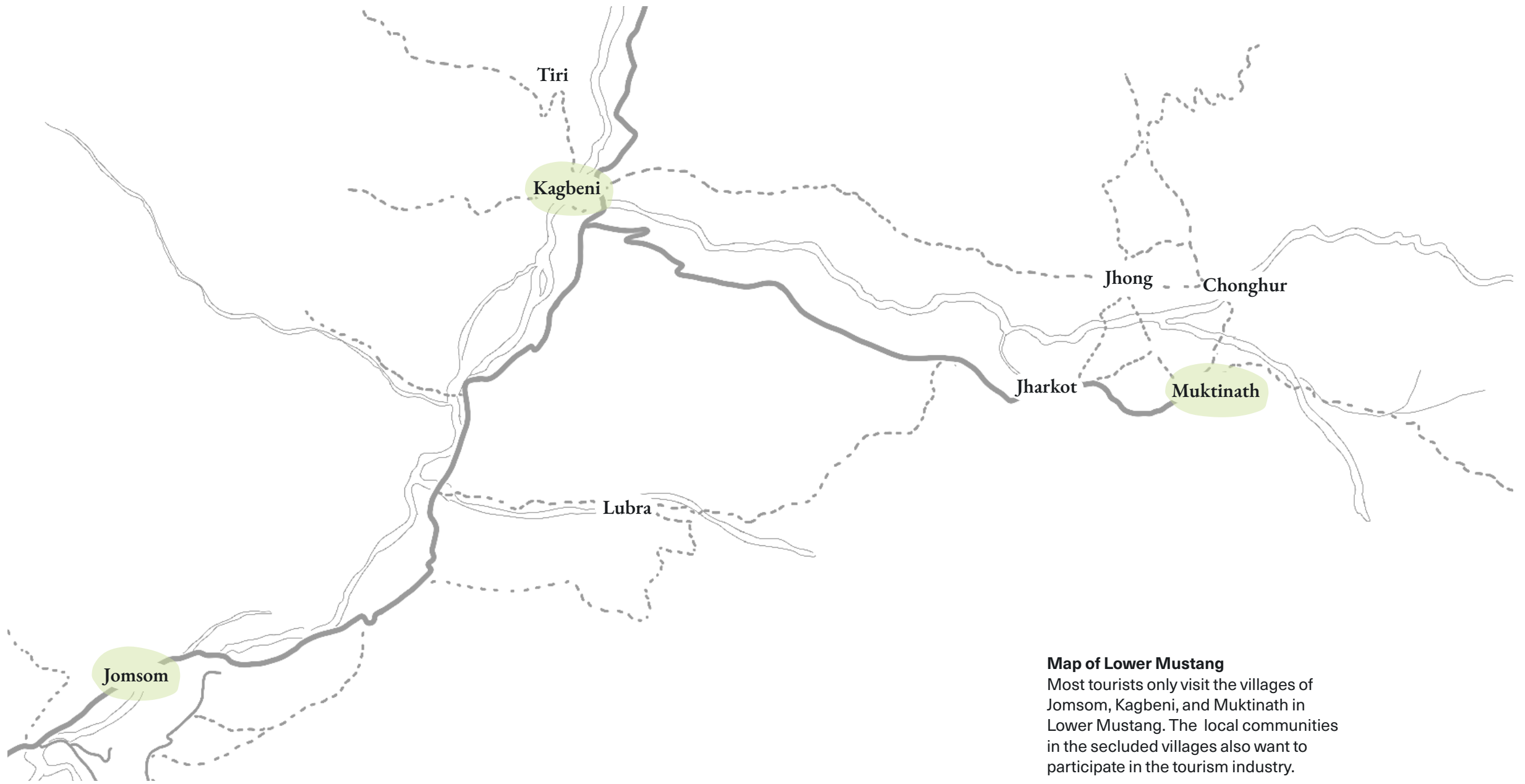
Jomsom

Map of Lower Mustang
Most tourists only visit the villages of
Jomsom, Kagbeni, and Muktinath in
Lower Mustang. The local communities
in the secluded villages also want to
participate in the tourism industry.

1.2 Methods and Process

The project uses methodology and tools from service design and human-centered design. Service design is a user-centric approach to creating holistic and optimized experiences. Achieving this requires qualitative research, co-creation, and stakeholder involvement. (DOGA, 2018; Stickdorn & Schneider, 2018). Human-centered design involves understanding the people one designs for to solve problems effectively (IDEO, 2015). Service design and human-centered design shares a common ground in aiming to identify the right problem by investigating the needs and issues of the users involved. Rapid prototyping, testing, iterations, and research are all key activities on the way to the solution (Stickdorn et al., 2018).

Simplified, our project comprises the activities within the following categories:
• Conducting insights
• Systemizing insights
• Concept development
• Testing

The project timeline on the following page shows that each activity had multiple phases, with some overlap between them. We started the thesis work by systemizing insights from our Design 9 projects about tourism in Lower Mustang. At the same time, we supplemented our knowledge by conducting both theoretical and practical research. In February, we started the first concept development stage by deciding on our concept's four components: branding, on-site experiences, sustainable business model, and digital platform. This gave us a clearer direction to conduct insights and explore concept development. In March, we used the weeks leading up to our field trip to Nepal to systemize our insights and create a testable concept. During the 5-week field trip, we conducted insights, tested the concept, and iterated on the concept simultaneously. The field trip gave us a lot of findings we had to systemize after returning to Norway. The last month until delivering the thesis was used to finalize and test the concept.

The thesis follows our process. Chapters 2-7 present our work done before the field trip. In other words, this work is done physically in Norway, with digital tools to reach remote stakeholders. Chapter 8 is about our field trip to Nepal, and the findings from this field trip resulted in the final concept, which is described and tested in Chapter 9. In Chapter 10 we reflect on our process and project, and make a short conclusion on how the project answers our objective.

	January	February		March	April	May

Field trip to Nepal

Conducting Insights

Building a theoretic fundament by reading books and articles on relevant topics

Observations and interviews exploring different topics

Interviews and observations during field trip to Nepal

Conducting a competitive analysis of other hiking trails

Digital survey to tourists traveling in Nepal

Interviewing project leaders of other hiking trails

Systemizing Insights

Summarizing findings from our previous project about tourism in Lower Mustang

Systemizing findings pre-Nepal using stakeholder map, user journey, etc.

Systemizing findings from the field trip

Concept Development

Deciding on the four components of our concepts: Branding, on-site experiences, sustainable business model, and digital platform

Making a first-draft for the brand guide and visual identity

Doing iterations on all four concept components based on feedback during the fiedtrip

Finalizing the brand guide, on-site experiences, business model, and Figma prototype

Making a experience library for on-site experiences to test in Nepal

Figma iterations

Performing workshops to explore branding and business models

Starting to prototype the digital platform in Figma

Making a first draft of the Business Model Canvas

Testing

Testing the branding in Norway

Testing the branding and digital platform on local residents in Lower Mustang

Testing the prototype in Norway

Testing the prototype by sending it to local residents in Nepal

Testing the branding and digital platform on tourists in Lower Mustang

Sharing the prototype and a feedback form in Facebook groups for travelers in Nepal

Key Takeaways – Chapter 1

- Many tourists come to Lower Mustang to admire the views, trek, experience local culture, and visit sacred sites. However, visitors mainly visit three of the villages in the area and overlook the smaller villages.

- Several local communities in Lower Mustang want to participate in tourism but struggle to attract visitors. Some tourists seek more authentic experiences, which the secluded villages could provide. A lack of information could be why they do not get these experiences today.

- SAMAJ and the local community have proposed a hiking trail between the secluded villages and a digital platform for booking homestays to attract more tourists. Our Design 9 projects confirmed that this could be a good approach and a feasible solution.

- Our thesis objective is to attract tourists to the secluded villages in a manner that benefits both the local communities and the incoming tourists.

- The project uses methodology and tools from service design and human-centered design.

CHAPTER 2

Background

This chapter will cover the following topics:

- Lower Mustang - An introduction to Lower Mustang to give an impression of the area, the local residents, and what draws tourists to the region.

- Rural tourism - An overview of tourism and rural tourism, highlighting their benefits and drawbacks.

- Previous research - A summary of our previous research on tourism in Lower Mustang, which will serve as the basis for our future work and focus.
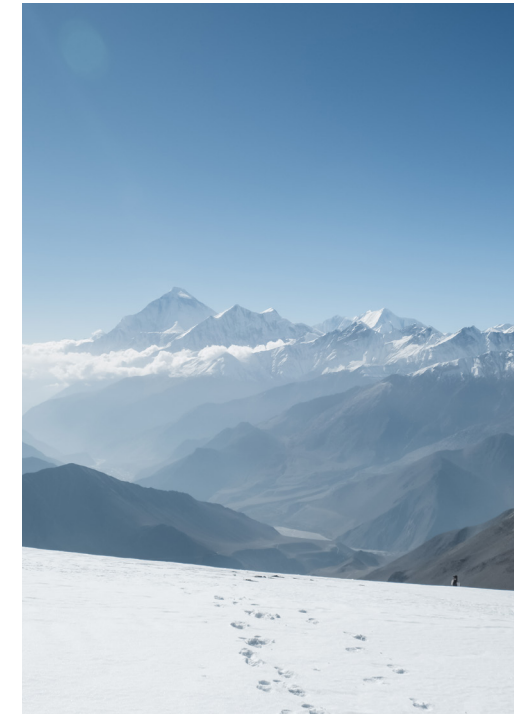
2.1 Lower Mustang

The Mustang District is a rural mountain region in Nepal's Trans-Himalayan range. It is divided into two parts, Lower and Upper Mustang, each offering unique natural and cultural experiences. Lower Mustang houses Himalayan mountain views, while Upper Mustang has Tibetan culture and desert terrain (Kharel, 2017). This project focuses on the villages in the Muktinath Valley of Lower Mustang, which is home to diverse fauna and flora, landscapes, climate, and vegetation (Becken et al., 2013, p. 24). Due to its geographical position, Lower Mustang has many historical, cultural, and religious attractions influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and Indian Hinduism (Dhungel, 1999, p. 2). Visitors can observe visible expressions of culture, such as monasteries, prayer flags, statues, and religious festivals.

Despite its remote location, Mustang is a popular destination for rural tourism, ranking as the third most visited trekking area in Nepal (National Tourism Board, 2021, p. 48). The famous Annapurna Circuit makes its way through the Muktinath valley, making it a natural destination for trekking and adventure tourism. In addition, Lower Mustang is home to several religious sites and festivals, attracting many religious pilgrims. The high number of visitors has led to a need to protect the area. Mustang is, therefore, part of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), aiming to preserve and maintain the area's unique nature, rich biodiversity, and cultural diversity (Kharel, 2017).

Lower Mustang faces challenges for tourism businesses with frequent power failures, inadequate infrastructure, and limited healthcare facilities (Kharel, 2017). In addition, climate change has been highly prominent in recent years, putting people's livelihoods at risk (Lama, 2010). Monsoons during summer and freezing winters make spring and fall the busiest tourism seasons (NTB, 2020, p. 49; NTB, 2019, p. 47; NTB, 2018, p.53). The winters are so cold that most of the population even migrates to the warmer cities in Nepal (Gibbons & Pritchard-Jones, 2016, p.48).

Lower Mustang

**End Point
Annapurna Circuit**

**Starting Point
Annapurna Circuit**
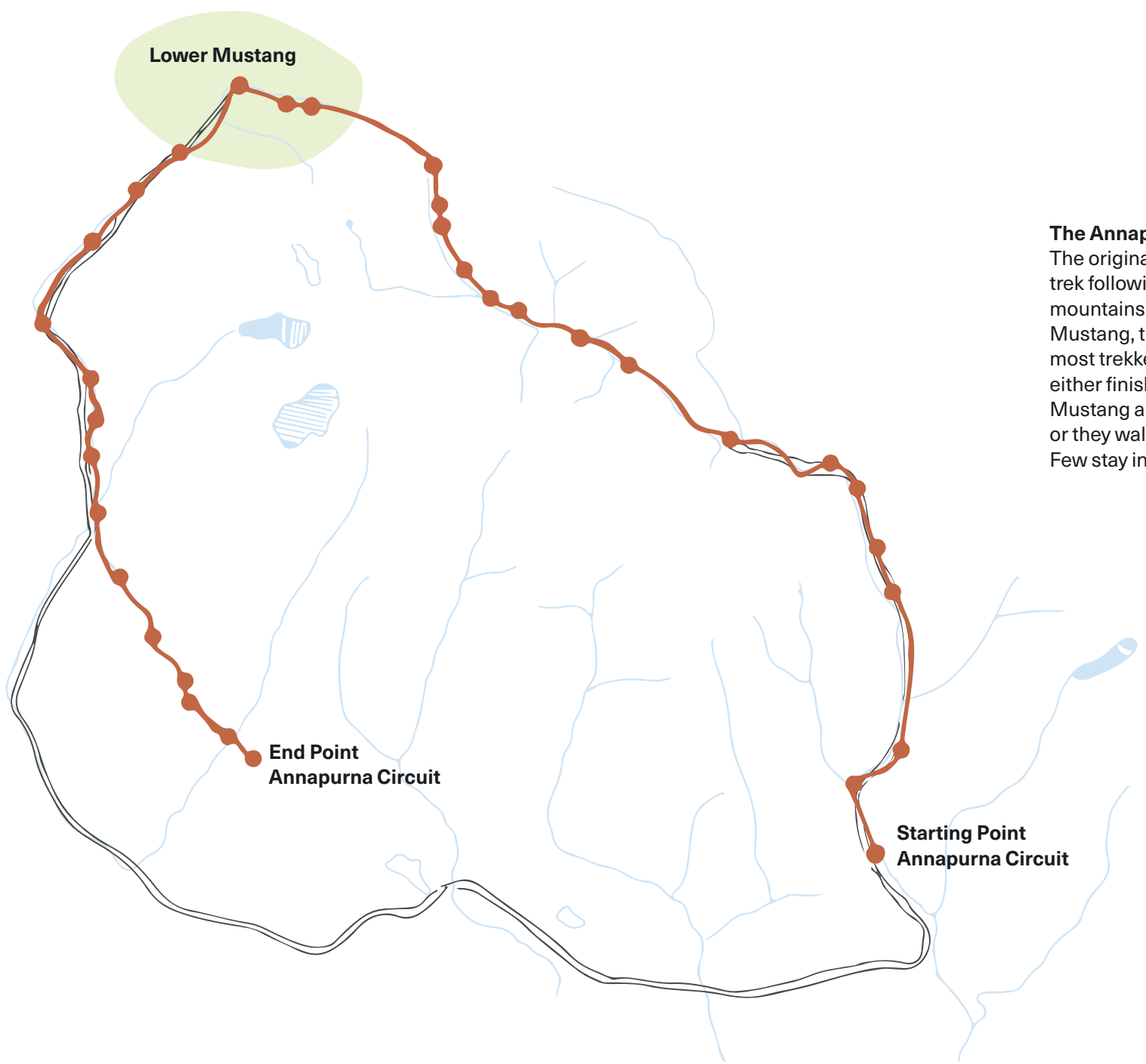
The Annapurna Circuit Route
The original Annapurna Circuit is a 30-day trek following trails around the Annapurna mountains. The circuit goes through Lower Mustang, the green area on the map. Today, most trekkers do only parts of the circuit. Many either finish their trek in Muktinath in Lower Mustang and travel by jeep or bus to Pokhara, or they walk quickly through the main villages. Few stay in Lower Mustang for several days.

2.2 Rural Tourism

Tourism is, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), when people travel beyond their usual surroundings for personal or professional reasons. The tourism industry contributes to the global economy (UNWTO, 2021), promotes intercultural exchange (Jack & Phipps, 2005), and plays an essential role in heritage preservation (Fyall & Racik, 2006). However, tourism can also cause overuse of natural resources (TWC, 2022), loss of cultural identity (WTO, 2012), and lack of economic benefit to host communities (Economic Times, 2022). To address these challenges, the UN (2015) emphasizes the importance of sustainability in reinventing the tourism sector, which involves considering the environment and positively impacting people, economies, and cultures when developing tourist destinations. Ecotourism, experience tourism, and transformative travel are other current focus areas and tendencies in the tourism sector. These types of tourism encourage travelers to seek authentic experiences, cultural exchange, and purposeful activities (UNWTO, 2022; WTTC, 2022).

Lower Mustang's tourism can be defined as rural tourism, which is tourism activities that occur in remote areas with low population density (National Geographic, 2022). Rural tourism products are typically associated with lifestyle and culture, nature-based activities, agriculture, and sightseeing (UNWTO, 2022). Travelers who visit remote areas usually prefer to do so in small groups, seeking to explore new cultures and natural scenery (Zurick, 1992, p. 609). This tendency is beneficial since small villages cannot accommodate large groups. However, rural tourism also raises concerns about the impact on local cultures as smaller villages are more vulnerable to change (Zurick, 1992, p. 611).

Recently, the number of rural and adventure tourists has increased, resulting in diverse consequences. Tourism has improved the living standards of many communities by reducing isolation, boosting local economies, and providing employment opportunities for women (ILOSTAT, 2013). On the other hand, overreliance on tourism can threaten local customs and traditions by turning them into tourist attractions. Moreover, rural tourism often occurs in fragile mountain landscapes vulnerable to inappropriate use, highlighting the need for tourism products that align with the socio-ecological system and local landscapes (Knowles, 2019). Sustainable tourism development is especially crucial for Mustang as a part of the ACAP area, emphasizing the importance of designing tourism products that preserve local culture and the environment.

2.3 Previous Work

During Design 9, we worked on separate tourism-related projects in Lower Mustang. One project focused on sustainable tourism in the area, while the other aimed to support local tourism entrepreneurship and minimize economic leakages. As part of the project, we went on a field trip to Lower Mustang and collaborated on collecting data there. We conducted 50 semi-structured interviews with local residents, tourists, and travel companies during the trip. Additionally, we did natural observations of tourists and local residents in Lower Mustang. The main findings from this trip will be presented in the following section and further used in the thesis.

Summary from Previous Research

Tourism

- Tourists mainly visit the villages of Jomsom, Kagbeni, and Muktinath. The other villages remain unvisited.

- Many local residents, especially in secluded villages, want tourists to visit. However, they struggle with attracting and reaching tourists.

- Several local residents have homestays, but information and booking are not easily accessible to tourists.

- Many tourists visit Lower Mustang as part of the Annapurna Circuit. The circuit is Westernized and lacks focus on local culture.

- Tourism leads to more focus on culture and preservation among local residents. However, tourism can also result in an unauthentic showcasing of culture.

- The tourism industry does not fully utilize the unique resources (nature, culture, experiences) of Lower Mustang.

Information

- Tourists remark that there is a lack of information before and during the trip.

- Information on villages and sites off the beaten path is not accessible or well-communicated to tourists.

- Information and interpretive signage are missing or misleading.

- Local facilities are typically communicated through word-of-mouth, making it challenging to access them without connections to the local community.

- Travel agencies and guides mainly offer information on Upper Mustang, the Annapurna Circuit, transport methods, and Muktinath.

- Tourists use a lot of different information sources and navigation applications.

Collaboration

- Local residents often informally collaborate by recommending acquaintances' businesses and services, but there is no formal collaboration between internal stakeholders.

- Local collaboration with external stakeholders happens, but it is rare. There are some travel agencies that collaborate with hotels.

Economy

- Homestay is a form of local entrepreneurship that require low economic investment but likely generate revenue.

- Tourism is essential for the local economy. However, only a minority of Mustang's villages and people make a living solely from tourism.

- Local residents in Lower Mustang mainly rely on farming as their primary income source, while tourism-related work is a secondary source of income for some.

- Tourism has economic leakages to travel agencies, international booking solutions, and importation of goods. Though, this is not a major problem in Mustang, since most tourist-related businesses are locally owned.

Social

- Migration is widespread, and the majority of youth move to Pokhara, Kathmandu, or abroad.

- There is a lack of job opportunities for highly educated people.

- Many local residents struggle with balancing tourism and farming.

Environment

- The infrastructure has several shortcomings (dangerous roads, lack of electricity, waste management, etc.).

- A road to Lower Mustang was built in 2006, and has made the area more accessible and increased crop production due to exports. On the downside, many villages are bypassed due to the new and more efficient way of traveling.

- Climate change is very apparent (floods, heavy rains, landslides, etc.).

Main Tourist Groups

Adventure Tourists

Adventure tourists visit Lower Mustang because of the excellent trekking opportunities and scenic views. Most of the adventure tourists in the region are trekkers who have completed the Annapurna Circuit. They usually only visit the main villages in Lower Mustang and stay for a short time.

Pilgrims

Lower Mustang is a popular destination for pilgrims due to its many sacred sites for both Buddhist and Hindu pilgrimage. The Muktinath temple is the main attraction for most pilgrims. While some pilgrims stay for several months to pray and meditate, most only spend a few days.

Motorbikers

The challenging roads of Lower Mustang attract many motorbikers. Bikers travel both with and without a travel agency. For most bikers, biking is the travel purpose, but for some, it is just a mode of transport. Groups of bikers only visit the bigger villages and the main tourist attractions, as they are bound to the road.

Cultural Travelers

Many tourists visit Mustang to experience the rich culture. However, many cultural tourists spend more time in Upper than Lower Mustang. This group of travelers either cycle, walk or drive between villages. They are interested in history and the everyday life of local communities, and travel independently or with a guide.

Villages in the Muktinath Valley

In Lower Mustang, there are many villages. The part of Lower Mustang that lies next to the Jhong River is called Muktinath Valley (mapy.cz, 2023). The 12 villages in this valley are small, with only a few dozen residents each. Our thesis focuses on seven of these villages, which were chosen based on several factors discovered during our field trip in Design 9. The decisive factors include the interest among villagers to participate in tourism, the village's uniqueness, and its location. Each of these villages has its own cultural experience. We will briefly introduce the seven villages on the following page. Additionally, we will include a description of Jomsom, which is the primary entry point to the Muktinath Valley, as this village also will be mentioned later in the thesis.

Tiri

Kagbeni

Jhong

Chonghur

Jharkot

Muktinath

Lubra
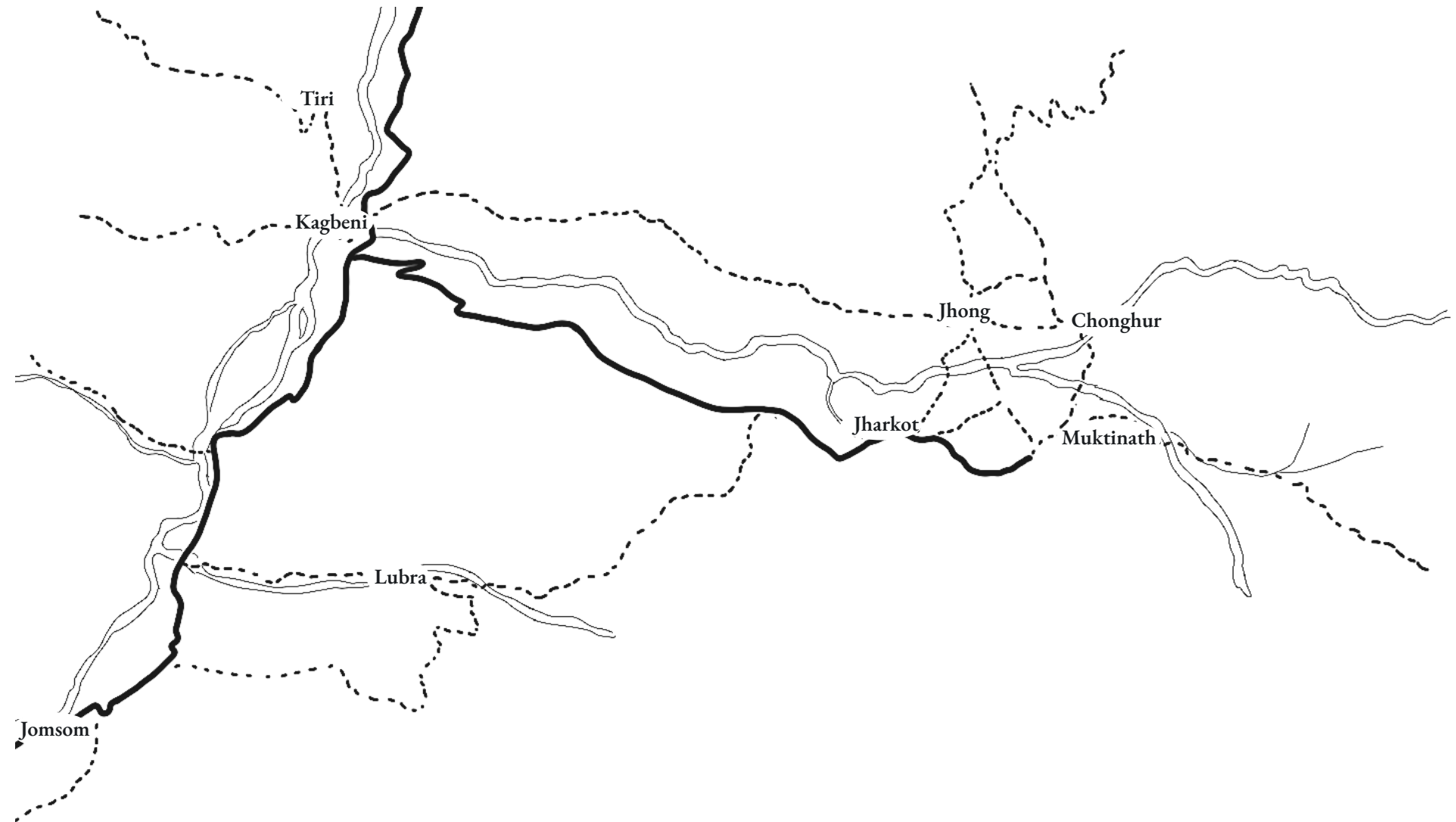
Jomsom

Village Characteristics

Jomsom

Jomsom is a gateway for anyone traveling from Pokhara to Mustang, and it is common to stay overnight to adjust to the altitude. All buildings in Jomsom are centered around the main road, making it less charming than the other villages.

Kagbeni

Kagbeni is a known destination to many pilgrims because of its position next to the merging point of two rivers considered sacred in Hinduism. It is one of the more busy villages, with many hotels, guest houses, and restaurants.

Tiri

Tiri is the only village in Upper Mustang where you do not need a special permit. It is a small village where you can stay at a homestay, walk among lush gardens, observe farming routines, and join morning Puja in the monastery.

Jhong

Jhong used to be the home of the monarchs of Mustang. Next to the old palace ruins and the newly reconstructed monastery, there is a path offering a panoramic view over the entire valley. Jhong is also a great starting point to Dakpoche.

Chonghur

Chonghur is a small village unknown to most tourists. The houses are decorated with red, blue, and yellow stripes and Buddhist flags. In one of the village farms, visitors will be greeted by the only potato chips producer in Mustang.

Muktinath

Muktinath is a popular destination in Mustang due to its sacred temple, significant to Buddhism and Hinduism, with 108 water sprouts serving holy water. As the busiest village, there are plenty of hotels and restaurants available.

Jharkot

Jharkot served as the home of the monarchs after they moved from Jhong. In the center of the village, there is a Tibetan school focusing on preserving traditions. A short hike from the village is the footprint of the god Guru Rinpoche.

Lubra

Lubra is the only village still practicing the Bon religion, an ancient form of Buddhism. The small village is nicely shielded from the road and has an arranged homestay community where visitors can book a place to stay online.

Homestays

Most of Lower Mustang's residents work as farmers. Some residents in Kagbeni and Muktinath have tourism as their primary income, while people in the smaller villages usually depend on agriculture. A few residents in each village also run a homestay. However, most homestay owners see the income from visitors as a sporadic bonus. The homestay booking usually happens on short notice by phone call or on arrival. This unpredictable arrangement makes it difficult to balance homestay assignments and agriculture. On the other hand, tourists find it difficult to find homestays because there is little information online. Today, tourists rely on getting homestay contact information from acquaintances of the owners.

Compared to other local tourism activities, the revenue of running a homestay is relatively high (see value chain analysis). The economic leakage is also very low, as most benefits go directly to the owner. There is also a demand for homestays from tourists. Several tourists request homestays because they want to stay with local residents to experience the culture, but as previously stated, they have difficulty finding information about them. In other words, developing homestay solutions can significantly benefit both local residents and tourists.

Main activities	HOMESTAY	HOTEL	COURSES	SELL PRODUCTS
Support activites	Manage bookings Prepare rooms Cooking Marketing	Manage bookings Prepare rooms Cooking Marketing Hire employees	Planning Collect goods Perform Marketing	Find arena Trade Be avalable Marketing
Cost	Low	High	Low	Medium
Time use	High	Very high	Medium	Low
Revenue	High	High	Medium	Low

Key Takeaways – Chapter 2

- There are two main reasons for tourists visiting Lower Mustang:
  1. Pilgrims visit the famous Buddhist and Hindu pilgrimage sites.
  2. Trekkers doing Annapurna Circuit pass through the area.

- Articles show that the increase in rural tourism improves many communities' living standards and boosts local economies. However, overreliance on tourism can threaten local traditions and fragile mountain landscapes.

- In Lower Mustang, increased tourism has caused problems with maintaining environmental sustainability and local resources.

- Tourists in Lower Mustang mainly visit Muktinath, Kagbeni, and Jomsom, while the other villages are left unvisited. Many local residents in the secluded villages want tourists to visit, but they struggle to attract and reach them.

- The local residents in Lower Mustang can provide authentic tourism experiences, but struggle to reach tourists. On the other hand, tourists seeking authentic experiences struggle to find them.

- Homestays can potentially greatly benefit the owners, as the revenue is high and the economic leakage is low. However, as few tourists know about homestays, most owners get limited and irregular income from guests.

Theoretical Insights

Designing for tourism requires diverse skills and knowledge. While our primary task is to provide design expertise, a successful project also relies on insight in other fields. Therefore, we have read books and articles in design and other domains to equip us better to make informed decisions. This chapter will present the main findings from the following topics:

- Sustainable tourism – to understand how to create solutions that benefit visitors, host communities, and the local environment.

- Cross-cultural design – to prepare for designing within a different cultural context.

- Visitor experience design and hiking trail design – to understand how to create meaningful experiences.

- Branding and tourism website design – to understand how to reach potential visitors with a platform that meets their needs for information and inspiration.

- Business models – to discover how to develop a viable concept that benefits both tourists and local residents.

- Design methods – to be more prepared for product testing, observations, and iterations during the project and field trip.

3.1 Sustainable Tourism

Sustainability is critical in developing the tourism sector in the upcoming years (UN, 2005), and we will focus on suggesting concepts within a sustainable context. According to UN Environment Program and World Tourism Organization (2005, p. 12), sustainable tourism is "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities." From the definition, it follows that economic, social, and environmental concerns are all necessary for the sustainable development of tourist desti-

nations. The focus on sustainability can benefit both tourists and local residents (UN, 2015, p. 3), as tourists can seek experiences in attractive and safe environments that benefit the local residents. Tourism that benefits the local residents and creates jobs is crucial for economic sustainability. Protection and preservation of local heritage and culture can help to attain socially sustainable tourism, while environmentally sustainable tourism preserves endangered natural environments and resources. To achieve genuinely sustainable tourist development, economic, social, and environmental concerns must all be addressed.

3.2 Cross-Cultural Design

Designing in a foreign and diverse cultural context requires a different approach than in Norway. The design process must adapt to the cultural context, considering language barriers, values, norms, and taboos to create contextually meaningful solutions. The cross-cultural design context introduces several ethical questions that should be addressed. (Vieria, 2017). For instance, questioning how designers can create feasible and viable products in another culture is highly relevant. In our project, we must be aware of the Nepalese culture and context, as the solutions feasible in Nepal differ from those we would create in Norway.

There are several pitfalls to consider when designing in a foreign country. A 2018 research paper (Bohemia et al.) discusses the potential pitfalls of educational collaboration in international design projects. According to the paper, some projects result in 'Design Tourism,' where the project goal is the personal or academic growth of the students, and the resultant concept has little practical implementation potential. The paper underlines the

significance of team cohesiveness and realistic student expectations to perform a successful international design project. To avoid this, students can regularly discuss and evaluate if the suggestions are implementable. The article also mentions longer interactions and dialogues with local residents as a critical component toward successful international design projects.

In Akpem's (2020) book about cross-cultural design, he presents five principles for successful design projects in different cultural contexts. The first principle involves embracing cultural immersion by consuming information and observing the target culture. The second principle is researching creative communities by looking for culture-specific design publications, practices, or projects. The third principle emphasizes the value of working with local experts and stakeholders. The fourth principle involves questioning assumptions and biases, and discussing this with the team and stakeholders should be a natural part of the process. The last principle involves prioritizing flexibility to ensure a culturally responsive final solution.

3.3 Visitor Experience Design

To create a hiking trail that gives memorable experiences to tourists, we have looked into the field of visitor experience design. Designing visitor experiences involves creating engaging and memorable events through idea generation, observation, conceptualization, staging, and production (Pedersen, 2012, p. 41). Understanding what makes an experience memorable is essential in this field. According to Scott et al. (2017, para. 1.2), emotionally intense experiences create stronger memories. A feeling of engagement can for example leave a lasting impression of the event, even though the visitor forgets the details of the experience. The factors that trigger emotional engagement in visitors are highly subjective (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 35), and the personal meaning, intensity, sharing, and complexity of the experience decide the level of engagement (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 21). As a result, modular experiences where visitors can customize the situation to fulfill their needs could create memorable experiences for a wider audience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 15).

To create personalized experiences, designers must understand visitors' underlying motives. When visitors' motivational needs are satisfied, they are more likely to have a memorable experience. Humans are motivated by factors that obtain their goals and make choices accordingly. However, there is often a conflict between motivational needs and sustainable values. Ethical assessments tend to be down-prioritized in the chase of achieving goals. Therefore, designing experiences that satisfy motivational needs without compromising sustainability is crucial for the design process. (Scott et al., 2017).

Within visitor experience design, there are several models and methods. We will describe some models in the following sections. Additionally, we have discovered tools that will be described and used later in the report, like the D4Me method (Matthews, 2019).

Experience Pyramid

Tarassanen and Kylänen (2005) developed the experience pyramid model that indicates the main dimensions of memorable experience design. The horizontal axis displays the six characteristics of experiences: authenticity, individuality, story, contrast, multi-sensory perception, and interaction. Customers experience these factors on a continuum from negative to positive, and their sum constitutes the experience. The models' vertical axis illustrates the five structural levels of experiences: motivational, physical, intellectual, emotional, and mental. These levels function as a ladder that tourists climb depending on their level of engagement in the experience. How much the tourists' are open and involved in the tourist experience determines how high they climb on the ladder and what structural level they reach.

Pedersen (2012) discusses how designers can use the experience pyramid. To understand how tourists perceive the characteristics of experiences, she claims that in-depth interviews and reference groups are the most valuable methods. The five structural levels can, however, be used to test concepts. Designers can use the levels to evaluate how attractive the target group perceives the concepts (motivational level), to what extent the physical attributes clarifies the concept (physical level), and so on (Pedersen, 2012, p. 165).
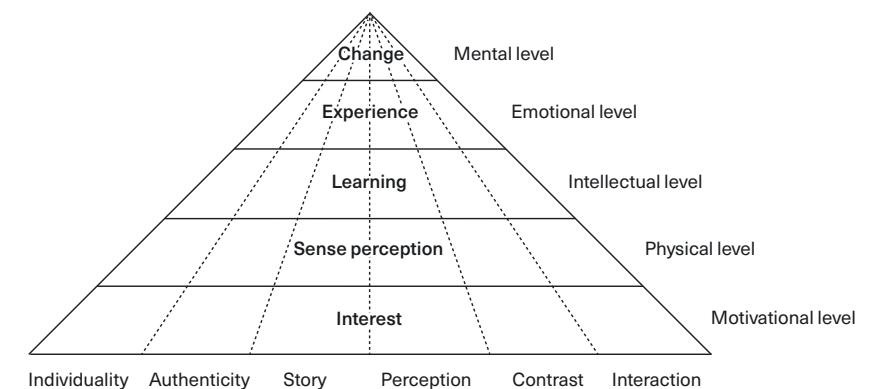
Authentic Experiences

Authenticity is the quality of being real or genuine (Pedersen, 2015, p. 162). However, this concept is highly subjective and fluid. Nevertheless, tourist hosts can guide guests to achieve an authentic experience. According to Wang (1999, p. 359), the key to creating authentic experiences is co-creation, which involves collaborating with the guest to enhance their feeling of authenticity. Wang also suggests that by referencing the guest's life and background, hosts can create emotionally engaging experiences for the guest.

Pine and Gilmore (2007, p. 50) classify authenticity into five categories. The first is natural authenticity, which posits that nonartificial things are more likely to be perceived as authentic. The second category, original authenticity, emphasizes the value of creating something unique to differentiate from familiar offerings. The third category is exceptional authenticity, which describes the perception of services performed with care and honesty as more authentic. The fourth category, referential authenticity, highlights the importance of experiences grounded in familiar cultural contexts. Lastly, influential authenticity requires guests to actively contribute, reflect, and remain open to change to achieve the highest level of authenticity.

Experience Journey

The experience journey is a commonly used method to describe a service over time (Clatworthy, 2019, para. 8.2). The journey consists of three stages: before, during, and after. Before the experience, customer involvement enhances satisfaction, but concise information is crucial to avoid overwhelming them (Woo et al., 2013, p. 257; Pedersen, 2015, p. 110). During the encounter, elements like involvement, dramaturgy, and narratives shape the experience. The phase after the experience is essential as memories continue to be processed and shared post-experience (Pedersen, 2015, p. 138). Through all three stages, a successful experience journey requires consistent and concise communication, trip coherence, and minimized touchpoint gaps (Pedersen, 2015, p. 137; Clatworthy, 2019, para 8.1).

Experience Concepts

An experience concept consists of five fundamentals (Pedersen, 2015, p. 124):
- The core activity: The main actions or activities like cycling or eating.
- Resources: The components that form the basis for a comprehensive experience, like the physical environment, equipment, host's knowledge, etc.
- Values and rituals: Meaning and symbolism to improve the experience.
- Core narrative: Ensures coherence, consistency, and meaning for the guest.
- Communication: Must be consistent and concise and occur in all customer journey phases.

When developing concepts, designers should aim for a high degree of uniqueness and refinement (Pedersen, 2015, p. 114), or what is called "unique concepts".

Co-Creation

Co-creation is a high degree of customer participation in an experience, and it requires that tourists participate through activities, learning, knowledge exchange, and interaction with other stakeholders (Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019; Scott et al., 2017, 6.2.1). Co-creation is an increasingly common business strategy among tourist handlers (Pedersen, 2012, p. 58). Neither tourist handlers nor designers can guarantee the customer experience. However, they can use co-creation to create a setting where it is likely that the customer gets a good experience (Pedersen, 2012, p. 59).

According to a study conducted in Portugal, experiences involving active participation and interaction are more likely to be remembered. It further states that visitors perceive memorable experiences as more meaningful than simply satisfactory experiences. (Campos, 2016, p. 7). To create memorable and meaningful experiences, visitors must be involved and attentive during co-creation (Campos, 2016, p. 131). As illustrated in the figure, attention and involvement are essential to creating a memorable experience during the co-creation process (Campos, 2016).
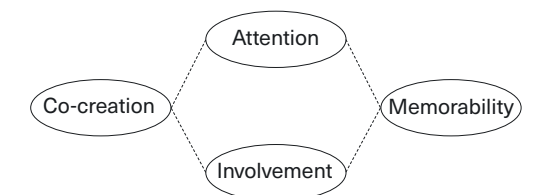
3.4 Business Model

A well-defined business model is essential when introducing a new hiking trail and tourism business concept in Lower Mustang. One popular tool for this is the Business Model Canvas. The model will be used and described in more detail in Chapter 7: Concept Development. In this section, the focus will be on understanding how we can use the Business Model Canvas and the benefits and limitations that come with it.

According to Ebinum (2016), the Business Model Canvas is a quick and efficient way to define and communicate a business concept. The book "This is Service Design Doing" further emphasizes that if used co-creative and iterative, the tool is very helpful to visualize the key components of a business model (Stickdorn et al., 2018). However, the model has faced criticism for its static nature and failure to consider changes in strategy (Sinkovics et al., 2014). Additionally, it does not show the interaction between components and core processes and the value of these interactions (Romero et al., 2017). Others have noted that it only focuses on organizations in isolation from their environment, neglecting factors such as society and nature (Bocken et al., 2014).

As the Business Model Canvas has been criticized for not focusing on society and the natural environment, recent literature has demonstrated a shift to the focus on sustainable value in business models (Baldassarre et al., 2017). Font et al. (2021) define sustainable value as a value proposition that engages and benefits numerous stakeholders. They suggest that service design and co-creation principles can be used to emphasize the value of sustainability. In this case, designers, tourists, local residents, and other stakeholders can co-create a sustainable business model by holding customer meetings, conducting ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews, and workshops that explore sustainability. Bocken et al. (2014) also recommend using value mapping to ensure sustainable business thinking. They suggest a four-step brainstorming process and provide a value mapping tool, which we will describe and use later in the report.

3.5 Tourism Website Design

Tourist destinations rely heavily on websites for marketing and information. Unfortunately, there is a lack of online content about Lower Mustang, with the current information mainly centered on a limited number of attractions and villages. Consequently, local residents and tourists alike have desired a more comprehensive digital source of information, as found in our D9 projects. Developing a website can address this issue, and what characterizes an engaging, informative, and effective platform is therefore relevant for our future work.

Attractive Tourism Website Design

According to Türker (2021), a tourist website must catch visitors' attention within the first 8 seconds by being fast, simple, easy to access, informative, and compatible. Visual and auditory elements are vital in influencing customers' buying decisions, and a well-designed website should have uniformity in color, structure, typography, and visual objects. Colors should highlight essential elements, and the website's structure should effectively communicate the message and purpose. Typography should consider readability, conformity, and attention, while visual objects such as pictures, graphics, and animations should be used wisely to avoid complexity.

Based on a thorough literature review, Türker (2021) summarized the requirements for good tourism website design:
- High technical quality (fast loading, browser compatibility, universal design)
- Easy navigation (home button, navigation bar, site map)
- Easy access to contact information for stakeholders visitors might look for
- Simple and understandable site design (limited scrolling and in-site searches)
- Broad information on the destination (attractions, accommodations, pricing)
- Implementation of e-CRM application
- Encouragement of user feedback
- Frequent updates to the website
- Market segmentation and offering different products to different groups
- Travel stories and reviews
- Avoid overwhelming the user with excessive alternative tourism services and attributes

Emotional Messages

Adding emotional messages to a website can improve how consumers view a location (Lwin & Phay, 2013). A 2014 study found that using emotional imagery from joyful, motivated, and enthusiastic individuals creates positive feelings about a location (Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2014). Wang et al. (2017) compared the effectiveness of emotional and rational messages

in enhancing tourists' attitudes toward a destination. Rational messages provide objective and practical information, while emotional messages appeal to the affective and psychological aspects of an experience. They discovered that emotional messages are most effective, and it is vital to use an appropriate method to deliver them to tap into tourists' emotions. For instance, videos can be more effective than plain text or photos (Lwin & Phau, 2013).

Authenticity

Tourism websites often emphasize the importance of authenticity in attracting visitors. However, some cultural tourism websites have been criticized for outdated, and colonizing portrayals of local populations. In a critical discourse analysis of Sámi tourism websites, Bernardi (2019) found that the websites reflected the modern aspects of Sámi culture and the evolving nature of heritage to varying degrees. Since heritage and authenticity are dynamic and adaptive, websites should consider this when representing cultural heritage. Additionally, Bernardi (2019) recommends that websites avoid using the term "authentic" as it may draw attention to the possibility of inauthentic aspects and undermine readers' trust in the cultural portrayal.

3.6 Design of Hiking Trails

Given our project's primary concept of creating a hiking trail, this section will explore how to develop such trails. A digital platform will play a crucial role in the hiking trail concept, allowing hikers to plan their trips and use the platform while hiking. Therefore, we will also examine hikers' perspectives on using digital solutions in natural settings. Finally, we will look at the users of hiking trails, namely hikers.

The Development of Hiking Trails

Research by Costantino et al. (2022) suggests restoring old agricultural and pastoral routes in rural areas can benefit the economy, preserve natural and cultural heritage, and combat depopulation. The authors recommend incorporating digital tools and storytelling techniques to showcase the importance of these heritage sites and create enjoyable and sustainable tourist trails along the old routes. To demonstrate their approach, they developed "The Golden Leaves Trail," a socially and economically sustainable hiking trail in San Giovanni Limpony, Italy, using diverse theories and methodologies. The key elements of their strategy included:
- Choose a trail name that connects with the local community and appeals to tourists to aid in promotion.
- Choose symbols that represent the natural and cultural heritage of the area to use as a logo or trail characteristic.
- Take photographs along the trail to document its state of maintenance, critical issues, and cultural and natural points of interest for promoting tourism.
- Create a map with potential routes and trail systems based on a physical environment analysis, selecting one route or trail system as the primary concept.
- Classify the trail or trails based on activities that can be performed (cycling, walking, riding, etc.) and their difficulty.
- Develop maps of the trails with information on points of interest, difficulty, length, ascent and descent times, and overall elevation differences for both digital and physical representations.
- Create physical maps and signage along the trail for wayfinding and interpretive engagement.
- Use graphics and illustrations based on the inhabitants' historical memory in online and on-signage information.
- Develop new tourism activities along the trail.

Digital Solutions for Outdoor Use

According to Anderson and Jones (2017), 95% of hikers bring their phones when hiking. While phones can be helpful for navigation and capturing memories, they can detract from the natural experience. Syvertsen's (2022) study found that disconnecting from technology can intensify the adventure and self-reliance aspects of hiking. However, hikers may face safety concerns and miss social communication and posting on social media. Positively, Anderson and Jones (2020) found that interactive computing can enhance the hiking experience as long as it does not interfere with human-nature interaction.

Hikers

"Hiking is an activity that can be enjoyed by many, but some hikers have different definitions of what they expect out of a hike. Some hikers expect a leisurely stroll by their neighborhood pond; others expect to summit a 14,000-foot peak. Because it is an activity that is so versatile and accessible, it is difficult to make generalizations of hikers – what they value, what they look for in trails, etc." – Bartolome, 2020

The quote from Bartolome (2020) emphasizes the importance of considering hikers' diverse expectations and preferences when designing a hiking trail. By recognizing these differences, we can develop a trail that meets the needs and preferences of different hikers, resulting in a more enjoyable hiking experience for all.
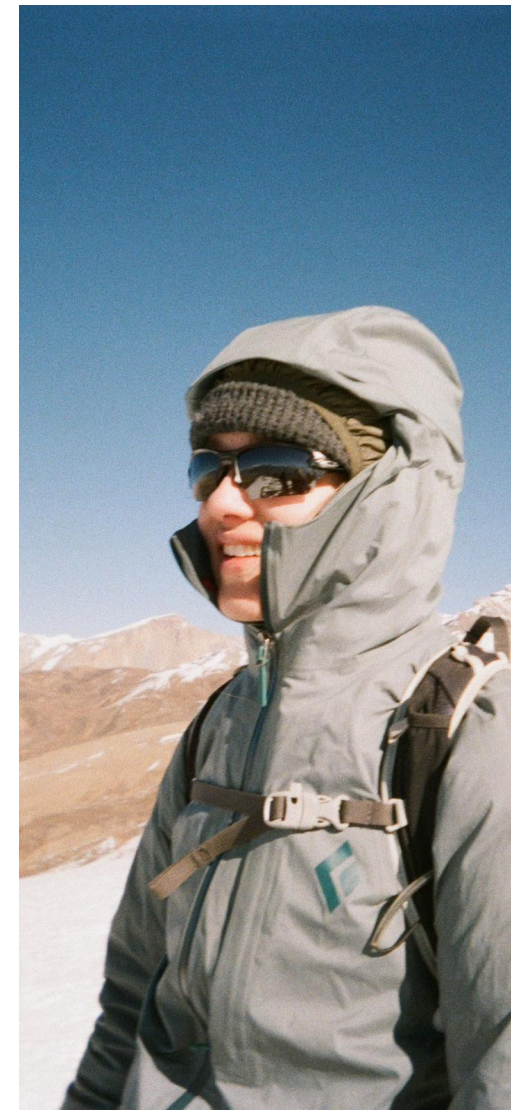
3.7 Branding

As the tourism industry becomes increasingly competitive, branding is commonly used to showcase a destination's uniqueness and distinctiveness, achieved through various platforms like websites and social media (Rather et al., 2020). Branding has also become a valuable tool for tourism destinations to explicitly communicate the range of experiences tourists can expect (Almayeda-Ibánez & George, 2017). This level of branding has not yet reached Lower Mustang, resulting in deficient access to online information about the area. The tourists are, therefore, unaware of other villages they can explore besides the ones they have come across online. This was one of the major pain points we discovered during the previous field trip to Lower Mustang. Employing marketing and branding strategies for our concept could help promote the area more appealingly and reach out to potential visitors.

A product with an associated brand has a better chance of success than a non-branded product. This is because a brand always is accompanied by a promise for the customer, making it a more appealing choice (Lerman et al., 2018). With this knowledge, we have decided to create a brand connected to the hiking trail concept. There are many approaches to brand development, but through our research on branding, we decided on the Story Brand 7 framework. With great success, the framework has helped many brands connect with their target audience by developing a clear brand story (Miller, 2017).

Story Brand 7 Framework (SB7)

Story Brand 7 is a framework developed by Donald Miller (2017), aiming to create brands that successfully communicate their relevance to their customers. The framework helps you define what your customers need, what you can offer to cover the need, and how to communicate your offer to the customers. Miller states that storytelling makes it easier to make sense of information. To successfully communicate the purpose and outcome of a brand, Miller suggests following a storytelling structure similar to a movie, including a hero, a goal, a villain causing a problem, and a plan to defeat the problem. The framework, therefore, guides you through a seven-step process where you build up a story consisting of all the storytelling elements mentioned above. In Chapter 7: Concept Development, we will show how we used the framework to clarify what we can offer with our concept and how to communicate it to our target group.

3.8 Design Methods

This section will explain the different design methods and tools we will use during our project. It will also present biases we must be aware of when conducting interviews and workshops.

Stakeholder Map

Stakeholder maps visualize all people, groups, and organizations involved in an experience. Mapping out and categorizing all actors in the system can help create a focus area. Usually, the most relevant stakeholders are positioned centrally in the stakeholder map, while peripheral actors are placed on the outskirts of the map. Interactions between stakeholders and pain points within the relations could subsequently be added to the map (Stickdorn et al., 2018, p. 58).

Competitive Analysis

A competitive analysis, also known as a competitor analysis, aims to discover strengths and weaknesses in existing companies similar to your own business. By analyzing the existing market, you get a better understanding of where your brand stands in comparison with other choices your target group is presented with. Increasing the knowledge of the surrounding market will enlighten the strengths and weaknesses of your own product. It can also help discover gaps in the market, as well as successful and unsuccessful strategies to learn from (Purcell, 2020).

Participant Observation

Observing participants in a natural environment can help you as a researcher discover how people behave in a relevant setting. There are often contradictions between how people talk about their actions and how they actually behave. As an observer, you can switch between passive and active observations. Passive observations, where you silently follow the user in a natural setting, can reveal how a user behaves unprovoked by the observer. A more active observer style involves asking questions regarding decisions and asking participants to explain their choices as they go (Stickdorn et al., 2018, p. 120).

User Journey Mapping

A user journey map shows the user experience of a service from your target group's point of view. Every key event during the service is pinpointed on a timeline, together with the customer's experience of the event. The tool is used to discover pain points in the user journey, indicating a need for improvement. Used the right way, journey maps can help create a thorough understanding of the overall user experience and what works and not in the current system (Stickdorn et al., 2018, p. 44).

User Profiles

User profiles, also known as personas, are fictional representations of the target user groups within a project. If based on real user insights, user profiles can help you gather the most important characteristics and needs of your target group. They are also used to generate empathy toward the user group by viewing the world from their point of view, thereby gaining a better understanding of the target group. (Stickdorn et al., 2018, p. 41).

The Service Model Canvas

The Service Model Canvas (SMC) is a tool used to give a common understanding of the purpose, goal, and scope of a project. It is meant to be a rough and living document, introduced to the project as early as possible, and to follow it from start to finish. Collectively filling out the canvas gives room for discussion to align expectations and clarify roles and criteria within a team and across stakeholders in a project. Furthermore, it enables a team to establish a baseline of the situation today and what values the initiative should create for the users, organization, and context in the future. (Svela, 2019).

Stakeholder Inclusion and Participation

Involving stakeholders is vital for sustainable rural tourism that benefits local residents and the environment while attracting tourists (Byrd, 2007). All stakeholders, such as tourists, citizens, communities, governments, and organizations, should be involved (Miller & Twinning-Ward, 2005) – but many articles highlight local communities and tourists as the most important (Roxas et al., 2020). Involving stakeholders can be done formally and informally with methods like focus groups, surveys, interviews, and workshops. The different methods require varying degrees of participation. Multiple articles suggest involving stakeholders in decision-making is most effective (Byrd, 2007). However, the degree of involvement is often lower than expected, which usually is caused by participants lacking information or perceiving themselves as unqualified. Facilitators can provide sufficient information and explain the value of their contribution to overcoming these challenges (Mak, 2017).

Precautionary Measures for Workshops

Researchers conducting participant observations should be aware of possible biases. A bias is a common term within social psychology, describing how people make cognitive shortcuts that lead to assessment errors (Sutton & Douglas, 2013). The first step towards avoiding biases is to be aware of them.

During workshops, the observer's effect and social desirability bias can occur, where the observer's opinion affects participants' choices. One should use neutral language and avoid indicating right or wrong answers to avoid these biases. (Sutton & Douglas, 2013).

Groupthink bias is a significant risk when observing groups of people. Participants may give untruthful answers to adjust to the group norm. This bias can be avoided by observing people individually or making participants write their thoughts before discussing them with the group. (Sutton & Douglas, 2013).

The facilitator is prone to confirmation bias, where actions and answers that confirm assumptions are perceived as more important. Answers confirming the research hypothesis tend to be considered more important than answers deviating from it. To avoid this bias, facilitators should be aware of it and write down all observations, regardless of their assumed importance. (Sutton & Douglas, 2013).

Key Takeaways – Chapter 3

- To achieve genuinely sustainable tourist development, economic, social, and environmental concerns must all be addressed.

- To create solutions feasible in Lower Mustang, we must know the Nepalese culture and context well. This can be done through regularly discussing and evaluating if the suggestions are implementable and having critical dialogues with local residents when possible.

- Methods from visitor experience design can be used to create memorable, unique, and authentic experiences (experience pyramid and D4Me method).

- Co-creation is necessary to create high-quality customer experiences, and it has therefore become increasingly crucial as a business strategy.

- We will use the Business Model Canvas to define our business model. As the model has been criticized for not focusing on social and environmental factors, we will use other methods to address this.

- The tourism website design must be attractive and effective to convince tourists to visit a destination, plan a stay, and it must contribute to a good in-destination experience.

- Authenticity is an important tool to attract tourists. However, using the term "authentic" explicitly should be avoided on tourism websites, and an outdated and colonizing portrayal of local populations must be avoided.

- When designing a hiking trail, the significance of natural and cultural heritage must be considered, and digital tools and storytelling techniques should be used efficiently to attract tourists.

- Branding could help reach tourists who would like to visit the smaller villages in Lower Mustang. Story Brand 7 Framework is a helpful method to identify and cover a need within the customer group.

- During interviews, observations, and workshops, we must be aware of probable biases that can occur, as this is the first step towards avoiding them.

Practical Insights

This chapter will supplement our theoretical knowledge by applying different tools and exercises from design in practice. The sections included are:

- Competitive analysis of hiking trails – to identify effective strategies and learn from mistakes. As part of the analysis, we will interview three project leaders to understand better the development and strategies behind the hiking trails.

- Workshop/interview exercises – to understand how people plan trips, what people perceive as authentic, and how tourists research travel. The theoretical insights will be used for this.

- Survey – to uncover the motivations and expectations of travelers in Nepal.

4.1 Competitive Analysis

Our case of redirecting tourists from the intuitive path is not the first of its kind, as many popular attractions have successfully led visitors off the beaten track. The following section examines successful strategies from similar cases and discusses common mistakes to avoid. The descriptions are based on the tourist trails' web pages and social media. Analyzing them could provide valuable knowledge for our project. Additionally, to get more in-depth information about some of the trails and their strategies, we conducted 1-hour interviews with three project managers for different trails. This gave us a broader understanding of the process of developing the trails, the strategies used, what made the trail successful, and potential areas of improvement.

Path of Perspectives, Austria

(Snøhetta, 2020)

The Path of Perspectives is a walking trail in Innsbrück, Austria, starting from the Seegrube cablecar station. Its development aimed to encourage visitors to explore nature and the environment and break the existing tendency of just to take photos and leave. The project was assigned to Snöhetta, making architectural methods a main factor.

Strategies:
- Each pit stop offers a new perspective, quote, or feature. All components work together and create a complete experience.
- Short intervals between the viewpoints make the hike less intimidating and help visitors gradually reach the final viewpoint.
- The viewpoints are designed to enhance the terrain with the help of 3D models and multiple visits to the area.
- The path incorporates features from the local culture, including quotes from the renowned Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein.

The Golden Road, Noway

(The Golden Road, 2023)

The Golden Road is a collaborative project between local enterprises at Inderøy in Norway. Inderøy is a short drive from the main road; the goal is, therefore, to motivate people to take a detour to visit their local attractions. Several villages along the Golden Road offer unique experiences, focusing on local food production and increasing emphasis on activities.

Strategies:
- Official website with information about the road.
- Cultivating a close host-visitor relationship by promoting a good host culture.
- Actively searching and incorporating visitor feedback.
- Criteria for new community members ensure high standards and compatibility.
- Regular meetings where the enterprises discuss feedback and improvements.
- Specifically market activities suitable to their target group.
- Utilizing storytelling to communicate cultural heritage along the paths.

SignaTUR, Norway

SignaTUR hikes are Norway's most breathtaking long-distance hikes, according to the Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT). They traverse world-class natural and cultural landscapes, lasting from five days to three weeks, and can be physically demanding. The routes are marked and follow DNT's T-marked trails, with accommodation at DNT cabins.

Strategies:
- All SignaTUR hikes have their own website with comprehensive information (text, images, maps) in Norwegian and often in English.
- DNT collaborates with local communities to develop SignaTUR hikes that authentically reflect the region's culture and values through community engagement.
- Storytelling is used online and in the physical environment to create a more engaging experience.

Viewpoint Snøhetta, Norway

The walk to Viewpoint Snøhetta is a journey of about 1.5 kilometers along a well-maintained gravel path. The path features a series of stone slabs that reveal the history of the Dovrefjell mountain range over the last 10,000 years. At the top is Viewpoint Snøhetta, a building designed by the architectural firm Snöhetta. From this viewpoint, one can enjoy a breathtaking panoramic view of Snøhetta Mountain.

Strategies:
- Interpretive signage on the path is a storytelling tool to engage visitors walking along the trail.
- The Snøhetta Viewpoint's unique architecture is a significant attraction in itself.
- The viewpoint offers a great view of the surrounding landscapes.
- The experience is accessible to visitors of all ages and abilities, with wheelchair access and pathways designed to make the experience as accessible as possible.

The Emigrant Trail, Sweden
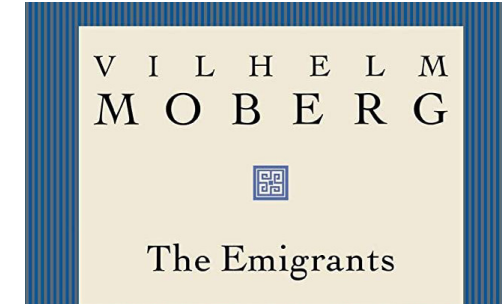
The Emigrant Trail in Småland, Sweden, passes through historically significant villages. Between 1850 and 1910, many Swedes emigrated to the US from these villages due to the challenging farming terrain. Vilhelm Moberg, a native of Småland, wrote a book series about the emigrants with the narrative set in the villages along the trail. Bringing Moberg's book while hiking the trail is recommended for a deeper understanding of local history.

Strategies:
- Interpretive signage along the trail is provided to give hikers information about the local history, nature, and culture.
- Moberg's book series is used as a storytelling tool to provide visitors with insights into the experiences of the emigrants and their impact on the area.
- Guides use personal and historical stories to create a more meaningful experience.
- Cultural experiences, such as traditional food, festivals, and music, are used to let visitors learn more about the local customs, stories, and traditions.

Nakasendo Trail, Japan

The Nakasendo Trail is a historic route through Japanese villages that provides an authentic cultural experience. Tracing an ancient path between Kyoto and Tokyo, it features historic landmarks, local cuisine, and homestays. This journey offers breathtaking scenery and a glimpse into Japan's rich past.

Strategies:
- A PDF you can download with information about the trek.
- Suggestion for both 3, 4, and 5 days itinerary.
- The local government and people make local conservation efforts to keep the trail attractive.
- The trek facilitates local interaction and provides many opportunities for visitors to learn about the local history, culture, and customs – for instance, by homestays and joining traditional activities, like tea ceremonies.

Lycian Way, Turkey

(CNN Travel, 2022)

The Lycian Way is a hiking trail that follows the ancient trade route along the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. Along the way, you can experience the local traditions and culture, visit small villages and historic sites, taste the local cuisine, and explore ancient ruins. The entire trail takes about 30 days to finish, but it is also possible to only walk parts of it.

Strategies:
- Official website with information about the trail, recommended gear, digital GPS data, and maps that can be downloaded for free.
- The path is marked with different colored signs to ease navigation.
- Local residents have opened guesthouses and restaurants along the trail to gain income from the tourists hiking the trail.

Norway in a Nutshell, Norway
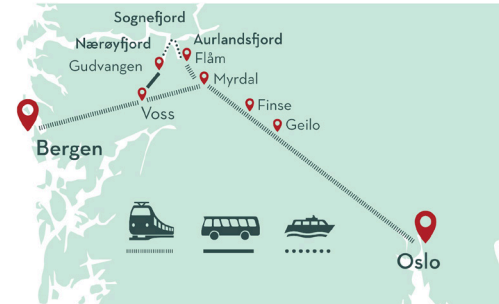
(Fjord Norway, 2018)

"Norway in a Nutshell" is a tour that takes visitors through the breathtaking fjord and mountain scenery of Western Norway. The tour includes a scenic rail journey, a boat cruise, and other unique experiences and can be tailored according to the customers' wishes. The experience is designed to fit both those who are looking for a day trip and those who wish to explore fjord Norway over several days.

Strategies:
- The Nutshell tour is easy to plan and customize, and additional activities and stays can be added to the trip.
- When booking, they create one travel route for you and send you a practical travel guide by email.
- Combines different means of transport to let travelers explore a bigger geographical area from different perspectives.

UP Norway, Norway

(UP Norway, 2023)

UP Norway is a luxury travel company that offers customized travel experiences in Norway. They provide both pre-designed journeys and tailored itineraries with activities such as hiking, sailing, fishing, and cultural excursions, as well as exclusive lodging and private transportation for a seamless travel experience.

Strategies:
- Methodology from visitor experience design was used to develop UP Norway and their journeys.
- Work closely with each customer to customize an itinerary based on interests, preferences, and budget.
- Social media to showcase travel experiences.
- Employs storytelling and travel narratives to create authentic experiences and deepen the emotional connection with customers.

Allmannajuvet, Norway

(Andreas Solbakken, n.d.)

Allmannajuvet zink mines is a site along the Architectural Route in Ryfylke. The Norwegian Public Roads Administration hired architect Peter Zumthor to create a project to tell the history of the mines. While some have criticized the design for not blending well with the surrounding landscape and questioned its necessity, others have praised it for highlighting the mines' historical significance. The project cost has also been discussed, with some suggesting that the investment rather should be used for community initiatives. However, since the Norwegian Public Roads Administration covered the cost, using the funds for other local projects was not an option.

Strategies:
- Using architecture and design to create a unique experience.
- A museum and an audio guide give visitors information about the history of the mines.
- Interactive exhibits allow visitors to experience what it was like to work in the mines.

Key Findings: Competitive Analysis

Transferrable Strategies

- Promote a close host-visitor experience.
- Seek and incorporate visitor feedback.
- Be aware of the target group, their interests, and preferred activities.
- Provide comprehensive information (text, images, maps) online.
- Collaborate with local residents to develop authentic experiences that reflect the region's culture and history.
- Use storytelling to engage visitors.
- Use interpretive signage for storytelling and to ease navigation.
- Reflect on the distance between attractions and how this can be used to engage visitors to reach the destination.
- Printable digital maps that can solve issues with bad mobile connectivity.
- Reflect on how the experience can be made accessible to visitors of all abilities.
- Utilize unique features along the trail to enhance the visitor experience.
- Use references from local culture, such as quotes or traditions, to create a sense of identity along the trail.

Mistakes to Learn From

- Some websites lack information (maps, accommodation options, etc.) needed to plan a visit.
- Many websites for hiking trails have outdated designs that may not be visually appealing to some users.
- Sometimes, it is hard to find up-to-date information, and several websites have not been updated for a long time.
- Some websites provide little information about the cultural and natural heritage of the area, which could be important to some hikers.
- Some hiking trails lacked community consultation, resulting in disagreements about project priorities.

4.2 Interview Exercise: Staged Participant Observation

What?
Observations of individuals in a simulated trip planning scenario.

Why?
Identifying the essential information people need when planning a trip to Nepal and understanding the features that attract or deter them from buying tickets.

Who?
10 people of different ages and life situations to get a wide range of insights. Finding people already considering going to Nepal and observing them in a natural setting proved challenging. Therefore, we had to stage a situation where participants were given essential background information and had to pretend that they were researching for an upcoming trip.

How?
All participants got a standard introduction: "Picture yourself considering a long-term vacation, and your friend suggests Lower Mustang in Nepal as a potential destination. Before committing to this location, you decide to research the area. Express your thoughts loudly as you do your research, and feel free to use the laptop."

We observed each participant for about 15 minutes. To capture all events and thoughts expressed by the participants, we divided our roles. One was the facilitator, introducing the task and asking follow-up questions to understand participants' decision-making processes and impressions of the search results. The other documented the participants' actions and thoughts on sticky notes.

After the observation phase, we clustered the sticky notes to disclose patterns in the participants' search habits. The categories turned out as follows:
• What do you want to know?
• What appeals to you?
• Negative impressions
• General impressions
• Search methods
• Reflections

Key Findings: Observation

The observations revealed that participants shared information needs and utilized similar methods to gather information about the destination. These findings give valuable insights into the key information that should be prioritized when presenting Lower Mustang as a potential destination to visitors. The key findings will be presented here and then further used to inform the design of the user interface.

What do you want to know?
• How to get there?
• What can I do there?
• Where to stay?
• Where to eat?
• How far is the walk?
• How long does it take?
• What other things can I combine the trek with?

What search results appeal to you?
• Hiking opportunities
• Sunny nature photos
• Cultural elements like temples
• Photos of people

Negative impressions
• Many grey photos that does not say much about the vibe of the place

• Many web pages show too much information at once
• "I would not go based on the photos"
• There is much information about Upper Mustang on sites for Lower Mustang

General impressions
• Photos are the most crucial factor when deciding where to go
• It seems like a place for people who love going for long walks and exploring nature

Search methods
• All participants looked for photos right away
• Many prefer looking at Google Maps to understand where Lower Mustang is and how to get there
• Many participants scrolled through the search results to find the most reliable source
• Many prefer Tripadvisor for sightseeing, but not for less touristic experiences

Reflections
• If you make an authentic cultural experience easier accessible to tourists, is it still authentic?

4.3 Facebook Groups of Nepal Travelers: Information and Observations

What?
Examination of Facebook groups for Nepal travelers to discover what information they seek.
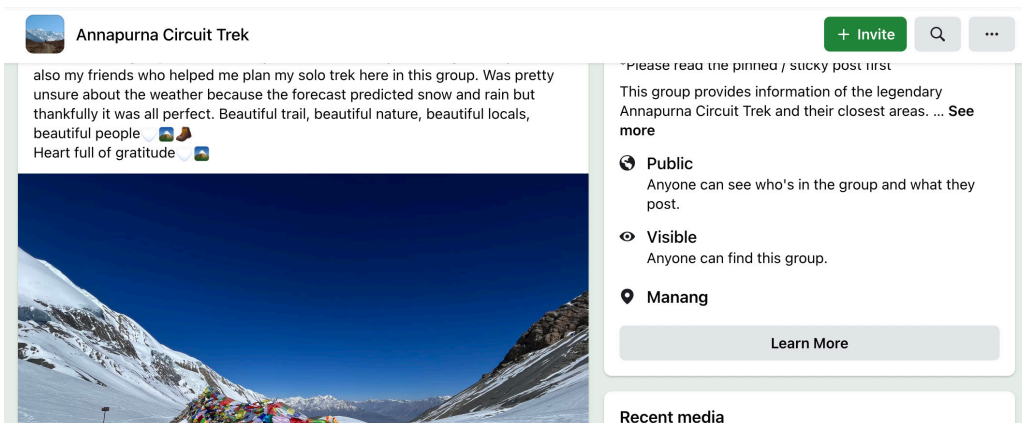
Why?
Through the staged participant observation workshop, we gained insight into how people plan trips to Nepal. However, as we only talked to Norwegians who were not planning to travel to Nepal, we also wanted to gather perspectives from travelers who are actually going or have been.

Who?
We examined three popular Facebook groups for Nepal travelers: Annapurna Circuit Trek, Trek Nepal 2023/2024, and Backpackers and Travelers in Nepal. These groups are for travelers who are going to, have been, or are in Nepal now.

How?
We read about 30 posts in each Facebook group and noted all questions. We categorized the questions to identify the most commonly asked topics and the type of information people seek. Additionally, we gathered some general observations based on the experiences of previous travelers.

also my friends who helped me plan my solo trek here in this group. Was pretty unsure about the weather because the forecast predicted snow and rain but thankfully it was all perfect. Beautiful trail, beautiful nature, beautiful locals, beautiful people 🙏🏽
Heart full of gratitude 🏔️

Annapurna Circuit Trek

⊕ Public
Anyone can see who's in the group and what they post.

👁 Visible
Anyone can find this group.

📍 Manang

Learn More

Recent media

Key Findings: Facebook Groups

Information – the most asked topics

Transportation
- Cheapest options
- Safety of different options
- Ticket prices and where to buy them
- Bus schedules and departure times

Equipment
- What equipment is necessary (e.g. sleeping bags, crampons, chargers)
- Where to rent or buy equipment
- Trekking maps in different languages

Insurance and permits
- Travel insurance needed
- Where to obtain necessary permits
- Costs of permits

Choice of treks
- Comparison of different treks
- Estimated time to complete treks
- How to avoid walking on jeep roads

Accommodation
- Where to find accommodations
- When to book
- Standards of accommodations

Best time to go
- Weather conditions
- Festivals that may affect travel plans
- Avoiding overcrowded lodges
- Trekking during different seasons

Budget and money
- How to cut costs
- Recommended budget treks

- How much cash to bring
- Availability of ATMs

Connectivity
- Mobile connectivity and wifi
- How to get a sim card and what kind

Health
- Required vaccines and medications
- Water purification methods
- How to avoid food poisoning
- Preventing altitude sickness

Cultural awareness
- Local customs and etiquette
- Responsible trekking practices
- English level of local residents
- Whether to bring a guide and porter
- Local travel agencies and guides

General observations

- Some travelers are seeking walking partners for their trips
- Many members plan their trips far in advance (up to a year in advance)
- Some have recommendations on how to be culturally sensitive
- Most claim accommodation is easy to find without booking ahead, and many expect it to be this way
- Many recommend hiring a local guide for local employment
- For many travelers, stunning views are the most important experiences
- Previous travelers advise others to take time to acclimate and not rush
- Many advise to carry trash and use water purification for sustainability

4.4 Interview Exercise: Information Prioritizing and Clustering

What?
Interview exercise where the participants clustered and prioritized the information they need when considering a new destination.

Why?
During our staged participant observation and observation of Facebook groups, we gained insights into the information people look for when considering traveling to a new destination and the information travelers going to Nepal ask about. Based on this insight, we wanted to determine what information people perceive as most important and what information they think belongs together.

Who?
8 people of different ages and life situations to get a wide range of insights. We ensured the participants were all different from the previous exercise.

How?
First, we consolidated the findings from the previous exercises into 20 sticky notes representing all types of information. After, we carried out the exercise as follows:

1. We asked the participants to picture themselves embarking on a one-week hiking trail through a mountain village area in Nepal and then to visit the trail's official website.
2. We gave the participants 20 sticky notes with different types of information, along with some blank sticky notes and a pen in case they needed to add more details.
3. In the first part, we asked the participants to sort all the notes into the following categories: Unnecessary, Neutral, and Necessary.
4. In the second part, we asked the participants to cluster the post-its from the Neutral and Necessary categories based on what information they expected to find at the same place on the website.
5. Based on what information was most commonly put together, we created a rough website hierarchy. The information was divided into four categories: Front page, What you can do there, Practical information, and Map.

Front page

What the area is known for

Images

What you can do there

Activites   Places to eat   Places to stay

Cultural attractions   Price estimate

Cultural information

Treks in the area   Reviews

Practical information

At what time is it best to go?   What do I have to fix before going?

Health advises

How to get there?   What equipment to bring

Difficulty level

How far is it to walk?   Altitude

Map

Showcasing things to do, and places to stay and eat

4.5 Interview Exercise: What is Perceived as Authentic?

What?
Interview exercise about how people perceive authenticity and what factors contribute to an authentic travel experience.

Why?
Through our analysis and observations, we discovered that numerous tourist providers promote their offerings as authentic, and travelers actively seek such experiences. However, as the concept of authenticity is subjective and varies from person to person, we wanted to explore people's perceptions of authenticity further.

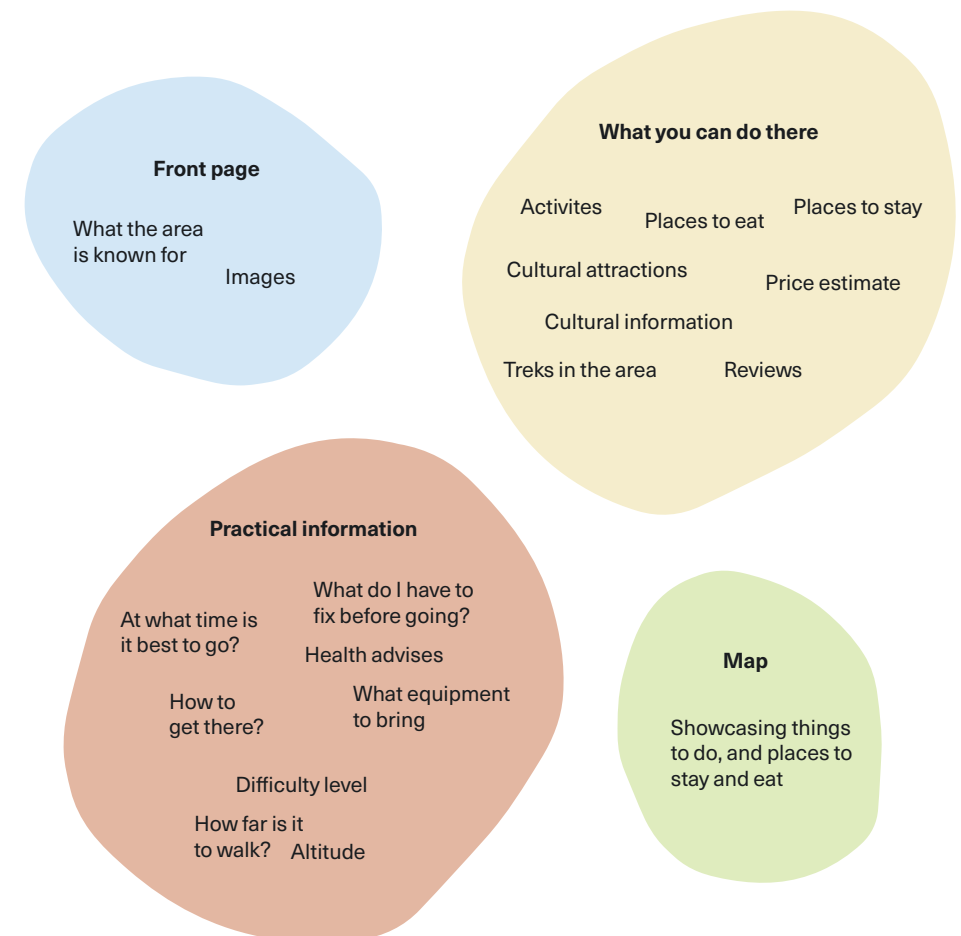**Who?**
6 people of different ages and life situations to get a wide range of insights. The participants were distinct from those involved in previous exercises.

How?
First, we consolidated the findings from the previous exercises into 20 sticky notes representing all types of information. After, we carried out the exercise as follows:

1. We engaged participants in a conversation about their personal definitions of authenticity, situations where authenticity is important to them, and their experiences with authentic and unauthentic travel situations.

2. We showed various photos to the participants and inquired about their emotional responses and authentic feeling toward them. The photos depicted four different situations: a) Pizza served at a street restaurant in Rome compared to pizza at a beach in Greece. b) A local dance show in Zimbabwe versus a cooking class in Bali. c) A McDonald's advertisement featuring a farmer compared to Freia's advertisement showcasing a cow in the mountains. d) A collection of photos portraying various experiences and landmarks in Lower Mustang.

3. We showed them a list of slogans ("Travel like a local," "Hidden gems," "Secret spots," "Popular destination," "Bucket list," "Must see") and asked about their associations with the slogans, what appeals to them, and whether anything suggests an authentic travel experience.

Key Findings: Authenticity

- The participants described authenticity as being genuine, real, original, and representative of the local culture at the destination.
- They desired cultural attractions to be authentic and avoid appearing staged or artificial.
- The participants highly appreciated authentic food experiences.
- Interacting with local residents at the tourist destination was considered a significant contributor to the sense of authenticity.
- Care and commitment were identified as essential elements contributing to authentic experiences, aligning with Pine and Gilmore's (2007) concept of exceptional authenticity (page 52).
- Participants perceived Western or commercialized experiences as lacking authenticity.
- Pine and Gilmore's (2007) theory of referential authenticity (page 52) was supported when participants preferred a photo of pizza in Rome over pizza in Greece, highlighting the importance of a familiar cultural context in authenticity.
- Interpersonal interaction was repeatedly mentioned as a crucial component of authenticity, underlining Wang's (1999) emphasis on co-creation in authenticity (page 52).
- While authenticity was valued, participants acknowledged that they prefer having comfortable amenities like good beds and Western toilets.
- The presence of people in imagery contributes to the perception of authenticity.
- Some slogans are used too often and consequently fail to create an authentic feeling.
- The participants had different preferences for the slogans and associated them with varying ideas.
- A significant challenge with the exercise is the potential disparity between what one considers authentic during the task and what one truly experiences as authentic or appealing in a real-life situation.

4.6 Survey: Motivations & Expectations

What?
A survey about motivations and expectations of travelers to Nepal.

Why?
To better understand tourists traveling to Nepal as they are the target group of our project. Before our field trip, a digital survey is the easiest way to get information from our target group who are far away.

How?
The survey's first part gathered the respondent's ages, countries, and whether they have plans to visit or have already visited Nepal. Depending on their response to the last question, they were either directed to the "future travels" or "previous travel" section. The questions in each of these were asked in a different tense but covered the same topics: Choice of destination, what experiences they seek and why, preferred attractions, research channels, accommodation booking time, the importance of different factors in choosing a place to stay, and whether their expectations were met.

Who?
We attempted to share the survey in relevant Facebook and WhatsApp groups for Nepal trekkers, travelers, and backpackers. Unfortunately, our initial attempts were met with resistance, as the groups perceived our posts as spam. After reaching out to several admins and moderators, we finally managed to share the survey in the Facebook group "Annapurna Circuit Trek" and the WhatsApp group "Annapurna Circuit," which has thousands of members in total. However, we still did not get to post the survey in other significant groups that could have provided insights from travelers to other destinations than Annapurna Circuit. Additionally, our post coincided with a significant change in the law governing trekking to Annapurna Circuit, which got a lot of attention in the group and made our post slightly disappear in the shuffle. Despite these challenges, we received 36 responses from travelers of different ages, countries, and backgrounds.

The survey is included in Appendix 2.

Why did you choose your destination?

- Nature/views
- Trekking
- Explore culture
- Meet local people
- Meet other travelers
- Spiritual purposes
- Pilgrimage
- Other

0% — 100%

Why do you seek these experiences?

- I want to get close to nature
- I want to challenge myself
- I feel the need to explore
- I want to learn a new culture
- I want new perspectives
- I want to achieve my goals
- I look for spirituality
- I like making new friends

0% — 100%
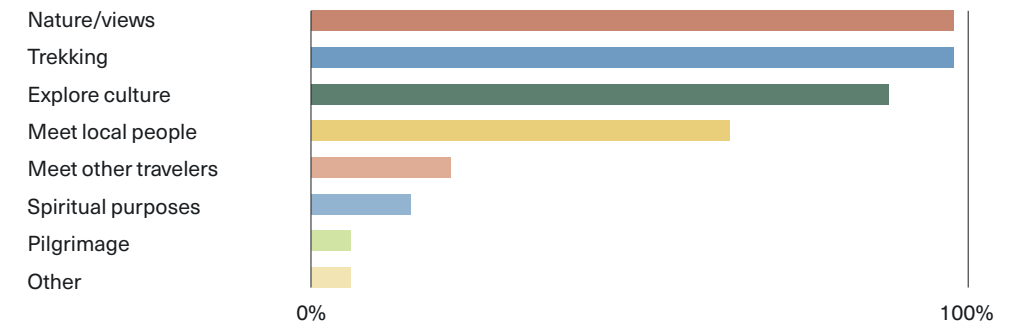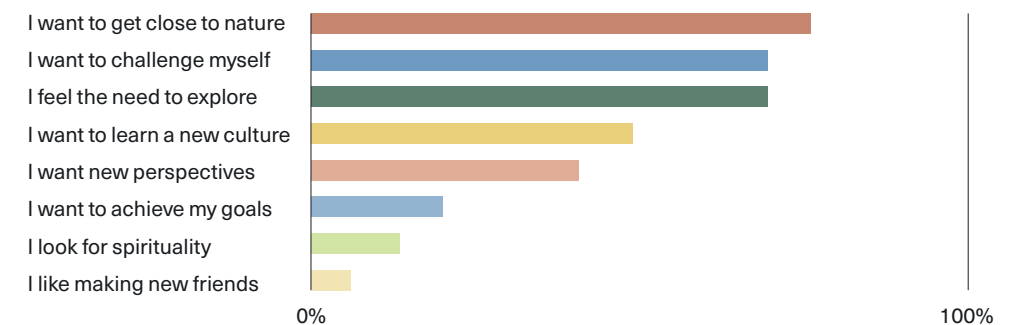
What channels do/did you use for research when planning the trip?
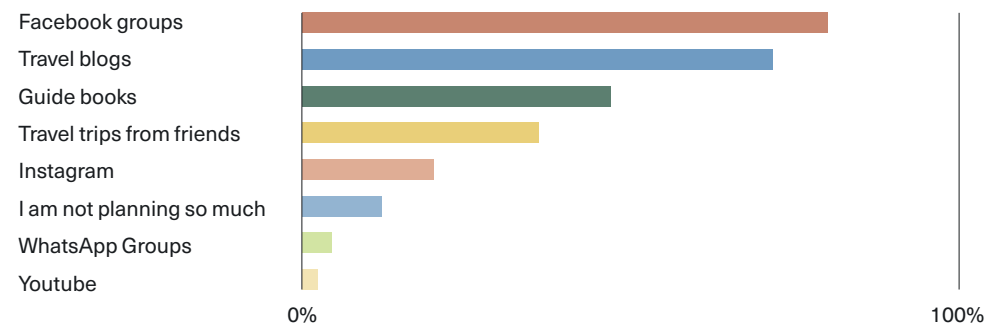
Facebook groups	
Travel blogs	
Guide books	
Travel trips from friends	
Instagram	
I am not planning so much	
WhatsApp Groups	
Youtube	

0%   100%

How far in advance did you book accomodations?

- 33,3% at arrival
- 23,3% the same day
- 13,3% a couple of days in advance
- 10% a week in advance
- 13,3% months ahead
- Other

How much did you enjoy the following attractions?

Enjoyed a lot

Enjoyed

Neutral

Did not enjoy

Not at all

Monasteries Viewpoints Cooking with local residents Homestays Longer treks Known tourist attractions Hidden spots Local history
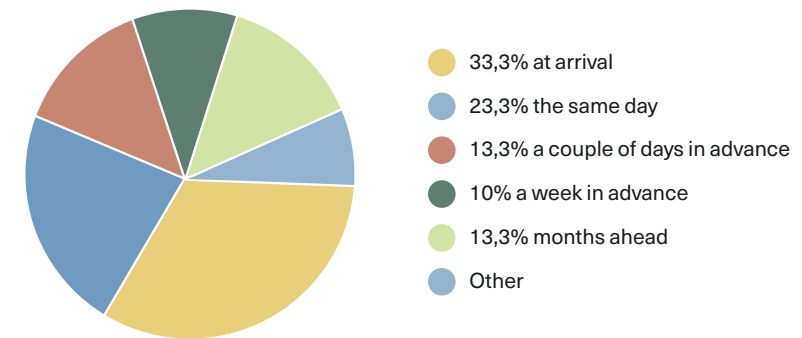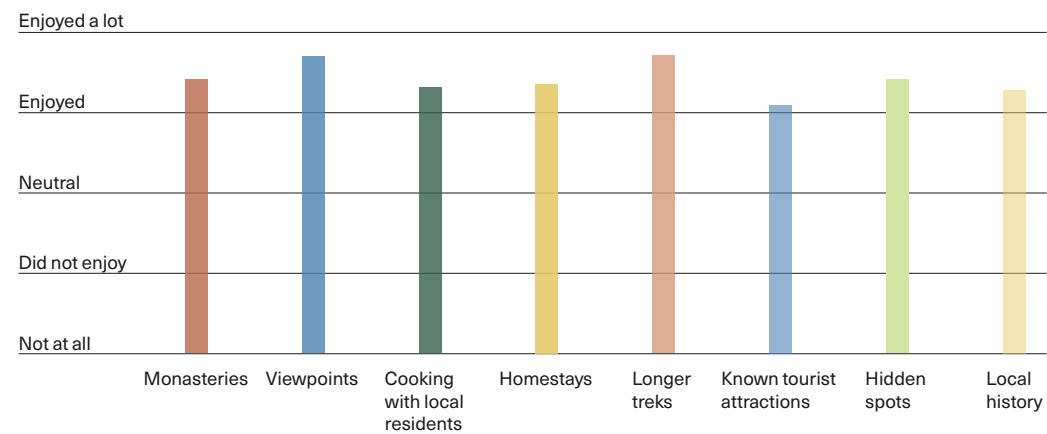
How important are the following factors when chosing a place to stay?

Very important

Important

Neutral

Unimportant

Very unimportant

Low price There is wifi Local food is offered International food is offered Western toilet Warm shower Authentic culture
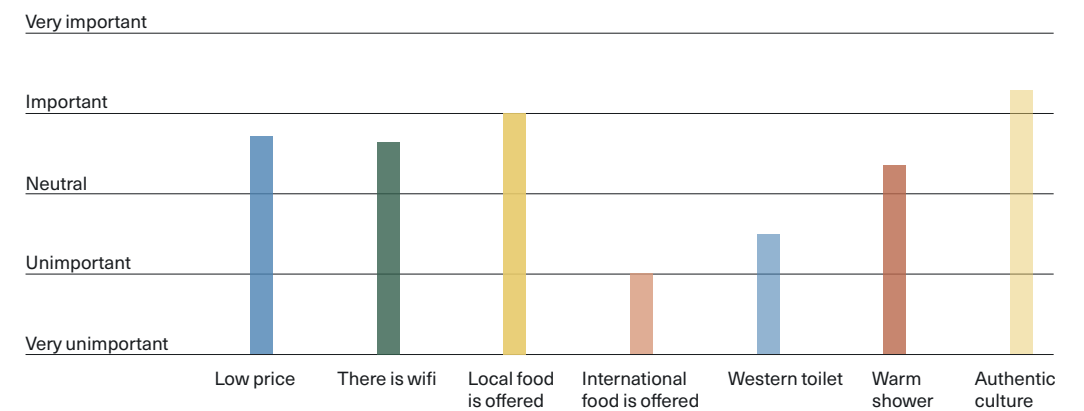
"
In Nepal, jeep roads are destroying the trekking trails in so many places now .. And the jeeps and motorbikes destroy the peace and tranquillity of nature. When will the government realise this?

– European tourist, 60+ years

"
Making guides mandatory just killed all my plans to visit Nepal again.

– European tourist, 30-39 years

"
I liked the route, the culture, the landscapes... It was an experience that changes your image of life and yourself.

– European tourist, 50-59 years

Key Takeaways – Chapter 4

- Many of the studied hiking trails are successful because they have a well-planned strategy. However, many trails lacked sufficient digital information.
- Lower Mustang does not make a good impression online due to limited information and poor quality photos.
- It is important to consider the potential consequences of improving access to authentic tourist sites, as it may lead to commercialization and unauthentic experiences.
- Travelers to Nepal have questions about transportation, equipment, insurance, permits, choice of treks, accommodation, the best time to go, budget and money, connectivity, health, and cultural awareness.
- When organizing website information, the participants grouped it into four main categories: the front page, practical information, things to do, and a map. Some mentioned that they would look for practical information from sources other than the website of the hiking trail.
- People prefer authentic cultural and culinary experiences. To be perceived as authentic, the presence of people in imagery was significant.
- People visit Nepal mainly for nature, trekking, and cultural exploration.
- Annapurna Circuit trekkers want to get close to nature, challenge themselves, and feel the need to explore.
- When planning a trip to Nepal, many travelers rely on Facebook groups, travel blogs, and guidebooks as their primary sources of information.
- In the survey, travelers rated the following categories as "enjoyed" or "enjoyed a lot": monasteries, viewpoints, cooking with local residents, homestays, longer treks, known tourist attractions, hidden spots, and local history.
- Authentic Nepalese culture, local food, and low prices were the most important factors when choosing a place to stay.

Systematizing Insights

The systematizations will summarize our primary discoveries and aid in decision-making and focusing our efforts. The chapter consists of the following sections:

- User profiles – to reflect upon which groups of tourists and local residents are most relevant in our further work and decide which users to focus on when addressing issues and solutions.

- User journey – to explain the main pain points for travelers and to make a starting point for discussing which issues require our attention.

- Stakeholder map – to show the stakeholders involved in tourism in Lower Mustang and highlight the ones we will focus on the most.

- Geographic map – to give a geographic representation of the issues and opportunities we can concentrate on, enabling us to target our efforts more effectively.

5.1 User Profiles

The user profiles present the two main target groups of tourists, and the two groups of local residents our project aims to benefit, and that will be involved in the development and the solution. The characteristics of each user profile are based on interviews during our fieldwork in Nepal and our insights from the previous chapter. Before presenting the four user profiles, we will reflect upon why we chose these.

Tourist User Groups

This section will argue for our choice of user group. Lower Mustang offers a variety of tourism activities, including religious tourism, adventure tourism, and nature-based tourism. As a consequence, Lower Mustang attracts different tourist groups. Adventure tourists, pilgrims, motorbikers, and cultural travelers are among the main groups of visitors. However, not all are relevant as a target group for a hiking trail between the smaller villages.

Lower Mustang's main pilgrimage sites are found in Kagbeni and Muktinath. Visiting these sites is the "reason to go" for most pilgrims, while homestays, local culture, and nature experiences sparked little interest within this user group. As for motorbikers, Lower Mustang offers one of the most challenging and adventurous roads in Nepal, and experiencing difficult

biking is their "reason to go." Many motor-bikers travel in bigger groups that would be too invasive and noisy to arrive in smaller villages. Therefore, neither pilgrims nor motorbikers are relevant as the project's main target groups. Some individuals within each group are relevant, but not the group as a whole.

However, adventure tourists and cultural travelers have travel habits and "reasons to go" that correspond with an interest in a hiking trail between smaller villages. Today, the majority of trekkers visiting Lower Mustang are Annapurna Circuit trekkers. However, most of them only visit Muktinath and Kagbeni during their stay. Several do not know other options, neither to visit the smaller villages nor homestays. Their travel purpose is to do the Annapurna Circuit and experience the stunning nature views, but many also wish for authentic cultural experiences. As many parts of the Annapurna Circuit are Westernized, including Muktinath, the smaller villages could offer the cultural experiences some trekkers seek. The survey (page 84) showed that accommodation standard is a low-prioritized criteria for them, and the lack of facilities in some homestays should, therefore, not be a problem. However, in addition to the Annapurna Circuit trekkers, there is a new group of trekkers and back-

packers that potentially could be attracted by a hiking trail in Lower Mustang. Trekkers and backpackers travel all over Nepal to experience local culture and nature, but Lower Mustang is usually not on their list. The main reason is the lack of information and how Lower Mustang is represented and marketed online. However, a hiking trail could be a potential solution to this. There is potential for attracting these when they look for a new destination in Nepal.

To summarize:
- We will not focus on pilgrims or motor-bikers, as only a minority have travel purposes and goals that correspond with our project.
- Our main target groups of tourists are "Annapurna Circuit trekkers" and "Travelers looking for a new destination," as their travel purpose and goals often match our project.

To understand our target group better, we have created two tourist user types with characteristics based on our research in Lower Mustang and the insight phase. The objective is to summarize the tendencies, needs, goals, and issues related to each of them, which can be helpful to narrow down our focus and develop and test concepts.

Local Residents User Groups

The success of our concept depends on local contribution and engagement. Additionally, it intends to benefit local residents, beginning with homestay owners. Therefore, we must involve residents and communities in our work. We have chosen to classify the residents into two groups: "homestay owners" and "other local residents." Homestay owners differ from other local residents in several ways, including their goals, pain points, and interactions with guests. In the category, other local residents, most are farmers, but this group also includes guides, market workers, etc.

Annapurna Circuit Trekkers

Annapurna Circuit Trekkers have Annapurna Circuit as their "reason to go". They are usually between their 20s and 60s, from Europe or America, in good physical shape, and of all genders and occupations. Annapurna Circuit trekkers travel both with and without a guide and range from solo trekkers, couples, and friend groups, to big groups of strangers.

Activities and interests
• Nature and views
• Trekking
• Explore culture

Values
• Exploration
• Challenge themself
• Being close to nature

Standard
• Need basic facilities

Pain points
• Mass tourism/not authentic
• They only visit small parts of Lower Mustang (Muktinath, Kagbeni and Jomsom)

Planning methods
• Recommondations from others
• Facebook/Whatsapp groups
• App with trail maps
• Online research
• Guide books

Main question for this group:
How to get Annapurna Curcuit trekkers to explore greater parts of Lower Mustang after arriving in Muktinath?

Adventure tourists

Adventure tourists are in search of a new destination to visit, and have extraordinary experiences in Nepal as their "reason to go". They are between their 20s and 70s, of all genders and occupations, in moderate to good physical shape, and mainly from Western countries. They travel solo, in couples, and as small groups of friends or family.

Activities and interests
• Nature and views
• Explore culture
• Authentic experiences

Values
• Exploration
• New pespectives
• Mastery

Standard
• Varying

Pain points
• Limited information
• Many does not get a good impression of the area by looking online

Planning methods
• Recommondations from others
• Facebook groups
• Instagram
• Online research
• Guide books

Main question for this group:
How to get a new group of adventure tourists to visit Lower Mustang in itself?

Homestay Owners

Homestay owners usually have one or several rooms where tourists can stay. They typically make three meals for their guests every day and are willing to tell them about the local cultures and traditions. There are homestays in several of the small villages in Lower Mustang, and more local residents consider opening one. However, they struggle with reaching tourists with information about their homestay.

Goals
• Attract tourists
• Economic income
• Convey culture to tourists

Income sources
• Primarily agriculture
• Occasional homestay guests

Qualities
• Friendly and hospitable
• Knowledge of local culture and traditions

Pain points
• Tourists seldom visit the smaller villages
• Few guests
• The visitor demand is sesonal and unpredictable
• The tourist arrivals are unpredictable
• Lacking facilities

Marketing strategy
• Word of mouth
• Booking through phone calls

Main question for this group:
How to attract tourists to homestays, and how to make visitor demand and tourist arrivals more predictable?

Other Local Residents

The people of Lower Mustang are hill people, with farming being their primary occupation. They are known for their friendly and welcoming nature. Cultural heritage and traditions are important to many local residents, as seen in traditional cuisine and practices passed down through generations. However, the life and culture in the region also face changes with modernization and tourism.

Goals
• Preserve culture
• Economic income
• Reduce migration
• Job creation

Income sources
• Primarily agriculture
• Trade
• Remittances
• Some work at hotel or restaurants
• Guding/porting

Pain points
• Tourism can in some cases lead to an unauthentic showcasing of culture
• Migration is a huge problem – most youth move to Pokhara, Kathmandu, or abroad
• Few job options with high pay

Opportunities
• Produce a variety of products from farming resources
• Involve more local residents in tourism

Main question for this group:
How to get other local residents directly or indirectly benefit from tourism, and avoid the negative impacts of tourism?

5.2 User Journey

The user journey conveys a simplified journey to Lower Mustang as it is today. It summarizes the main stages, and the pain points and gain points at each stage. Therefore, the user journey works as a base to address which qualities should be retained in the future as well as which measures must be taken to enhance the user experience. In addition, some solution requirements that follow from the gain and pain points are included in the user journey.

	PLANNING	Annapurna Circuit	MUKTINATH	OTHER VILLAGES	HOMESTAYS	LEAVE MUSTANG
USER JOURNEY	Nepal is a popular destination for tourists seeking an adventurous journey. These travelers rely on various information channels to plan their itinerary.	Many of the travelers in Lower Mustang does the Annapurna Circuit before "ending up" in Muktinath.	Travelers arrive in Mukitnath because of the Annapurna Circuit. Muktinath is also the main destination for pilgrims and travel agencies visiting Lower Mustang.	Among the other villages in Lower Mustang, almost all tourists only visit Kagbeni and/or Jomsom.	Very few travelers stay at homestays.	Travelers leave Lower Mustang by jeep, bus, and some by plane.
GAIN POINTS	• The well-known pilgrimage site Muktinath and the popular trek Annapurna Circuit, leads a lot of travelers to Lower Mustang.	• Thorong La Pass is the main highlight of Annapurna Circuit. When completing the pass, the trekker arrives in Muktinath.	• Muktinath is a popular tourist attraction with a broad offer of accomodations, restaurants, and religious sites.	• It is easy to find information about Kagbeni and Jomsom, including accommodation and dining options. In addition, these villages are easily accessible by both walking and bus/car transportation.	• Homestays provide authentic experiences. • Homestays are an affordable accommodation and dining option. • Homestays contribute to interaction between tourists and the local communities.	• Many travelers share their experiences with friends, in Facebook/Whatsapp groups, Instagram, etc.
PAIN POINTS	• Limited information about the attractions and villages in Lower Mustang beyond the pilgrimage route and the Annapurna Circuit trek. As a result, smaller villages are often excluded from travelers' itineraries.	• Lower Mustang is not trekkers "reason to go". • Annapurna Circuit trekkers does not experience much local culture. • Challenging to get travelers to visit Lower Mustang "in itself".	• Muktinath is touristic and not very authentic. • Information signs about where to go after Muktinath are unclear or poorly situated. • Random whether they get information about other villages, homestays, etc.	• Secluded villages are left unvisited. • The main road determine the movement pattern of most travelers. • Uneven income distribution as local residents in secluded villages earn little on tourism. • Tourists find walking along the main road unpleasant.	• Travelers do often not receive information about homestays, as most of the marketing happens "word-to-mouth". • No digital information about homestays. • It can be challenging to book homestays because of lacking phone coverage. • Worried about low standards.	• Most travelers leave Lower Mustang without having experienced the secluded villages. • Income from tourism is only distributed to a small minority of the local residents.
REQUIREMENTS	Inform about: • Village locations • Village activities • Accomodation • Prices • Food options • Reason to go	• Offer the local culture Annapurna Circuit is lacking. • Create an independently attractive "package".	• Clearly communitcate the alternative route to visitors in Muktinath.	• Emphasize that the alternative path is secluded from the main road.	• Make information about homestays available online. • Make it easier to contact the homestays. • Clarification of expectations to homestays between tourists and local residents.	

5.3 Stakeholder Map

The stakeholder map demonstrates the stakeholders involved in tourism in Lower Mustang on a superior level. It displays only the most important stakeholders for simplification. We divided the stakeholders into four categories; tourists, conservation and support, local communities, and tourist providers. The three circles indicate to which extent we will focus on and involve the different stakeholders in our project. The outermost circle shows the stakeholders who we will involve the least in our project, while the innermost shows the ones we will involve the most.

Tourists

As described in the section about tourist user types, we will mainly focus on Annapurna Circuit trekkers and cultural travelers looking for new destinations – in other words, adventurous travelers. As the smaller villages are not adapted to receive big groups of travelers, we will focus on smaller groups.

Tourist Providers

As found during our first field work in Lower Mustang, homestays greatly contribute to sustainable tourism and avoid economic leakages. In addition, homestays are a great way to experience the authentic culture. It is the only possible place to stay in the smaller villages, and homestays are easy to initiate for residents wanting to involve themselves in tourism. Therefore, homestay owners will be among the main stakeholders in our project.

Local Communities

The local communities closest to the center are chosen based on several criteria, such as their location, the village's uniqueness, and the interest of the local inhabitants in participating in tourism. Therefore, we will involve the local residents in the villages of Tiri, Kagbeni, Jharkot, Lubra, Chonghur, and Jhong the most.

Conservation and Support

Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) is responsible for tourism and conservation in Lower Mustang, and we will aim to involve them as one of the main stakeholders in our project. We will also try to involve the local municipality of Mustang. Besides that, few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental organizations work with tourism, conservation, and/or support in the area.

TOURIST PROVIDERS

TOURISTS

Pilgrims
Big groups
Motorbikers

Travel books
Facebook/ Whatsapp groups
Local guides
Small groups
Hotels
Activity providers
Adventure tourists
Transporation companies
Homestays
Annapurna Circuit trekkers
Travel agencies
ACAP
Tiri Jhong
Local initiatives
Lubra
Jharkot
Chonghur
Muktinath
Kagbeni
Local municipality
Government
Jomsom
Khingga
Thini
Phalyak
Pagling

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

CONCERVATION AND SUPPORT

5.4 Geographic User Journey

Some pain and gain points occur in specific geographic areas during the user journey. Therefore, we have created a map of Lower Mustang to organize this information. The map can contribute to discussions on the qualities and challenges of the area more efficiently, as you can see where the problems occur geographically. Based on the map, we can discuss how to solve the issues, how to maintain what works well, and where a hiking route that attracts tourists should go.

Many students and researchers stay at the homestays in Tiri

Tiri has three homestays and several day trip guests visiting the monastery, but there are still few overnight guests due to a lack of information

Tiri

The trail between Muktinath and Kagbeni through Jhong is much nicer than the main road, but few tourists go there

It is hard to find information about day trip hikes to hills/mountains in Lower Mustang. Dakpoche is an example of a hike with great views that is doable in one day, but you have to talk to local residents to get to know it

Successful entrepreneurship, where a local farmer is running an ecological farm with popular chips production

Kagbeni

Jhong, like most small villages, struggles with attracting tourists

Jhong

Chonghur

Jharkot

Muktinath

Cars, dust, and noise make it unpleasant to walk along the main road between Jomsom, Kagbeni, and Muktinath

Lubra

Several unique attractions, like the Tibetan School, that those who visit enjoys a lot

After completing Thorong La Pass – the hardest part of Annapurna Circuit – trekkers arrive in Lower Mustang

Part of the Community Homestay Network

Several tourists criticize Muktinath for being touristic and unauthentic

Pollution, traffic chaos, and trash in the streets make Jomsom an unpleasant junction point

Jomsom

The trail between Muktinath and Jomsom through Lubra is very nice and with great scenery, but few tourists go there

● PAIN POINTS
● GAIN POINTS

Key Takeaways – Chapter 5

- Annapurna Circuit trekkers and adventure tourists are our target groups. We will collaborate with homestay owners and other local residents to create solutions for the target groups. The project aims to benefit trekkers in the form of authentic experiences, and local residents in the form of a more central position in the tourism industry.

- The main issue we will focus on is that the smaller villages in Lower Mustang are often excluded from travelers' itineraries. One of the main reasons for this is limited information about the villages and the attractions and places to stay there.

- Our solution should inform about the villages, places to stay, and things to do there. Additionally, it should focus on local culture and make it easier for tourists to contact homestays.

- We will focus on the villages Tiri, Kagbeni, Muktinath, Jharkot, Lubra, Chonghur, and Jhong because of their location, uniqueness, and the interest of local residents in tourism participation.

- There are few NGOs and governmental organizations involved in tourism in Lower Mustang. ACAP is the most influential organization, and their involvement will be prioritized. We will also try to involve the local municipality.

Narrowing Focus

The systematizing of insights allowed us to identify the target groups, pain/gain points in the user journey, primary stakeholders, and geographic locations to prioritize. In the following chapter, we will further narrow the focus of our project:

- Four-component hiking trail concept – we will define four components of our hiking concept, decide what questions each component should address, and prioritize focus areas within each component.

- Connecting tourists and local residents – we will illustrate how the four components will connect tourists and local residents.

- Service Model Canvas – we will use frog's "Service Model Canvas" workshop to clarify our project's focus further.

6.1 Four-Component Hiking Trail Concept

Based on our theoretical and practical insights, we decided that a successful hiking trail concept must consist of four components: **digital platform**, **branding**, **sustainable business model**, and **on-site experiences**. Therefore, during the concept development phase of our project, we must address all four components. However, due to time constraints, we cannot fully develop solutions for all of them. Instead, we will outline some parts and suggest ways to proceed with others. The following list shows the main questions we will explore and address within each component during the concept development phase.

Sustainable Business model

- Who owns the service?
- What kind of service is offered?
- Who gains from the service? Who loses?
- What kind of risks are involved?
- How are the environment, society, and culture affected?
- How can risks be reduced/avoided/mitigated?

Branding

- Who is the sender?
- Who is the receiver?
- What is the identity (feelings, value, form)?
- Who will recognize themselves in the brand?

Digital Platform

- Who owns it?
- Who manages it?
- How is the user flows?
- What kind of transaction happens?
- What kind of information is included?

On-Site Experiences

- What physical attributes should be part of the service?
- What kind of experiences are tourists interested in?
- What types of experiences should be offered, and by whom?
- How can we ensure that the experiences on-site match the digital information before going?
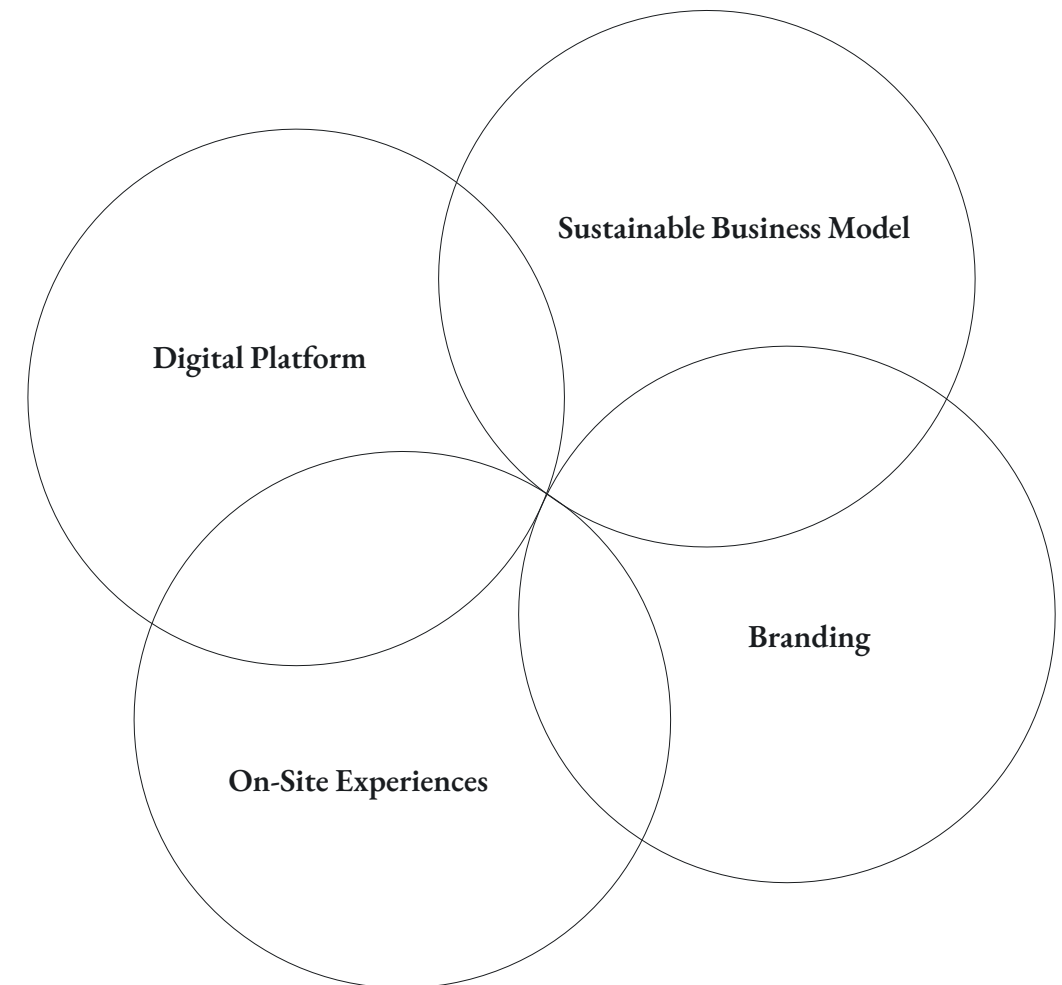
6.2 Connecting Tourists and Local Residents

The four parts of the concept have to supplement each other to attract tourists to the secluded villages in a manner that benefits both the local communities and the incoming tourists.

Digital Platform

Sustainable Business Model

Tourists

Local residents

On-Site Experiences

Branding
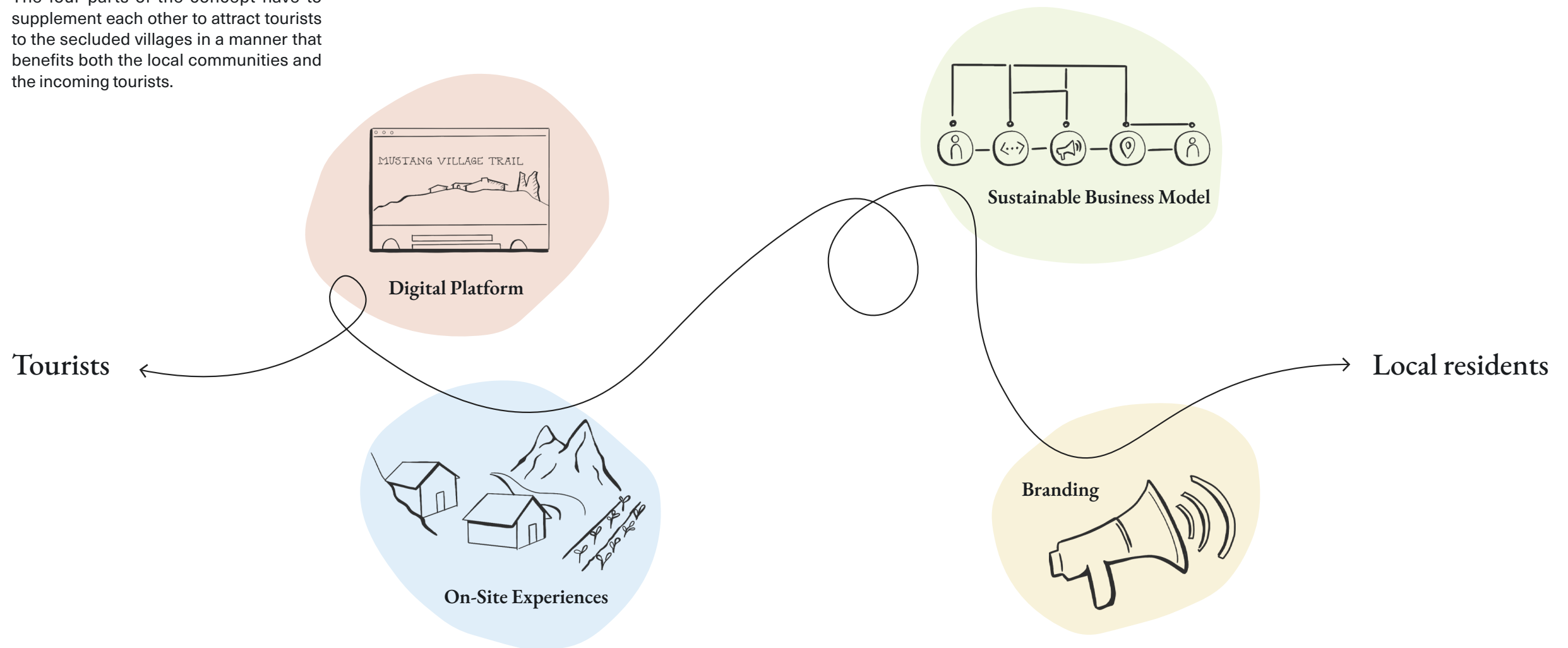
6.3 Service Model Canvas

After deciding on the four focus areas for our project, our co-supervisors from frog, a design consultancy firm, facilitated a workshop for us. They used their Service Model Canvas (SMC) to help us define what we are making, for whom, and why, as well as the goals and consequences of our project. SMC is a tool they use with their customers to narrow the focus in the starting phase of projects, as described in Chapter 3.8. The results are summarized in the table.

WHAT ARE YOU MAKING?

Hiking trail between secluded villages in Lower Mustang.

The hiking trail concept includes homestays, unique experiences, and a non-profit digital platform providing detailed information about the trail and its offerings. The aim is to make it easier for tourists to find lesser-known villages and experiences.

WHY ARE YOU DOING IT?

Purpose
- Create value for both tourists and the local community by 1) helping tourists find authentic experiences and 2) discovering how local residents in the smaller villages can partake in tourism and benefit from it.

WHO IS MAKING IT?

- Master students (design, concept development, ensuring stakeholder involvement)
- SAMAJ collaboration project (managing, funding)
- Local residents (co-creators)
- Tourists (co-creators)

WHO ARE YOU DOING IT FOR?

Target group
- Local residents who provide or are interested in providing homestays or activities
- Tourists, which includes Annapurna Circuit trekkers and potential new adventure tourists

Needs
- Local residents need to reach tourists, establish a secondary income, strike a balance between tourism business and farming, have more predictability, and evaluate risks and consequences
- Tourists seek adventure, unique and different experiences, closeness to nature, information about where they can have the experiences they seek, and the basics such as a place to stay, food, and services

Value
- More local residents can benefit from tourism than today
- Making information and experiences more available
- Cultural exchange between tourists and local residents

Where is the solution to be used?
- At home before traveling (website)
- While traveling in Nepal (mobile)

Potential obstacles
- Expectation conflict between tourists and local residents
- Connectivity – some places have no wifi/cellular
- Some homestay owners have low digital experience
- Communication challenges between local residents and us
- Communication challenges between tourists and local residents
- Tourist participation (they have plans already and limited time)
- How to organize more in-depth co-design activities with local residents

Possibilities
- A chance for tourists to come closer to the local residents and their culture
- A chance for local residents to be included in the tourist industry

Conditions
- Homestay owners and other local residents must be involved
- Tourists must be involved and willing to change their travel route, both when planning and when they are there
- A live website that informs about the service

Who and what will be affected?
- Ecological systems: Nature, trails, waste management, neglecting farming can change the food chain
- Industrial system: Shift from farming to tourism, roads
- Social system: Westernizing, cultural changes

Vision – dream scenario
- Tourists visit the smaller villages and stay with local residents in homestays
- The local residents earn from it and have a proper balance with farming
- Local residents and tourists have joyful experiences and greater mutual understanding
- Tourism gives local residents a higher standard of living and makes them less dependent on remittances
- Tourism does not increase too much – no negative cultural changes, etc.

Vision – good enough
- Create something that does not cause negative consequences: Either improve the status quo or do not diminish it

What keeps you from succeeding?
- Funding for the project (development etc.)
- Maintenance of the website
- The information does not reach the right group of tourists (those interested in small village experiences)

Key Takeaways – Chapter 6

- The hiking trail concept will consist of four components: a digital platform, branding, sustainable business model, and on-site experiences.
- We will focus on addressing each component's most important issues but not fully develop solutions for all.
- The project aims to attract tourists to the secluded villages in a manner that benefits both the local communities and the incoming tourists.

Concept Development

In the concept development phase, we started to develop the four components described in Chapter 5.1. To do this, we performed several workshop exercises and applied the findings gathered in the previous chapters. The aim was to lay a foundation for our upcoming field trip to Nepal, covering discussion points with tourists/local residents, interview topics, things we should test, prototypes we can showcase, etc. The chapter covers the following topics:

- Developing a brand – a workshop to define a clear brand and a first draft of the brand style guide.

- Developing on-site experiences – workshops to uncover meaningful and unique experiences and a plan for what experiences we should test in Nepal based on insights from the last field trip and the survey.

- Developing a business model – future scenario workshop to define a desired and undesirable future, and value mapping tool and business model canvas to specify a starting point for a business model.

- Developing a digital platform – a plan for the website's hierarchy and structure and a first draft of the prototype.

7.1 Developing a Brand

The information gathered during the first field trip to Lower Mustang revealed a lack of available information about travel opportunities in the area. If we are to attract tourists to the villages, the tourists need to know about them in the first place. Our staged participant bservation (page 76) also revealed that digital information and images of Lower Mustang failed to draw the participants' interest. As the local residents aim to attract visitors, the lack of appealing information is a major pain point. Employing marketing and branding strategies for our concept could help promote the area more appealingly and reach out to potential visitors. This chapter will therefore focus on building an associated brand for the hiking trail concept.

As introduced in Chapter 3.7 concerning theoretical insights on branding, we will now conduct a Story Brand 7 workshop. After, we will introduce our initial design for the brand's visual identity. This will be the beginning of answering the questions related to establishing the brand, including determining the sender, receiver, target audience, and brand identity.

Workshop: Story Brand 7

What?
The SB7 framework (Miller, 2017) is designed to help brands effectively convey their relevance to customers.

How?
To initiate the brand development, we used the SB7 framework as a workshop. It involves seven steps that aim to build up your brand like a catchy story.

1. A **character** with a clear goal (the customer)
2. A **problem** standing in the way of achieving the goal
3. A **guide** showing up to assist the character (your brand)
4. A **plan** provided by the guide
5. A **call to action** initiated by the plan
6. The action prevents **failure**
7. The story ends with success

During each step, we answered questions defined in the framework individually on post-it notes within a time limit of two minutes. Afterward, we discussed our notes and collaborated to determine one clear answer for each step. This process resulted in the creation of our brand story, which is presented on the following page.

Adventure Tourist
The **character** is an adventure tourist searching for mastery and exploration and want to explore unique culture and nature different from their previous experiences.

Commercialization
The **problem** is that commercialization of the known villages has led to a lack of authentic and uncommon travel experiences.

Guide
The **guide** communicates: "We understand that it is frustrating to travel far and still struggle to find authentic experiences."

Plan
The **plan** is: "Together with local residents, we have collected authentic experiences for you."

Call to Action
The **call to action** is: Contact information and maps leading the adventure tourists to their desired experiences.

Action Preventing Failure
The **action prevents failure**: The trekkers are led to the smaller villages instead of the commercialized ones.

Successful End
The **story ends with success**: The adventure tourist get an authentic experience of the local culture in the remote villages.

The Grunt Test

To validate that the website communicates the desired message clearly enough, Miller (2017) suggests to use the "Grunt Test". Within 5 seconds, the customers visiting your brand website should understand: 1. What your brand offers, 2. How it can improve their lives, 3. What they need to do to purchase the product. All three questions must be easily answerable for the brand to pass. The principles from the grunt test are very similar to Turker's theory from Chapter 3.5, stating that a tourist website must catch visitors' attention within the first 8 seconds. Speed is, therefore, a clear common ground when designing a tourist website. The key takeaway is, however, not the number of seconds required to attract the visitor's attention. The importance lies in communicating the purpose of the website quickly. This test has been used as a baseline for the information hierarchy of our website. The test will later be performed on the prototype to decide if the concept is communicated clearly enough.

Name of hiking trail
Catchy sentence describing why you have to go

How it can improve their lives

Explore hidden spots   Stay with locals   Join cooking classes

What our brand offers

Call to action

Call to action to purchase the product
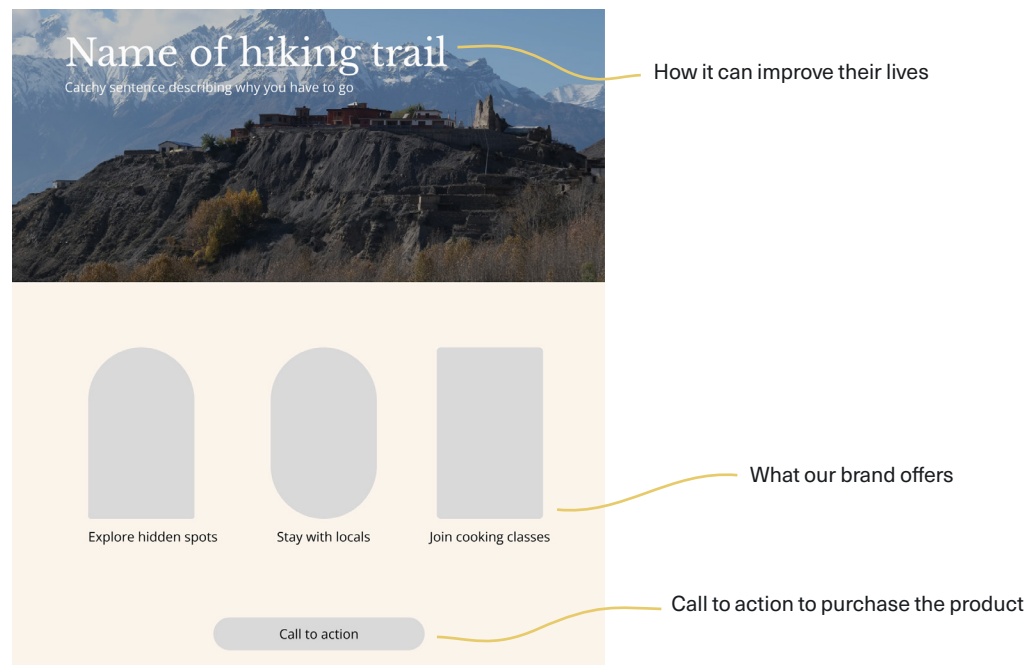
Visual Identity

To ensure consistency with the brand identity, the visual identity of the concept must communicate mastery, exploration, authenticity, and uniqueness. When people visit the website, they should immediately get an impression of Lower Mustang and quickly associate the brand with traveling. To gather inspiration and learn about industry standards, we researched imagery, websites, and visual identities related to adventure tourism and Nepal. We compiled the findings in mood boards for easy access. Based on the mood boards, we made a preliminary visual identity to show the local community during our field trip. The goal was to create a visual identity that resonates with the local residents simultaneously as it attracts tourists.
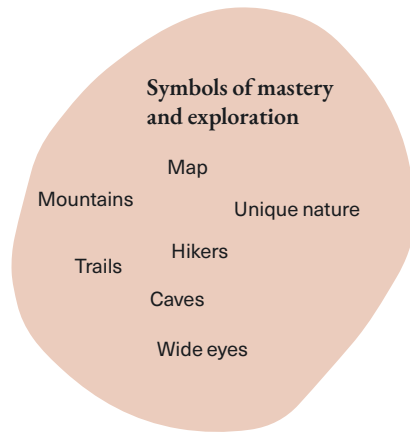

(Miguel Rato, n.d.)
(Matt Anderson, n.d.)
(Unsplash, n.d.)

Symbols of authenticity and uniqueness

Food
Dal Bhat
Momo   Apples

Farming
Goats   Yak
Horse   Fields
Whistling song

Spiritual
Scarf   Goat head
Prayer flags Many
Buddha statue

Buildings
Tea houses Stone
Monastery buildings
Paint streaks

Nature
River   Snow-covered
Desert cliffs mountains
Green fields

Symbols of mastery and exploration

Map
Unique nature
Mountains
Hikers
Trails
Caves
Wide eyes

After surveying adventure tourists, we found that they value exploration, authenticity, mastery, and uniqueness. Therefore, we sought out symbols that represent these ideas. These resulted in a handful of simplistic drawings that we have included in the visual identity to create playful yet informative elements on the website. Further, we made a color palette based on photos that reflect Nepal's natural and cultural richness. The four primary colors originate from the four colors of the Buddhist prayer flags but are presented in earth tones to match the nature and architecture in Lower Mustang. We have also included a suggestion for a font in the visual identity. The header font is a serif font meant to represent a professional website without making it seem like a luxurious location with high standards. This font is paired with a simple sans-serif font with good readability or the content texts to increase the website's usability.

Mustang Village Trail

AA

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKk
LlMmNnOoPpQqRrSsTtUu
VvWwXxYyZz

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLl
MmNnOoPpQqRrSsTtUuVv
WwXxYyZz
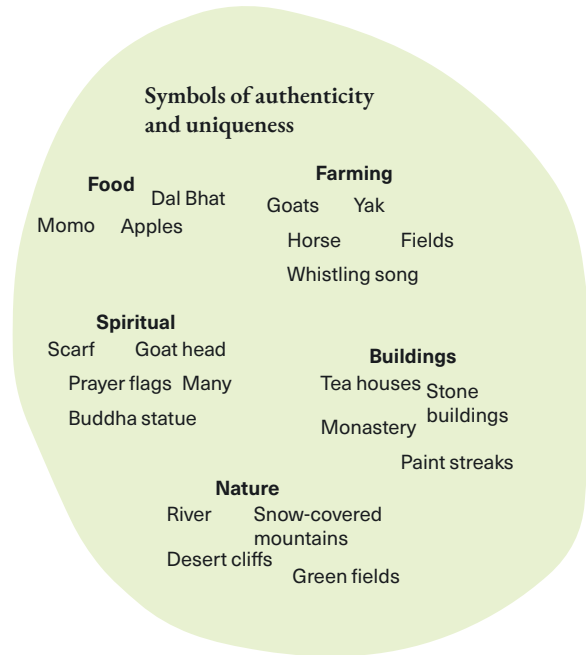
Primary

Secondary

Gradients

Gray scale

7.2 Developing On-Site Experiences

The on-site experiences in Mustang must be unique and meaningful. To achieve this, we conducted one workshop exercise to improve our understanding of how to facilitate these experiences. Furthermore, we analyzed the results from our last field trip to Nepal and the survey we conducted among trekkers. We wanted to uncover as many potential tourist experiences as possible to be able to promote a varied offer of on-site experiences. Based on our findings, we compiled a list of activities to test during our upcoming field trip. The list is presented on page 130.

(Sonam Gurung, n.d.)

Workshop: Design for Meaningful Experiences

What?

D4Me is an approach for designing meaningful experiences created by the AHO service designer Ted Matthews (2019). According to him (2019, para. 9.1), rituals, mythologies, and collective symbols may be used to give meaning to experiences. The method includes four stages:

- Stage 1: Uncover cultural elements relevant to your market, and then map symbols, narratives, and anxieties.
- Stage 2: Extract meaning from the symbols, narratives, and anxieties collected in stage 1.
- Stage 3: Designing the offering as a service myth based on the material from the cultural mapping.
- Stage 4: Designing the experiential journey as a ritual through meaningful service encounters.

How?

We performed the four stages as described, focusing on creating memorable experiences for adventure tourists. First, we collected information from various online platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, blogs, and websites. We analyzed the gathered data to identify symbols, narratives, and anxieties that emerged from the stories and experiences of adventure tourists. These insights were then translated into meaning and used to develop a service myth and a service ritual that address the needs and anxieties of adventure tourists. Through this workshop, we gained greater clarity of the essential components necessary to create a memorable experiential journey for adventure tourists.

STAGE 1

What **symbols** are important to adventure tourists?
- Cairns, mountain tops (achievement)
- Nature and scenic views (exploration)
- Shared experiences (friendship)
- Sunset and sunrises (peace)
- Equipment (experience, identity)
- Nice weather (enjoyment)

What **narratives** whirl around adventure tourists?
- They desire to discover new places
- They seek challenges
- Adventure is vital for their identity
- They are more likely to share achievements than difficulties they face
- They value sharing experiences

What **anxieties** exist among adventure tourists?
- Fear of not finding meaning
- Fear of expectations not being met
- The conflict between enjoying and damaging nature
- Fear of injury during high-risk activities
- Fear of mass tourism
- Fear of having a dull, routine life and missing out on life's adventures

STAGE 2

What do the symbols, narratives, and anxieties tell about adventure tourists?
- Being in nature and having experiences that challenge them is a crucial part of the adventure tourist's identity
- Sharing experiences, both in the moment and afterward, enhance the memorability and enjoyment of adventure tourism
- Adventure tourists seek to escape the monotony of everyday life and crave extraordinary experiences

STAGE 3

The character is stuck in the monotony of a 9-to-5 job and feels restless and dissatisfied. He travels to the Himalayas to find purpose and new perspectives. Surrounded by mountains, diverse cultures, and scenic views, the character gains a sense of self-discovery. He returns home with newfound energy and a stronger identity. The memories and experiences the character has gained from this trip have enriched his life in ways he could never have imagined.

STAGE 4

During the separation phase, customers should be offered the opportunity to travel away from their monotonous yet comfortable everyday life. It is crucial to convince them that the service can provide a meaningful experience.

During the transition phase, the journey should help customers feel connected to something larger than themselves, such as the natural beauty of Nepal. Symbols that emphasize this connection, such as shared experiences, scenic views, and undiscovered places, should be incorporated into the experience.
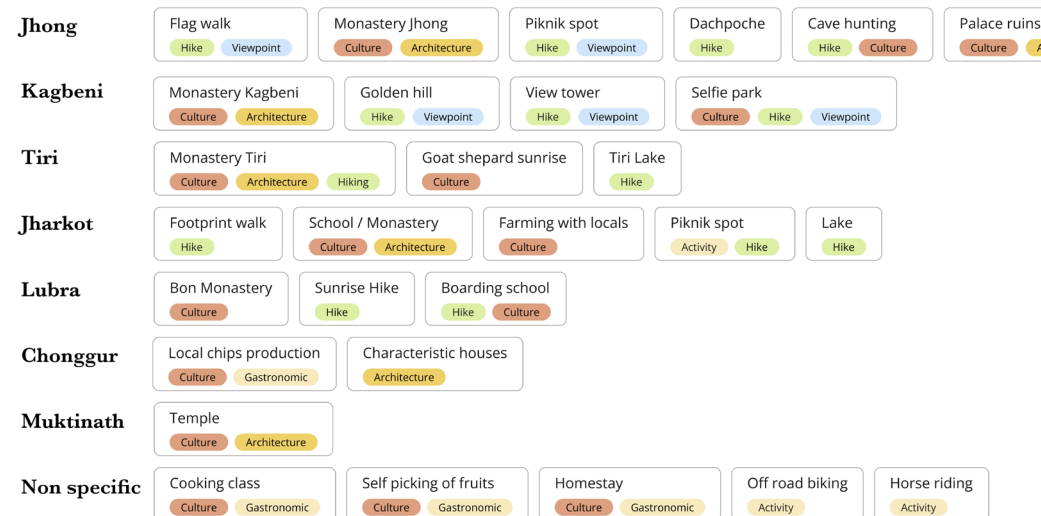
In the reincorporation phase, customers should return home with newfound energy and a sense of accomplishment. The journey should bring about a positive change in the customer's life, such as a new perspective, a sense of self-discovery, or a stronger identity.

Experiences in Lower Mustang

Based on our previous trip to Nepal and insights from the survey on page 84, we started to make an experience library. This library includes a summary of the activities that travelers want to do and the activities that we should test for potential inclusion in our hiking trail concept. We categorized all the activities by village and activity type.

As we discovered when learning about visitor experience design in Chapter 3.3 and hiking trails in Chapter 3.6, a varied offer of on-site experiences is important for a successful hiking trail concept. This is because hikers have diverse expectations and preferences when visiting a location

(Bartolome, 2020). A broad offer of experiences makes it easier to customize the trip to each traveler's preferences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 21). This way, it is more likely to suit a bigger part of the user group. The list, therefore, includes diverse activities and locations that could interest a tourist. Additionally, one of the studies showed that tourists perceived an experience as more memorable if they were actively involved and attentive through co-creation (Campos, 2016, p. 7). Experiences like cooking classes, horse riding, and farming with locals were, therefore, especially important to include in the list of experiences.

Jhong	Flag walk — Hike · Viewpoint	Monastery Jhong — Culture · Architecture	Piknik spot — Hike · Viewpoint	Dachpoche — Hike	Cave hunting — Hike · Culture	Palace ruins — Culture · A...
Kagbeni	Monastery Kagbeni — Culture · Architecture	Golden hill — Hike · Viewpoint	View tower — Hike · Viewpoint	Selfie park — Culture · Hike · Viewpoint		
Tiri	Monastery Tiri — Culture · Architecture · Hiking	Goat shepard sunrise — Culture	Tiri Lake — Hike			
Jharkot	Footprint walk — Hike	School / Monastery — Culture · Architecture	Farming with locals — Culture	Piknik spot — Activity · Hike	Lake — Hike	
Lubra	Bon Monastery — Culture	Sunrise Hike — Hike	Boarding school — Hike · Culture			
Chonggur	Local chips production — Culture · Gastronomic	Characteristic houses — Architecture				
Muktinath	Temple — Culture · Architecture					
Non specific	Cooking class — Culture · Gastronomic	Self picking of fruits — Culture · Gastronomic	Homestay — Culture · Gastronomic	Off road biking — Activity	Horse riding — Activity	

7.3 Developing a Business Model

This subchapter will cover a future scenario workshop and our use of two business model tools. As stated in the Service Model Canvas on page 115, the main requirement for our project is that it will not cause negative repercussions but rather improve or maintain the current situation. Throughout the process, we have extensively discussed the potential consequences of our project. We formalized these conversations into a future scenario workshop to evaluate our project's possible positive and negative

outcomes. After performing the workshop, we used two tools to develop a business model. The goal was to develop a business model that benefits the local community. Several articles we read during the theoretical insight phase stated that the Business Model Canvas is a simple and helpful tool. However, some criticized it for not considering environmental and social factors. To include this perspective, we will also utilize the value mapping tool.

Workshop: Future Scenario Workshop

What?

A future scenario workshop is a tool to identify a project's potential positive and negative outcomes. We were inspired by frog's workshop template (Lutz, 2021).

Why?

The workshop aimed to make us more aware of our project's potential consequences through discussing how to avoid the negative ones and how to work towards the positive ones. The concept and business model should answer this.

How?

The workshop exercise consisted of five stages. Initially, we individually generated ideas at each stage. We wrote each idea on a sticky note. Later, we discussed our ideas and moved on to the next stage.

The stages are as follows:
1. Choose a time frame based on the industry and the context.
2. Explore best, worst, and in-between future scenarios.
3. Explore what you can do to reach the worst-case scenario.
4. Discuss if you are heading toward any of the worst-case scenarios.
5. Suggest what can be done not to reach the worst-case scenario.

We included many topics in our workshop, but in the summary table on the following page, we have excluded topics outside our scope or control to make it more concise, like climate change, waste management, and young people moving abroad.

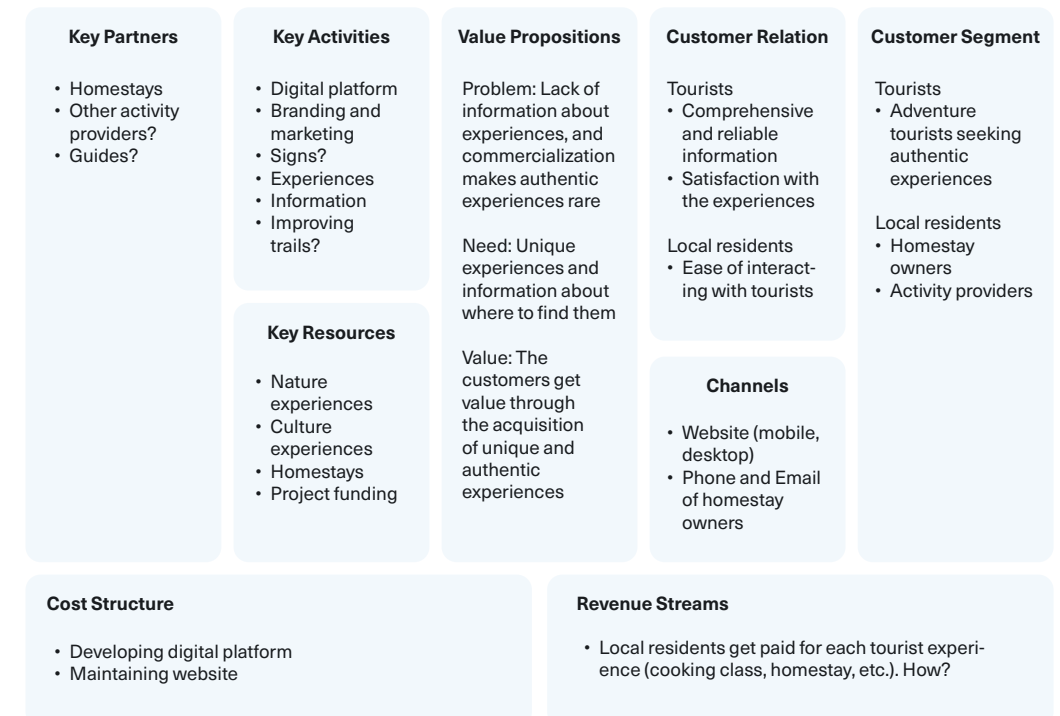| Worst case scenario: 10 years from now	What can we do to reach the worst case?	Are we on our way to the worst case?	How can we avoid the worst case scenario?
The villages are touristic, and visitors can no longer get authentic experiences. Adventure tourists, therefore, seek a new authentic destination.	• Focusing on reaching too many tourists and earning a lot of money • Selling experience packages where everything is organized • Removing the space to explore culture and nature in the area	• One of the project's goals is that it will benefit the local residents • Information gets more accessible with the digital platform we are working on	• User test the feeling of the website • Be aware of our goal and our target group (slightly decrease tourism to the area and only target a narrow group of tourists) • Keep the activities quite open to avoid a "package-feeling"
Western tourism has changed local culture, leading to over-commercialization and a loss of belonging for some villagers.	• Starting Western concepts in the villages (pizza, Halloween, H&M, etc.) • Starting many concepts similar to Yak Donalds	• Some tourists make demands that the local residents try to adapt to • To Dakpoche they are already building a road • The current prototype of the website does not address how to be culturally sensitive	• Develop curiosity about the local culture • Convey how to be culturally sensitive when you visit the villages on the website
The local economy is over-dependent on tourism, and the area cannot handle a crisis similar to Covid 19, changes in the numbers of visitors, etc.	• Market the trail with the goal of it becoming the new Annapurna Circuit • Make sure that as many local residents as possible work in the tourism sector	• Many local residents mention that it is hard to do both tourism and farming. What happens if we actually succeed in increasing tourism? • We plan to share the prototype in the Annapurna Circuit-groups	• Be careful about where and how the trail is marketed
The local residents struggle with balancing tourism and farming and get a more stressful life. Some even quit farming, which leads to Lower Mustang depending more on food imports.	• Create a system that depends on a lot of organizing for the local residents • Require quick answers and constant attention from the homestays • Not making a plan on how the local residents should balance farming with more visitors	• We do not have a clear plan for how local residents could balance farming and tourism • Our concept does not have a clear clarification of expectations for tourists	• Take inspiration from Lubra on how the community homestay is organized • Include a disclaimer like on the Community Homestay Network saying that it is only Nepalese toilets, etc.
Our solution only benefits a minority of the people in the villages, and it is not distributed fairly.	• Make solutions that only benefit a few	• Only some local residents are included in the solution and will benefit directly from it	• Take inspiration from the community solution in Lubra • Discuss the business model with local residents

Business Model Canvas

What?
The Business Model Canvas is a strategic management tool that offers an easy way to define and communicate a business concept. The left side of the canvas focuses on the business (internal), while the right focuses on the customer (external). In the middle, the external and internal factors meet in a value proposition, representing the value exchange between the business and its customers (Ebinum, 2016).

Why?
We aimed to outline a business model concept that we could use to discuss the business model with local residents during and after our field trip, and decided to use the Business Model Canvas. The goal is to create a long term plan describing how the concept will generate revenue and succeed as a viable business concept.

How?
We inserted the canvas in Figma and wrote sticky notes on each section. We added a question mark for topics that needed clarification or testing during our field trip. After the field trip, we will use the information and insights gained to fill out the business model canvas in greater detail. The model will, either during or after the field trip, be discussed with local residents to ensure that the goals and wishes of the local community are considered in the model. Based on our insights, an iteration will be made to the current business model canvas.

Key Partners

- Homestays
- Other activity providers?
- Guides?

Key Activities

- Digital platform
- Branding and marketing
- Signs?
- Experiences
- Information
- Improving trails?

Key Resources

- Nature experiences
- Culture experiences
- Homestays
- Project funding

Value Propositions

Problem: Lack of information about experiences, and commercialization makes authentic experiences rare

Need: Unique experiences and information about where to find them

Value: The customers get value through the acquisition of unique and authentic experiences

Customer Relation

Tourists
- Comprehensive and reliable information
- Satisfaction with the experiences

Local residents
- Ease of interacting with tourists

Channels

- Website (mobile, desktop)
- Phone and Email of homestay owners

Customer Segment

Tourists
- Adventure tourists seeking authentic experiences

Local residents
- Homestay owners
- Activity providers

Cost Structure

- Developing digital platform
- Maintaining website

Revenue Streams

- Local residents get paid for each tourist experience (cooking class, homestay, etc.). How?

Brainstorming: Value Mapping Tool

What?
The Value Mapping Tool is a four-step brainstorming process that ensures sustainable business thinking in a business model.
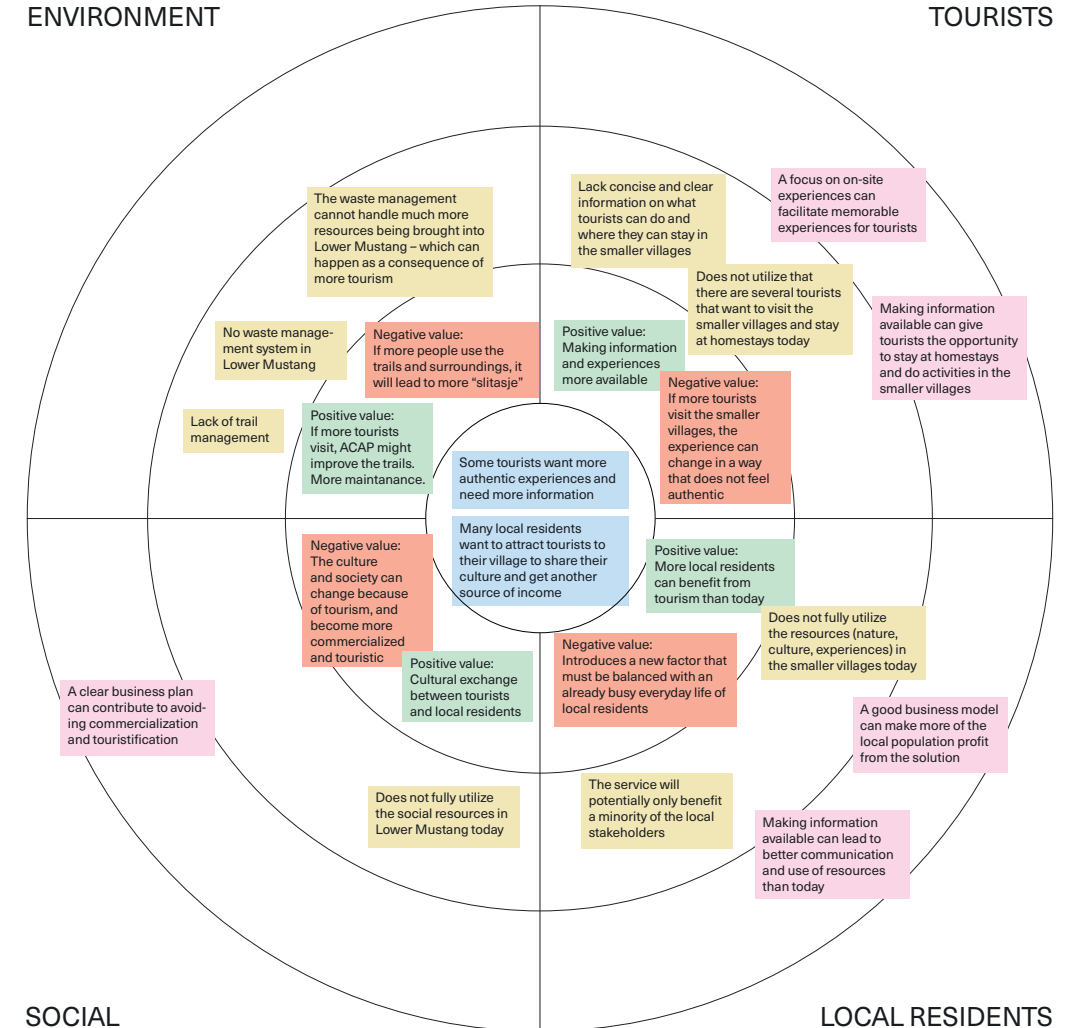
Why?
As the Business Model Canvas is criticized for not considering social and environmental factors, we used the value mapping tool to ensure this perspective.

How?
The model consists of five circles and four slices. The circle in the center signifies the purpose, while the remaining three represent the other brainstorms. The slices are different factors and themes which the brainstorms should cover. We used the tool as a workshop exercise. First, we discussed and wrote down all ideas on sticky notes for the four brainstorming sessions. We then placed the sticky notes in the corresponding slice of the model.

The four brainstorms are as follows:
1. Value Captured. Discuss the purpose of the business. Why is the business here? What product or service is offered?
2. Value Destroyed. Discuss the value creation for different stakeholders. What kind of value is created for different stakeholders? What positive value is created? What negative value do the stakeholders mitigate?
3. Value Missed. Discuss the values that are destroyed or missed for the stakeholders. Does the business waste any value? Are potentially useful materials/qualities going to landfills or not utilized in any other way?
4. Value Opportunities. Perform blue-sky thinking, focusing on turning the negatives from the previous brainstorms into positives. What new positive value can be created by introducing new activities and collaborations? What can you learn from others to enhance sustainable outcomes?

ENVIRONMENT TOURISTS

SOCIAL LOCAL RESIDENTS

The waste management cannot handle much more resources being brought into Lower Mustang – which can happen as a consequence of more tourism

Lack concise and clear information on what tourists can do and where they can stay in the smaller villages

A focus on on-site experiences can facilitate memorable experiences for tourists

No waste management system in Lower Mustang

Negative value: If more people use the trails and surroundings, it will lead to more "slitasje"

Positive value: Making information and experiences more available

Does not utilize that there are several tourists that want to visit the smaller villages and stay at homestays today

Making information available can give tourists the opportunity to stay at homestays and do activities in the smaller villages

Lack of trail management

Positive value: If more tourists visit, ACAP might improve the trails. More maintanance.

Some tourists want more authentic experiences and need more information

Negative value: If more tourists visit the smaller villages, the experience can change in a way that does not feel authentic

Negative value: The culture and society can change because of tourism, and become more commercialized and touristic

Many local residents want to attract tourists to their village to share their culture and get another source of income

Positive value: More local residents can benefit from tourism than today

Does not fully utilize the resources (nature, culture, experiences) in the smaller villages today

A clear business plan can contribute to avoiding commercialization and touristification

Positive value: Cultural exchange between tourists and local residents

Negative value: Introduces a new factor that must be balanced with an already busy everyday life of local residents

A good business model can make more of the local population profit from the solution

Does not fully utilize the social resources in Lower Mustang today

The service will potentially only benefit a minority of the local stakeholders

Making information available can lead to better communication and use of resources than today

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137

7.4 Developing a Digital Platform

In this chapter, we will discuss the digital platform that promotes the hiking trail. The digital platform is crucial to the final concept as it will serve as the main source of information about the trail and enable visitors to connect with the local community. The platform should reach tourists before they travel, teaching them about the trail in the planning phase.

Page Structure

When designing a website, one should always start by deciding on the functionality (Wathan & Schoger, 2018, p. 9). This involves creating a well-planned information hierarchy before beginning with the actual website design. In line with this, we developed a website hierarchy based on the findings from the participant observation and the clustering workshop (Chapter 4). The suggested structure reflects what information the participants considered useful and how they clustered it together.

We were considering removing the "villages" and "practical information" pages from our website hierarchy. Several of our insight exercises from Chapter 4 explored what kind of information tourists need and look for when traveling to Nepal. However, we also found that many find travel websites overwhelming and prefer to seek information from other sources. We are weighing the benefits of including practical information versus the risk of having too much information on our website. As our website's objective is to provide information about places to stay and things to do, we may exclude these pages. However, we will conduct usability tests before making a final decision.

Website design

The website design will be the most prominent representation of the concept and must be professional to persuade visitors. We aim to create a high-fidelity prototype in Figma ready to be developed and published as a functioning web page. The prototype has been designed iteratively based on user testing feedback.

When designing a digital interface, starting with low-fidelity sketches is usually recommended to avoid getting caught up in minor details (Wathan & Schoger, 2018, p. 12). Despite this trend, we decided to create a relatively high-fidelity prototype rather early in the process. A prototype that looks like an actual website is a clear way to describe our project and intentions to the local community. A more detailed prototype leaves less room for misunderstandings when explaining the concept. As many local residents do not speak English, we must bring a translator to some inter-

HOME PAGE
— What the area is known for
— How to get there
— Map
— Photos
— Itinerary suggestion

VILLAGES?

THINGS TO DO
— Hikes
  — Distance
  — Difficulty
  — Map
  — Altitude
  — Gear
— Activities
— Culture
— Viewpoints

WHERE TO STAY
— Map?
— Homestays
  — Intro text
  — Contact info
  — Photos
  — Location

PRACTICAL INFORMATION?

MAP
— Things to do
— Where to stay
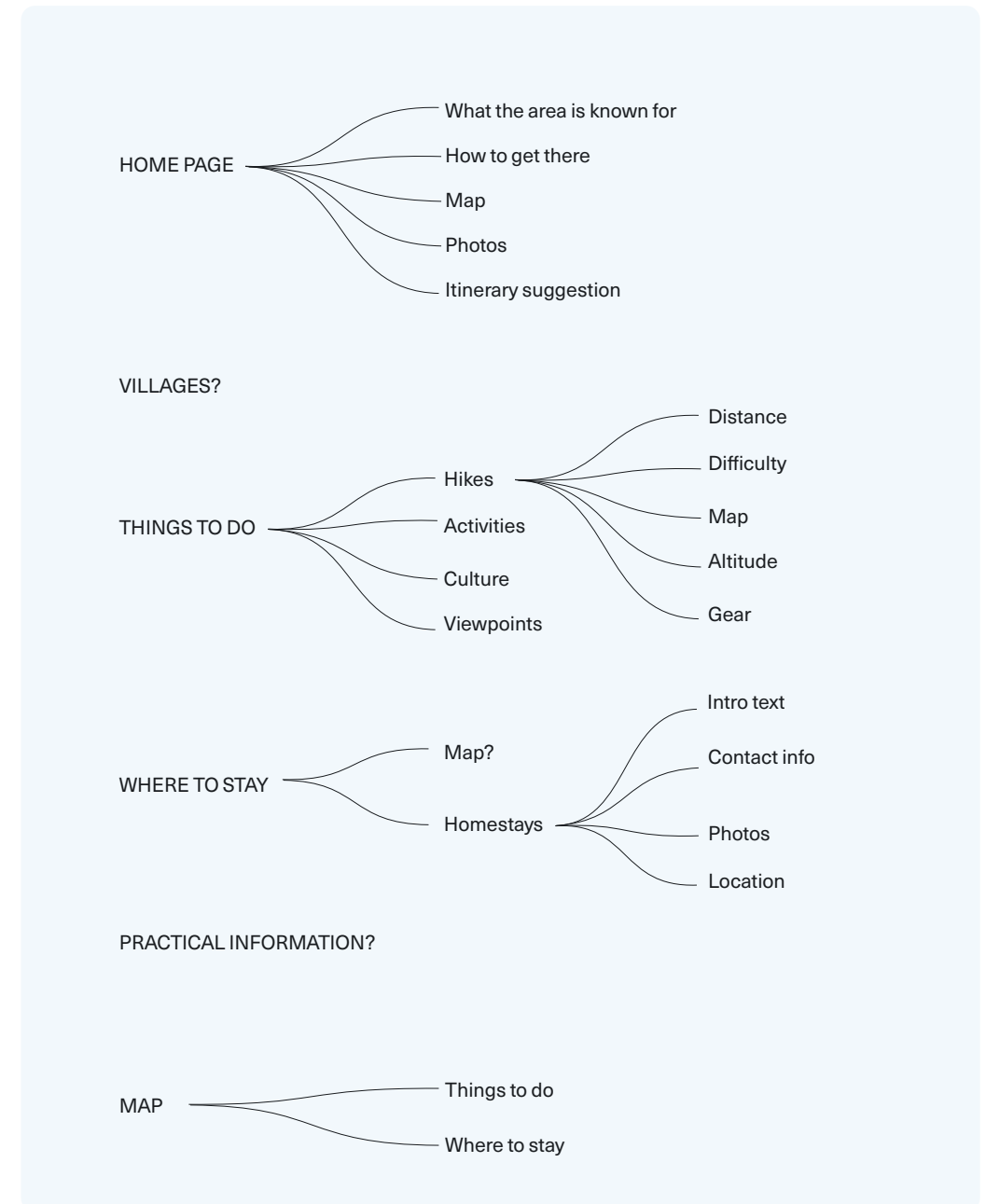
views. With a detailed prototype, we can show them visually what we are trying to make, ensuring that as little information as possible is lost in translation.

Some design decisions for the website align with the requirements for good tourism website design found during the theoretical insight (Türker, 2021). The site is generally created simply and consistently, avoiding overwhelming and excessive information. Still, a broad selection of information shows many different activities and accommodations. Contact information for the accommodation sites is also easily accessible on the «Where to stay» page. To support the simplicity aspect, a static navigation bar with understandable titles provides easy navigation on the site.

We structured the information in the prototype based on the hierarchy we created, placing the topmost categories in the page header. Some minor changes were made to the hierarchy while designing, as it became clearer what information seemed natural in the different categories. The two pages to the right were used to illustrate the concept to the local community during the field trip. The two pages showing "Things to do" and "Where to stay" summarize the website's main features. Using examples from places in Lower Mustang will make the prototype more relatable to the residents reviewing it.
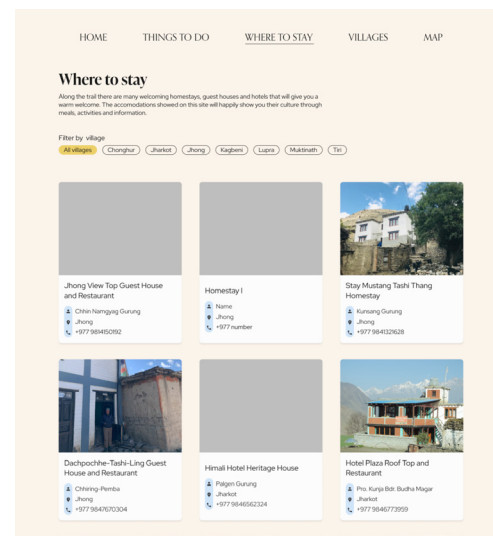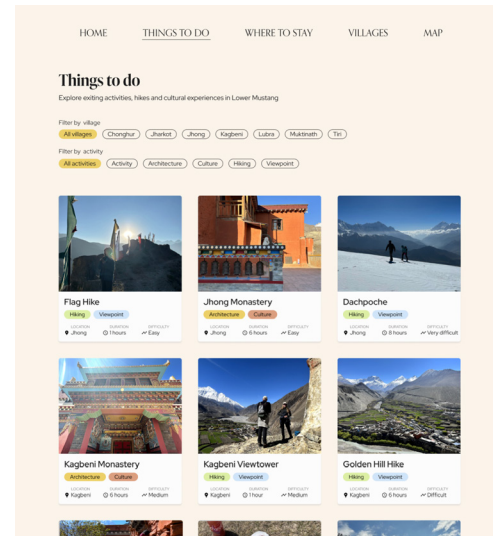
Key Takeaways – Chapter 7

- Our brand will appeal to adventure tourists by using symbols of mastery and exploration, imagery of unique culture and nature, and a color palette inspired by Lower Mustang.

- We must facilitate memorable on-site experiences and co-creation.

- Our solution must focus on preventing touristification, westernization, and commercialization while also considering the impact of over-reliance on tourism and finding a balance between farming and tourism.

- The business model must be discussed with local residents to ensure a solution that is beneficial for the local community, feasible, and will create value for tourists.

- The website prototype should be tested and discussed with tourists and local residents during the field trip.

Field Trip to Nepal

This chapter will cover the following topics:

- Field trip – the itinerary and travel route for our field trip to Nepal.
- Case study of Annapurna Circuit – the key findings we discovered during our case study of the trek.
- Insights gathered from tourists, local residents, and institutional stakeholders in Lower Mustang.
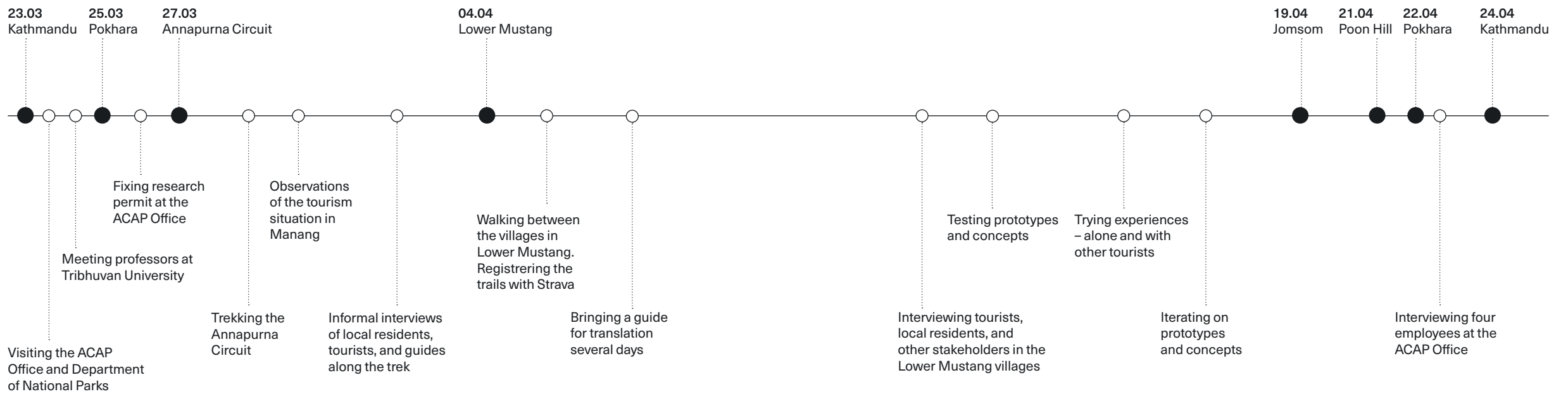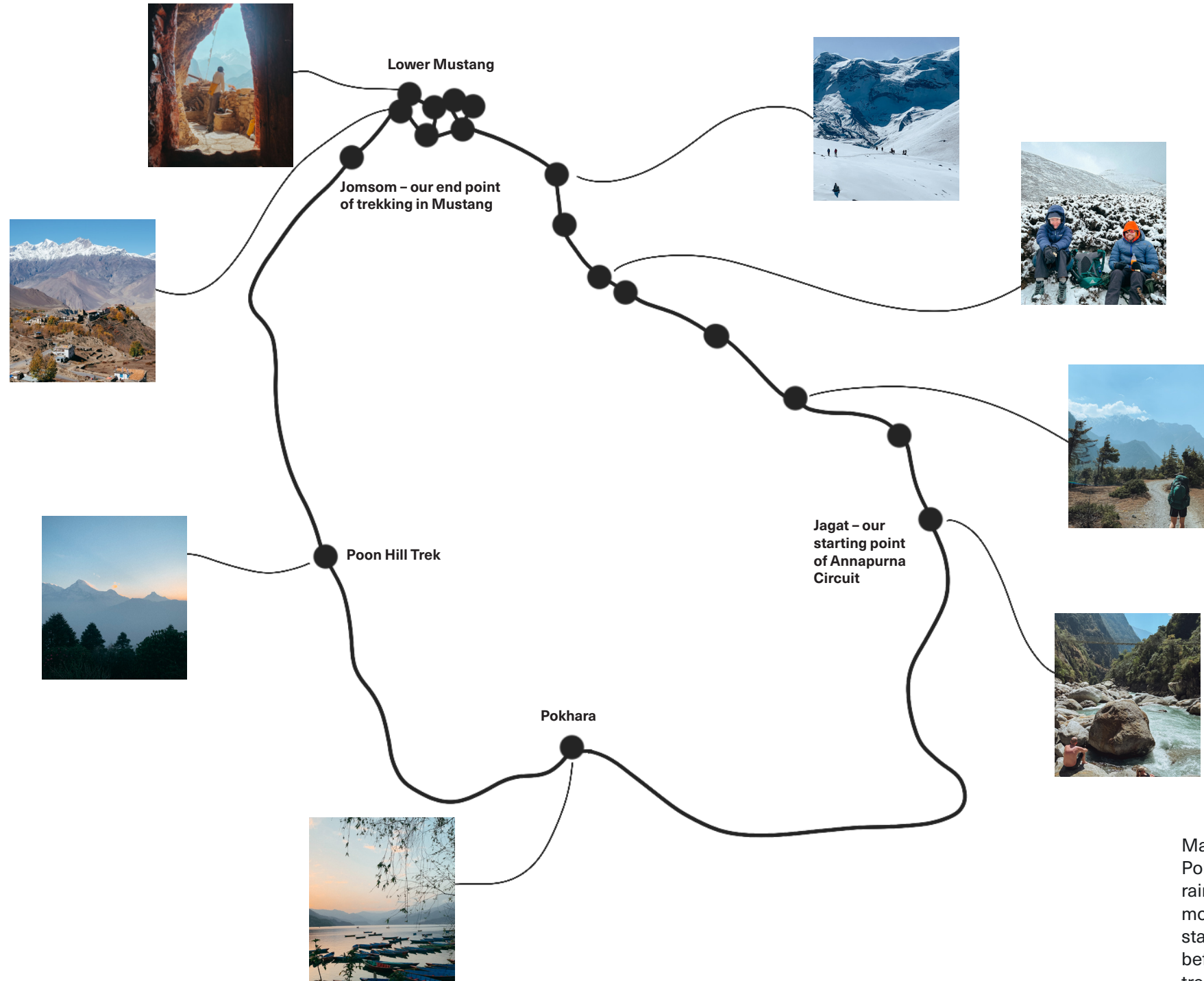
8.1 About the Field Trip

From the end of March, we spent five weeks in Nepal to gather insights and test our concept in Lower Mustang. This was our second trip to the area, as we went on a three-week field trip to Nepal for our projects in Design 9. During our first trip, we familiarized ourselves with the area and the local residents, which meant we had background knowledge and valuable contacts for our second trip. This time, we focused on researching the potential for establishing a hiking trail and a digital plat-form that provides information on activities and accommodations in Lower Mustang. Our project targets Annapurna Circuit trek-kers, and we started by doing the circuit as a case study to understand this user group better. After that, we spent a few weeks in Lower Mustang talking to various stake-holders, testing experiences, and getting feedback from tourists and local residents. Our travel schedule and a map showing our travel route in the ACAP area are displayed on the following pages.

23.03
Kathmandu

25.03
Pokhara

27.03
Annapurna Circuit

04.04
Lower Mustang

19.04
Jomsom

21.04
Poon Hill

22.04
Pokhara

24.04
Kathmandu

Fixing research
permit at the
ACAP Office

Observations
of the tourism
situation in
Manang

Testing prototypes
and concepts

Trying experiences
– alone and with
other tourists

Meeting professors at
Tribhuvan University

Walking between
the villages in
Lower Mustang.
Registrering the
trails with Strava

Trekking the
Annapurna
Circuit

Informal interviews
of local residents,
tourists, and guides
along the trek

Bringing a guide
for translation
several days

Interviewing tourists,
local residents, and
other stakeholders in the
Lower Mustang villages

Iterating on
prototypes
and concepts

Interviewing four
employees at the
ACAP Office

Visiting the ACAP
Office and Department
of National Parks

Lower Mustang

Jomsom – our end point
of trekking in Mustang

Poon Hill Trek

Jagat – our
starting point
of Annapurna
Circuit

Pokhara

Map of our route. We traveled by bus from
Pokhara to Jagat and trekked from the
rainforest in Jagat to the snow-covered
mountains in Mustang. Afterward, we
stayed in Lower Mustang for two weeks,
before taking a jeep to do the Poon Hill
trek and then returning to Pokhara.

8.2 Case Study: Annapurna Circuit Trek

What?
During an eight-day trek, we did a case study on the Manang area and the Annapurna Circuit. We observed and conducted informal interviews throughout the trek.

Why?
Annapurna Circuit is a renowned route in Nepal that provides a good start to understand trekkers, local residents and how tourism works in such regions. Through our case study, we sought to identify the strengths and weaknesses of this route, and learn from them accordingly. Furthermore, since our project focuses on Annapurna Circuit trekkers, we also hiked alongside them to observe their behaviors and preferences to understand our user group better.

Where?
We followed the route from Besisahar to Muktinath as this is the most common route for Annapurna Circuit today.

Who?
Trekkers (solo, group of friends, families, bigger groups - and both with and without a guide), local residents (mostly with tourist businesses, but also some who did not work with tourism), and guides.

About the Annapurna Circuit Trek

The Annapurna Circuit Trek is among the most popular treks in Nepal. The trek was established in 1977 and has been increasingly popular since then. In recent years, around 30 000 trekkers finished the circuit every year (HeavenHimalaya, 2023). To begin the trek, trekkers can take a bus from either Kathmandu or Pokhara to Besisahar. Some start trekking from Besisahar, while others take a jeep to one of the villages further up in the valley. The main part of the trek passes through the region of Manang. Based on route choice and trekking pace, the trekker will reach the highest point of the trek, Throng La, about one or two weeks later. When walking down from Thorong La, the trekker will arrive in the region of Mustang. Previously, trekkers walked through the area of Mustang and further through other districts. However, as a road was constructed through Mustang and down to Pokhara in 2006, many trekkers now skip the last parts of the trek and take a jeep, bus, or flight from Muktinath or Jomsom in Mustang instead.

Key Findings: Trekkers

Information: Trekkers use guidebooks, online resources, and recommendations from other travelers to plan their treks. Digital maps are the preferred navigation tool, but some also carry physical maps and guidebooks. Facebook and WhatsApp groups are used to share experiences and seek recommendations.

Reason to go: People have various reasons for selecting the Annapurna Circuit trek. Some have had it on their bucket list for a long time, whereas others may learn about it while backpacking in Asia and decide to go.

Flexibility: Trekkers usually have a temporary itinerary for their trek, but they are typically open to change the route based on recommendations from other trekkers along the trail.

Western influence: Local residents adapt to Western tourists, for instance, by serving Western food and changing the guest houses according to Western standards. This has affected the culture and changed the way of life in Manang.

Trekking focus: Most trekkers focus on nature, views, and the trekking experience, with less emphasis on cultural experiences. Some may visit monasteries, but cultural experiences are not a primary focus for most.

Choice of trekking route: The most common trekking route ends in Muktinath, with Throng La, considered the last stage of the trail. Some trekkers also walk to Kagbeni and Jomsom. After the trek, many trekkers yearn for warmth and comfort and therefore choose to visit the hot springs in Tatopani or a nice hotel in Pokhara.

Lower Mustang knowledge: Few trekkers know much about Lower Mustang or the smaller villages beyond Muktinath.

Walking on roads: The construction of new roads, littering, and poor maintenance have changed the area and the movement pattern of trekkers. Many trekkers complain about walking on roads with dust and cars passing by.

Authenticity: Some trekkers mentioned that villages in other parts of Nepal felt more authentic and that this was something they appreciated and thus also missed during the Annapurna Circuit.

Interaction: There is a strong camaraderie among the trekkers, who often stop and talk with one another. Getting to know each other and even eating meals together is common. In contrast, there is generally less interaction between tourists and local residents.

Key Findings: Residents

Employment and income: Many rely on tourism as their primary source of income, while some also engage in farming and other activities. The local community heavily relies on tourism, which can be vulnerable to changes in the industry and external factors. For instance, the Covid 19 pandemic hit the local community very hard.

Competition: Local residents often compete for the attention of trekkers by standing outside their guest houses and offering their services. Because of competition, trekkers can stay for free in most guest houses as long as they eat dinner there. Food prices are regulated to avoid competition.

Resources: Bringing goods and supplies to the area requires significant resources, including vehicles, horses, and people.

Efforts: Many local residents put great effort into working in tourism, such as walking long distances and carrying heavy loads.

Distribution of tourists: The distribution of tourists in the area may be uneven at times, with some areas seeing more visitors than others.

Cultural changes: The villages are facing significant changes because of tourism and are therefore not as authentic as before.

New Guiding Rules

- The Nepalese government has suggested making it mandatory to bring a guide when doing Annapurna Circuit from the 1st of April 2023
- The new guiding rules have raised concerns among tourists, local residents, and even some guides.
- Many tourists posts on Facebook and WhatsApp groups for visitors to Nepal that they consider skipping trekking in the ACAP area due to the new rules. Some argue that hiring a guide will be too costly, while others prefer to trek individually.
- Many trekkers doubt that the new rules are meant to enhance safety and believe that it's more about making money. This has left them feeling skeptical about the authorities' intentions.
- Local people fear losing visitors as guides tend to select larger villages and hotels when planning treks.
- Some guides will get more work because of the new rules, while others will not, as there will be stricter requirements for who can be a guide.
- The government requires authorized guides to pay a fee, and they will receive a portion of the income generated from this fee. As a result, some have expressed concern that these new regulations are corrupt.
- ACAP has not received any formal information about the new rules, and they have, therefore, not been put into effect as of today (end of May).
- The rules are very unclear, and no one knows if they will be implemented.

8.3 Insights: Lower Mustang

After completing Annapurna Circuit, we spent over two weeks in Lower Mustang. During our stay, we visited the following villages: Kagbeni, Tiri, Jhong, Chonghur, Muktinath, Jharkot, Lubra. We chose the route based on which villages will be part of our hiking trail concept. All of the mentioned villages answer to the requirements for being included:
- Local residents in the village want to partake in the tourism industry.
- The village has qualities making it attractive to tourists.
- Well-maintained and nice pathways connect the village.

- The village's location makes a natural walking route with the other villages.

During our field trip, we walked between and stayed for a few nights in each village. This gave us the experience of how it could be to complete the hiking trail we are working on. Along the trail, we also conducted interviews, observations, and testing on tourists, local residents, and institutional stakeholders. We had a translator with us some days to get insights from local residents that did not speak English. The insight methods and findings from Lower Mustang will be presented in the following subchapters.

8.4 Insights: Adventure Tourists

Tourists are the project's user group, so their participation is crucial for the project's success. During our previous field trip to Nepal, we talked to all kinds of tourists to get a broad overview of tourism in the area. This time, we mainly talked to tourists in our target group, which is Annapurna Circuit Trekkers and other adventure tourists. We focused on discovering which experiences appeal to them, what they think about the hiking trail concept, and how we can adapt the solution to their needs.

During this field trip to Nepal, we used various methods to involve our target group. Quickly, we experienced how the insight methods were affected by the setting. Generally, the mountain tourism context provided a great setting for natural conversations and observations. However, this context also resulted in several situations where it was hard to do as planned. Structured and formal interviews were not doable along the trail, and on some occasions, the tourists were tired after walking long and not responsive to questions. It resulted in the use of different insight methods and approaches to get a comprehensive understanding.

Method 1: Self-Testing Experiences

As we belong to the target group, we used ourselves as a simple way to test many experiences. Even though we are just a selection of the target group and not external users, we found this approach helpful in gaining a quick and broad understanding of the tourist experience and the range of activities available in the area. Throughout our testing, we also envisioned how the experiences would appeal to different individuals. As experiences are subjective, we tried to stay objective and imagine how the experience could be for others.

We tried all the activities suggested in the experience library (page 130) and recommendations from local residents and tourists. We used multiple methods, including taking pictures, filming, discussing, and taking notes, to evaluate and document our experiences. For activities that involved walking, we used a workout tracking app called Strava to calculate distances. All the collected data can be used for the website and to convey the experiences to others. In addition, our testing serves as quality control for the activities. While it is up to each participant to create a positive experience, we have ensured that the conditions are good.

Method 2: Interviews

To better understand the interests and activities preferred by tourists, we conducted unstructured interviews of tourists in various settings, including along trails, at hotels, and at homestays. We adapted the questions to the setting of the interviews and informed some participants of our project's topic while keeping others unaware. The reason for keeping some people unaware was to observe their genuine responses to various activities. For instance, we mentioned that we stayed at homestays and dropped hints about activities like cooking classes and farming with local residents to observe their responses. Additionally, we asked open-ended questions about their experiences and requested recommendations for activities and accommodations.

Method 3: Testing Activities Together with Tourists

When discussing an experience, people may describe it differently than how they actually would have behaved. To better understand tourists' experiences in practice, we joined other tourists in activities like visiting monasteries and participating in a guided village tour. Testing experiences with other tourists allowed us to observe how they act and react during different activities. However, we are also aware that the tourists may be affected by the group setting and us being part of the experience.

Method 4: Getting Activity Reviews from Tourists

During interviews, we got informal reviews of activities from tourists. Additionally, we formalized this in some cases. When someone was going to do an activity we were interested in their experience of, we asked them to send us an update afterward. We added them on Facebook/WhatsApp so they could send us a description and pictures of the experience.

Method 5: Observations

We gathered information about tourists through natural observation. We observed their behavior, engagement levels, and interactions with local residents. We also took note of the popularity of activities based on the number of visitors participating in them.

Key Findings: Tourists

- Many tourists are positive toward the hiking trail concept and say they would use the information.
- Many tourists are interested in staying at homestays but struggle with finding information about them.
- Many tourists are interested in activities where they can take part in the everyday life of local residents and learn about local culture. Cooking classes are particularly interesting, and some are interested in farming with local residents.
- Some trails are so difficult or poorly maintained that we cannot recommend them.
- Some tourists look for places to eat lunch in the smaller villages but struggle to find them.
- Annapurna Trekkers usually trek directly from Muktinath to Jomsom, while some also go by Kagbeni.
- Lubra Community Homestay attracts many visitors to Lubra, compared to the other small villages.

Based on the insights from tourists, we better understood which activities should be included or not in the digital platform. It also helped us evaluate how we can appeal to those in the target group.
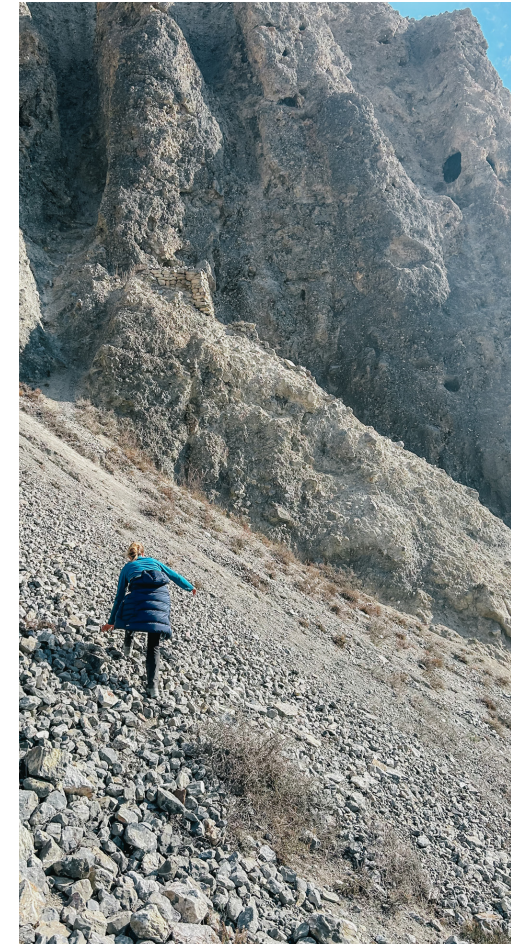
Excluded activities

We have removed certain activities from our experience library after testing them. For instance, Tiri Lake (as seen in the left image) was suggested by a resident, but it turned out to be a small pond with no nice seating areas rather than a lake. Similarly, the path leading to Jhong Cave (as seen in the right image) was deemed too steep and unstable, and therefore, we cannot recommend it to other tourists on the website.

8.5 Insights: Local Residents

Involving the local community in the design process has been a criteria from the very beginning of the project. The challenging part is how to do so. Before traveling to Nepal, we planned to make a prototype to show to the residents, conduct interviews and facilitate a workshop with local villagers. After arriving in Lower Mustang, we quickly realized that a workshop would not serve the predicted utility. Language barriers made it necessary to keep our insight methods simple. A workshop would likely create confusion, redirecting the focus from the goal. Instead, we got a lot of useful feedback from interviewing local residents and discussing the prototypes.

During our previous field trip to Lower Mustang, we collected a lot of general insight about tourism in the area. We talked to residents about increased tourism's positive and negative consequences and their experiences with the tourism industry. One thing that stood out was their desire for more visitors to stay at their homestays and visit their village. Returning to the same villages during this trip, we had a more narrow focus for the interviews. This time we wanted to suggest a possible solution to their problem and get their opinion. The interviews mainly focus on the hiking trail, the website, running a homestay, and potential activities in the villages.

Interviewing Homestay Owners

Before going to Lower Mustang, we created a prototype in Figma demonstrating the concept. As described in Chapter 7.4, we produced a high-fidelity prototype to clarify our project visions. This way, we could get precise feedback on their opinions on the project and specific suggestions for the website. By including the local community in the design process, they will hopefully feel more ownership of the end product.

We were particularly interested in reaching out to owners of homestays and guest houses. We would need their consent to put their homestay information on a website, and it was necessary to disclose whether they supported the idea of a hiking trail and a website. Knowing who runs a homestay in the villages is quite difficult. Some have a sign signalizing that they have a homestay, but most look like regular houses. Therefore, we depended on the local villagers' help to get an overview of families running a homestay or interested in opening one. In most cases, we walked around with a local who knew the villages' families and could translate when necessary.

Every meeting started with an introduction of us and the project, where we actively used the prototype to clarify what we were trying to make. The introduction would typically look something like this:

"Most tourists traveling to Lower Mustang mainly visit Muktinath and Kagbeni. We also want them to visit smaller villages like Jhong, Jharkot, Tiri, and Chonngur. Therefore, we want to establish a hiking route moving between these villages. Here, tourists can come and experience local culture and stay in homestays. To promote this, we want to create a website where you can see things to do and where to stay in the small villages. This is an example of what the website could look like *showing the prototype*. What do you think of this idea? Do you think it is a good or a bad idea?"

The meetings with homestay owners would usually start with general thoughts regarding tourism in the village and a discussion on whether they would like more tourists to visit. Then we would ask for specific feedback for the website. We tried to discover what local activities they would recommend to tourists, whether they were willing to provide activities, and if they wanted their homestay to be promoted on the website. Lastly, if the owner wanted to promote their homestay on the website, we got their contact information and took a photo of them in front of their homestay.

Key Findings: Residents

- The majority of the accommodation owners were interested in joining the website, except for one that was too busy with farming and one that was satisfied with the current number of visitors.
- Everyone we contacted was positive toward the project and thought it could help increase the number of visitors.
- Several local residents stated that their festivals are unique and should be included on the website.
- The selection of activities on the website results from suggestions from the local community.
- Some local residents find it hard to balance farming and running a homestay, but collaboration comes naturally to the villagers, and they help each other out when necessary. They were, therefore, confident that they could handle more visitors.

8.6 Insights: Institutional Stakeholders

Including institutional stakeholders is important to understand the bigger picture and the environment surrounding the project. We wanted to reach out to the local government institutions to get their opinion on the project, learn about previous projects in the area, and understand protocols that should be followed. We did additionally reach out to travel agencies and guides to understand what they look for when creating a travel itinerary.

Annapurna Concervation Area Project (ACAP)

ACAP is among the most influential institutions in Lower Mustang. They are responsible for the Annapurna Conservation Area, which Lower Mustang is a part of. Their primary task is to ensure that tourism develops sustainably and does not negatively affect nature or culture. To conduct research within the conservation area, you need a research permit accepted by the governmental Department for National Parks and Wildlife Conservation. We were granted this permission and were, therefore, able to meet with representatives from the ACAP head office.

During the meeting, we discussed our project and what role they could play in the potential realization of it.They were positive toward the project but disclaimed that they personally did not have too much knowledge of the specific area we were working on. We were therefore requested to deliver a list of suggestions for improvements that should take place in Lower Mustang. Their annual budget meeting was taking place right after our meeting, and they assured us that they would consider our recommendations during the meeting. Funding for signage and official marking of the trail was among our suggestions. Even though the suggestions are unlikely to be implemented in the final budget, the institution has at least been informed of our findings in Lower Mustang. The complete document with recommendations is attached in Appendix 1.

Local Government

To get a better insight into upcoming plans for tourism in the villages, we wanted to contact representatives from the local government. We tried to contact the head of the municipality, who is responsible for all villages in our scope. Unfortunately, we did not receive any response. Instead, we managed to book a meeting with the elected leader of a smaller area within the municipality and the predecessor of this position. Due to privacy and confidentiality, we will not describe the position or geographic area in further detail.

Travel Agencies and Guides

Travel agencies and guides are responsible for a big part of the existing trekking tourism in Lower Mustang. We wanted to find out what they consider when creating a travel itinerary and why they choose to visit one village over another. We visited travel agencies both as researchers and pretending to be tourists looking for recommendations in Lower Mustang. We also interviewed several guides, both independent and connected to an agency.

Key Findings: Stakeholders

- A village leader suggested that small villages already have many visitors, but the problem is that they do not stay. He thinks this could be due to a lack of signage and information. Tourists may not know that there are places to stay and eat in the villages.
- During each election period, the leader is granted a budget to fund a development project. This time, the budget is spent on building a road toward a local viewpoint. The local government believes the viewpoint can be popular among tourists and make the villages more attractive.
- Both leaders seemed positive toward our project and wished for increased tourism in the villages.
- Travel agencies often only suggest Muktinath and Kagbeni in Lower Mustang, neglecting the other villages. They usually have not heard of the villages in our scope.
- Travel agencies often recommend other places in Nepal for cultural travel.
- Guides tend to bring their groups to hotels with high standards to satisfy and comfort the group participants.
- Many guides adjust the itinerary based on the group and their desires.
- Many guides have unofficial deals with some accommodations and tend to return to the same places.

Key Takeaways – Chapter 8

- Planning for the Annapurna Circuit trek involves using guidebooks, online resources, and recommendations from other travelers. Our digital platform should be an online resource informing about an alternative itinerary through the Muktinath Valley, and could sometimes feel like getting recommendations from other travelers.

- Facebook and WhatsApp groups are commonly used to share experiences; and could be used to market our hiking trail concept.

- Annapurna Circuit trekkers mainly focus on nature and views, but some seek cultural and authentic experiences. This is hard to find along the typical route along the main road but could be provided in the villages of our scope.

- The local residents in Manang adapt to Western tourists, and they are very dependent on tourism. This development should be avoided in Lower Mustang.

- From April 1st, 2023, it is mandatory to hike with a guide, which has raised concerns among trekkers and local communities. However, as the rules are very unclear, and not even ACAP know if they truly are implemented, we have chosen not to focus on the rule change.

- By interviewing tourists, we discovered that they are positive toward the hiking trail concept and that they are particularly interested in the information about homestays. Additionally, many seek information about activities where they can take part in local everyday life, like cooking classes. Experiences in nature, like hikes and viewpoints, are also popular.

- The majority of homestay owners wanted to join the website, were positive towards the concept, and thought a website could increase the number of visitors.

- Local residents suggested many activities they wanted us to include on the website, and several were also interested in providing activities.

Final Concept

This chapter will cover the following topics:

- Concept specification: Mustang Village Trail – an introduction to the final concept, its components, and how they fit together

- Branding – the final brand guide, addressing the sender and receiver of the brand and showcasing the visual identity

- On-site experiences – a final overview of the experiences tourists are met with when they arrive in Lower Mustang, and a rationale for how these experiences will match the information the tourists get from the digital platform

- Sustainable business model – using the Business Model Canvas to address how the service will both benefit local residents and engage adventure tourists

- Digital platform – a final prototype of the digital platform, addressing which information will be included and how the user flows will be

- Testing – performing usability tests, color contrast tests, and sharing the prototype with local residents and travelers

- Further implementation and maintenance – discussing the following stages for the project

9.1 Concept Spesification:
Mustang Village Trail

At the start of this semester, we established a thesis objective to determine the project's purpose and goal. As a reminder, we will present it again:

> "Our thesis objective is to attract tourists to the secluded villages in a manner that benefits both the local communities and the incoming tourists."

As both of us completed a preparatory thesis about tourism in Lower Mustang, we already had a quite specific vision of how to reach the thesis objective. We had uncovered common pain points among villagers and had the hypothesis that an official hiking trail and a digital platform could help. This semester, we aimed to test the hypothesis and discover if it would benefit the tourists and the local community. During the field trip, we got solely positive feedback on the concept and decided to continue the development process.

Based on our findings, we have come up with a four-component solution that we decided to call "Mustang Village Trail." Though the name would indicate so, it is not merely a hiking trail. It is a brand, a website, and a visitor experience. The four components referred to are (1) a digital platform, (2) a brand profile, (3) a sustainable business model, and (4) a set of on-site experiences along the path.

As we started specifying the project's focus area, a series of questions connected to each part was introduced in Chapter 6.1. They represented issues we needed to address during the project. The questions will be answered in this chapter while describing each component.

The following section describes the individual importance of each solution component and how they work together to attract tourists to the villages. The website provides information, helping villagers promote their businesses and helping tourists make informed choices. The brand strategy aims to convince tourists to take the final leap and actually visit the villages, while the on-site experiences lead to a positive stay in Lower Mustang. The sustainable business model ensures that all solutions work together to create an overall positive experience for the visitors and the hosts and that the concept is feasible. The business model's sustainability refers to creating a plan that is both viable and beneficial for the local community while preserving the culture.


Tiri

Kagbeni

Jhong

Chonghur

Jharkot

Muktinath

Lubra

Digital Platform

What

The digital platform is a website available for PC and mobile, promoting Mustang Village Trail. It presents activities, attractions, and accommodations available along the trail.

Why

Tourists do not know about the villages along the trail and what attractions are available there. Very little information is found online, resulting in travelers passing straight by.
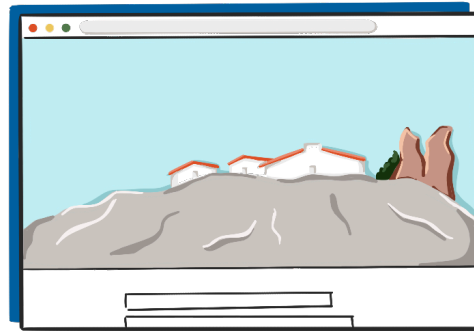
Branding

What

The branding strategy aims to reach adventure tourists looking for culture and nature experiences. Mixing high-quality photos, descriptive texts, and casual tips creates a playful but professional brand style.

Why

A clear and appealing brand increases the chance of reaching out to tourists in the first place and later convince them to give the hiking trail a visit.

On-Site Experiences

What

Everything that tourists are met with when arriving at the hiking trail is seen as an on-site experience. Hikes, activities, viewpoints, cultural attractions, homestays, and route suggestions are all present along the trail and are part of the user experience after arrival.

Why

The homestays, activities, and the trail contribute to the visitors' overall experience. When people visit the website, they form expectations that they hope will be met upon arrival. All activities and locations recommended on the site are therefore tested and approved by us, followed by a truthful description of the experience on the website.

Sustainable Business Model

What

The business model is a long-term plan determining how to create value for both the local community and the tourists. It defines how the digital platform, branding, and on-site experiences together will create a successful dynamic in the long run.

Why

The business model exists to ensure that the project is heading toward a feasible and viable state. The website has to conform to the on-site experiences, and the branding has to appeal to the website visitors. The business model is a way to organize all elements of the concept into one business.
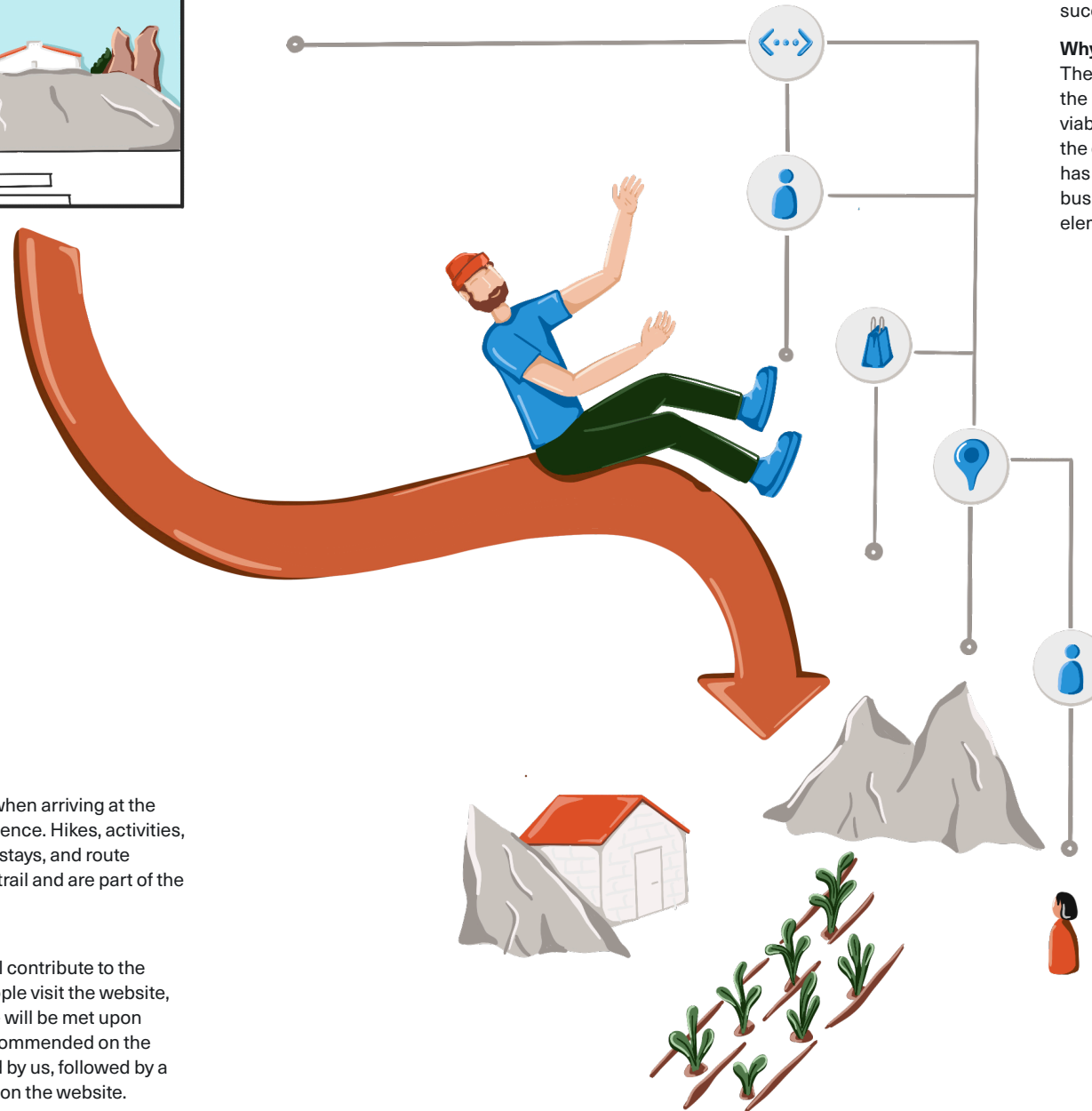
9.2 Branding

Since Nepal has numerous hiking trails, a clear brand is essential to stand out from the other trails and highlight what is unique about this particular trail. Creating a brand representing Mustang Village Trail has helped us define what value we can offer our target group and how to reach out to the customers. Using the StoryBrand 7 framework resulted in the initial brand story that helped us direct the focus toward the tourists and figure out what was needed for them to add the trail to their itinerary. By defining the brand early in the process, we have managed to keep our work consistently focused on highlighting the authenticity and uniqueness of the destination. The final brand will be presented through a brand style guide at the end of this section.

As stated in Chapter 6.1, our concept's brand should answer the following questions:
• Who is the sender?
• Who is the receiver?
• Who will recognize themselves in the brand?
• What is the identity (feelings, value, form)?

Who is the sender and the reciever?
We used the StoryBrand 7 Framework to create an initial brand story. From this, we decided that the sender should be someone that "together with local residents, has collected unique and authentic experiences for you." And "you," the receiver, are adventure trekkers seeking mastery and exploration and that want to explore unique and authentic culture and nature. This brand story helped us direct the focus to the tourists and what they needed to add Mustang Village Trail to their itinerary. By defining the brand early in the process, we have managed to keep our work consistently focused on highlighting the authenticity and uniqueness of the destination.

Who will recognize themselves in the brand?
Our goal is that both local residents and adventure tourists will recognize themselves in the brand. As tourists are the receiver and target group, it was most important to us that the brand appeals to them. This is crucial for making more tourists want to visit Lower Mustang. However, as the brand and website pres-

ent local experiences, we also wanted local residents to recognize themselves in how these experiences are conveyed. By making a visual identity based on the local culture, colors, and imagery, and by showing the prototype and brand to local residents, we ensured to make a brand that appeals to tourists without compromising on behalf of the local residents.
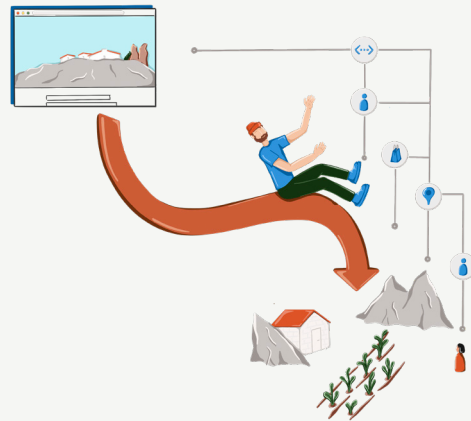
What is the identity?
A brand style guide has been created to describe the brand identity thoroughly. A clear and consistent brand style guide helps summarize the intention of the concept and how to communicate externally to the target group. It describes the target group, tone of voice, mission, vision, and style guidelines for the brand. Reading it is useful for anyone intending to work with or represent the brand. It could make the transition easier and less time-consuming for the new project owners this fall. The following pages will present the content from the brand style guide to give a better understanding of how we intend to appeal to tourists. The brand style guide in its full format is attached in Appendix 3.

Extract from Brand Guide

Mustang Village Trail

Among mountains and desert dunes in the shadows of the Himalayas, you find Mustang Village Trail – a hiking trail that gives you the best of nature and culture. The villages house a culture influenced by Tibet, India, and Nepal. Simultaneously, the spectacular nature calls for an adventure. It is the perfect location for a curious soul looking for a unique hike to add to their travel itinerary.

Mission

Our mission is to attract travelers to the secluded villages of Lower Mustang in a manner that benefits both locals and tourists. The local community should experience increased safety running a tourism business, and tourists should be able to explore local culture and unique nature along the village trail. By collecting and informing of all the special places and activities hiding in the corners of Lower Mustang, tourists can get a more unique experience when visiting Lower Mustang, and locals can get increased economic safety and development.

Vision

Mustang Village Trail should be a concept driven by helpfulness. Just like the cool friend recommending new music, Mustang Village Trail should be a place where you get honest travel advice – from one adventurer to another. It should be a safe place for locals to front their homestay. A place where open people connect with other open people.

Target Group

Adventure Tourists

The brand should first and foremost appeal to adventure tourists. To succeed in the mission to attract them to the villages, they should feel connected to the brand. The webpage's content should therefore be directed toward information desired by adventure tourists and trekkers.

Local residents

It is crucial that the local residents too can recognize themself and their culture in the brand. The service is designed on behalf of the local community and should reflect their values and wishes. The brand should represent the locals authentically and genuinely.

Tone of Voice

A playful tone of voice

Mustang Village Trail should appeal to adventurous trekkers valuing independence and exploration. Therefore, the tone of voice should not be too serious or commanding. Still, the website should be perceived as a reliable source for travelers seeking information. The result is a delightful symbiosis of *a playful expert voice*.

The defined tone of voice should take form through a combination of graphical elements and text. The text describing activities and homestays should be professional and include safety warnings when necessary. Simple and playful illustrations, as well as casual travel tips, are used to make the site more exciting and explorative.

Inside tip:)
Fun tip from a fellow adventurer

Inside tip:)
We are experts in terms of knowing the area

Primary Colors

#4D83B6   #C06646   #3A614E   #EDD068

Down to earth and close to culture

The primary colors are inspired by four of the five colors represented in the Tibetan prayer flags. Blue represents the sky, red the fire, green the water, and yellow the earth. In contrast to the bright prayer flags, the primary colors are all set to earthy tones. This is to match the nature and architecture in Lower Mustang, creating a brand in harmony with its environment.

Fonts

A playful yet professional voice

Libre Baskerville is a trustworthy but kind font – just in line with our desired tone of voice. Paired with the readable and versatile Open Sanse, any message can be delivered playful yet professional.

Aa

Header font
Libre Baskerville

AaBbCcDdEeFfGg
HhIiJjKkLlMmNn
OoPpQqRrSsTtUu
VvWwXxYyZz

Content text
Open Sans

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgH
hIiJjKkLlMmNnOoP
pQqRrSsTtUuVvWw
XxYyZz

9.3 On-Site Experiences

On-site experiences refer to what the tourists are met with when they start the trek. It could be the feel of the walking path, a cooking class, or a homestay. The total experience of the visit should be positive. As stated in Chapter 6.1, this component should answer the following questions:
- What kind of experiences are tourists interested in?
- Who can provide experiences, and what types?
- How can we ensure that on-site experiences match the digital information before going?
- What physical attributes should be part of the service?

What kind of experiences are tourists interested in?
As described in Chapter 3.6, hikers are a diverse group, and we wanted to include a wide range of activities to account for this. Based on our survey and the field trip, we discovered that many tourists are interested in experiences where they get close to the local culture, such as homestays and cooking classes. Additionally, they seek nature experiences and are interested in viewpoints and hikes. We tested activities during our field trip and updated the list of experiences accordingly (page 130). All experiences were categorized as "Activity," "Viewpoint," "Hike," or "Culture" based on feedback from tourists.

What types of experiences should be offered, and by whom?
After testing what activities appealed to tourists, we had to discover which residents wanted to offer them. In the small village communities where everyone knows each other, we were quickly put in contact with the residents interested in providing a tourist activity. Their contact information was collected together with information about the type of on-site experience they wanted to contribute with. Some wanted to front their homestay on the website, and others wanted to offer farm-related activities.

How can we ensure that the experiences on-site match the digital information before going?
The wording and photos presented on the website will affect the predetermined expectations of the tourists coming. Our job is to present them in a way that matches the true conditions. The expectations could be divided into three categories, each demanding individual measures to be met:
1. Expectations for the activities and accommodations,
2. Expectations for the trail,
3. Expectations for the trip in general.

With the insight collected on the field trip, we have tried to represent Mustang Village Trail as truthfully as possible. We aim to attract tourists who seek a peaceful destination that allows them to connect with the local residents and nature. The website tries to capture the essence of this experience. The following sections describe how we worked to adjust each expectation category:

Activities and accommodations – All activities have been tested to ensure they match the real-life experience. This let us measure distances and durations, making understanding the hikes' extent easier. Only the activities found worth recommending are included in the hiking trail concept.

Hiking trail – When approaching an official hiking trail, a well-marked and secure path to follow is necessary. To ensure this, we have tested different paths between the villages, selecting the ones in the best condition for the map. We have also created a sign that shows the entire route and suggested it to ACAP (see the following page). The sign is in the same style as other official ACAP signs and aims to provide information about the route and assure visitors that it is an actual route upon arrival in Lower Mustang. It has been sent to ACAP for their budget meeting.

General trip – The branding and tone of voice will partly determine the general expectations for the trip. This is why we have kept the tone down-to-earth on the website. We want the visitor to feel like that the recommendations on the website are given by a friend. It is also one of the reasons for the inside tips hiding in some of the pages. This will be explained in Chapter 9.5 about the digital platform.

What physical attributes should be part of the service?
As mentioned, we made a sign and submitted it to ACAP as one of our suggestions. Due to time limitations, we did not prioritize creating more physical signage. However, we recognize the importance of this and recommend it to be a focus in the continuation of the project. Currently, homestays are not easily visible in the villages. More tourists could discover the homestays if physical signage directed them, as many rely on signs to navigate villages and find accommodations and dining options.

To summarize – what will be the on-site experiences offered?
An overview of all experiences being part of the hiking trail concept is found on the next pages. They are divided into homestays, culture, viewpoints, hikes, and activities. These are also the categories tourists will find on the digital platform, which incorporates all experiences on the website.

Map Suggestion for ACAP

Suggestion for physical signage showing the Mustang Village Trail sent to ACAP. The design is based on the style of other official ACAP signs.

Overview of On-Site Experiences

Homestays

Tea House, Kagbeni

Pema Homestay, Jharkot

Viewpoint Guesthouse, Jhong

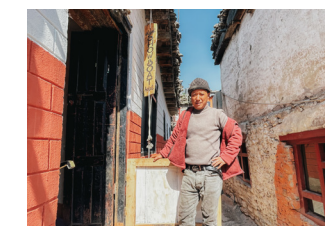Himali Hotel, Jharkot

Hotel Plaza, Jharkot

Community Homestay, Lubra

Kunga Homestay, Jharkot

Showboat, Kagbeni

Stay Mustang, Jhong

Dakpoche Homestay, Jhong

Tsering Mendok, Jharkot

Norbu Gurung, Jhong

Culture

Caves, Lubra

Kali Gandaki River, Kagbeni

Monastery, Jhong

Bon Monastery, Lubra

Monastery, Tiri

Monastery, Kagbeni

Tibetan School, Tiri

Activities

Cooking Class, Multiple

Ecological Farm, Chonghur

Self-Picking Apples, Multiple

Horse Riding, Multiple

Hikes

Farming with Locals, Multiple

Off-Road Biking, Multiple

Dakpoche, Jhong

Flag Hike, Jhong

Footprint of Rinpoche, Jharkot

Sunrise Hike, Lubra
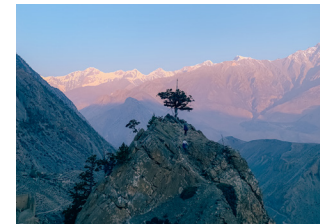
Viewpoints

Kagbeni Viewtower, Kagbeni

Golden Hill, Kagbeni

Picnic Spot, Multiple

Picnic Spot, Jharkot

9.4 Sustainable Business Model

Our business model is designed to *benefit* the local residents and *engage* adventure tourists. We have interviewed both groups to create a final version of the Business Model Canvas that reflects this aim.

As stated in Chapter 6.1, the business model in our final concept should answer the following questions:
• Who owns the service?
• What kind of service is offered?
• Who gains and loses from the service?
• What kind of risks are involved?
• How are the environment, society, and culture affected?
• How can risks be reduced/mitigated?

The Business Model Canvas addresses several of these questions, either directly or indirectly. We will also answer the questions here to clarify or address topics the canvas does not include, while the canvas is presented in the next pages.

Who owns the service?
The goal is to have the service owned by local residents, which we believe is crucial for the long-term viability of the service. There was an initial plan for who would take further responsibility for the project, but unexpected conditions have resulted in a need for a new project owner. It has, however, proved difficult to find someone with the necessary technical expertise, especially since many young people have moved away. Therefore, our initial thought of making a plan of how the local community can run the concept independently after the collaboration with SAMAJ ends has been put on ice. Some questions must be answered before a detailed plan can be made. We are currently discussing this with local residents and SAMAJ, and it will be a crucial topic in the project's future.

What kind of service is offered?
A homestay and experience service. Before traveling, tourists can access digital information about homestays and other experiences. Then, upon arrival, they can enjoy on-site experiences that correspond to the digital information. The service is explained in detail in the Business Model Canves.

Who gains and loses from the service?
As explained in the Business Model Canvas, the goal is for local residents and tourists to gain from the service. Local residents providing homestays or activities gain economically, while tourists can engage in authentic experiences. However, since only a minority of villagers are involved in the solution, the entire community will not benefit from the service as of now. As a suggestion for how to benefit more local residents, we have discussed imple-menting a community homestay solution (Future Scenario Workshop on page 132). They have already implemented this in Lubra, where all interested villagers participate and take turns hosting visitors. The community homestay benefits the entire community. However, due to the scope of our thesis, we decided not to develop this further. Additionally, we found that the success of the community homestay in Lubra relies on engaged local residents who introduced and managed the solution. If feasible, this could also be applied to other villages. As we decided not to introduce a community solution, the service will only benefit some individuals, to begin with. If the project succeeds, future project owners should consider ways to achieve a more evenly distribution of benefits.

What kind of risks are involved? And how can risks be reduced/avoided/mitigated?
One considerable potential risk is that no local residents take over the project and that it, therefore, will vanish. Similarly, there is also a risk that the digital platform does not prove to be the best way to make tourists visit the area. These two cases have the same consequence; our project leads to no more tourists visiting and, therefore, no changes. This aligns with our requirement from the Service Model Canvas on page 116, saying that we should "Create something that does not cause negative consequences: Either improve the status quo or do not diminish it."

Another more severe risk is that our service diminishes today's situation. The local environment cannot handle an enormous increase in visitors. This is not the goal, as we aim to offer more authentic experiences to a small group of visitors. However, even though this is our aim, we must also consider that the solution can have unexpected consequences. Suddenly, it is appealing to more tourists than expected, and many new visitors arrive. As stated, this can negatively affect the local culture and lifestyle, and the experiences can become too commercialized and authentic for the targeted tourists. This is not a likely scenario, but it should be considered.

Some key factors reduce the risk of mass tourism: There is a maximum limit on the number of possible overnight guests in the villages due to limited available beds. Additionally, only a specific group of tourists are interested in these experiences. For example, the low standards in several homestays are not in everyone's interest. Additionally, marketing should happen consciously and at a suitable scale. At last, in a worst-case scenario, the website can be removed if it causes unforeseen consequences.

Based on our understanding from two field trips, many conversations with tourists and local residents, and having thoroughly familiarized ourselves with the context and the situation, we consider the risk of diminishing the situation to be unlikely and not a realistic scenario. There is a more significant risk of nothing changing and local residents staying unhappy about the lack of visitors, which should take our attention and focus.

How are the environment, society, and culture affected?
In Chapter 7.3, we used the value mapping tool and a future scenario workshop to address these questions. As a result, we have formulated requirements that the solution must adhere to. If these requirements cannot be met, the concept should be reevaluated. The requirements are:
• The villages must not get too touristic, making the experiences inauthentic.
• The increase in the number of visitors must be small and controlled.
• Westernizing leading to over-commercialization and a loss of belonging among villagers, must be avoided.
• The economy must not rely too heavily on tourism, as this can make it vulnerable to unexpected changes and crises.
• The increased tourism activities must be possible to balance with farming so

that local residents do not get a much more stressful life.
• The solution must benefit as many local residents as possible, and the benefits must be fairly distributed.

Business Model Sucess
To determine the success of our business model or concept, we must consider whether it benefits local residents and tourists. Even a small increase in visitors can make a big difference. A slight increase means that local residents can earn more from tourism and share their culture with more people. It also means that tourists can have unique experiences they might miss if they only stick to the Annapurna Circuit. To summarize, the success of our project is not measured in a high number of visitors, but rather the contrary; it depends on carefully and sustainably increasing tourism.

Business Model Canvas
The final version of the Business Model Canvas is included on the following pages. We followed an iterative process and consulted with local residents to create it. The sustainable business model outlines how our digital platform, branding, and on-site experiences will work together to ensure long-term success. This helps us stay on track toward achieving a feasible and viable project.

Mustang Village Trail

Designed for local residents in Lower Mustang and visiting tourists

Key Partners

Who are the current and future key partners in the project?

Homestay owners
Local homestays are crucial stakeholders, providing accommodation and dining opportunities in the villages. This makes it possible for tourists to stay in the villages longer and makes adding the villages to their travel itinerary more appealing.

Activity providers
Local residents providing activities like cooking classes or horse riding make the villages more exciting for tourists. This is also a way to include local residents unable to open homestays, making the tourism benefits available to a bigger part of the local community.

ACAP
Lower Mustang is a part of the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA), making ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project) an automatic key partner. They make a yearly budget where they distribute funding to different tourism projects in ACA. A list of suggested improvements connected to Mustang Village Trail has therefore been delivered in conjunction with the budget meeting held in spring 2023.

Key Activities

What key activities are crucial for delivering the value propositions?

Website
A well-designed website is an efficient way to present information to a large audience. A digital representation of the hiking trail is also a way to reach tourists in the planning phase of their travel. Therefore, website design and development is one of the key activities connecting local residents and adventure tourists.

Branding
A website makes no difference if unvisited. Branding and marketing of the trail and website are crucial to establishing a functioning information channel for tourists.

On-site information
On site-information like signage informing of the path strengthens creates an impression of an official and well-implemented hiking path. This is important to align the expectations of the trail with the real-life experience.

Accommodation and activities
Attractive accommodation and activity offers will be a decisive factor for tourists considering going. Identifying what activities are desirable to adventure tourists and what activities the local residents would like to offer is an essential key activity. Obtaining an overview of everyone offering homestays and whether they want to be featured on the website is also crucial to the service.

Key Resources

What resources does our value proposition require?

Local workforce
To provide valuable experiences to adventure tourists, the service will require desirable activities and accommodations provided by the local residents. This will require their workforce, time, and effort.

Physical attractions
Natural environments like caves, and cultural monuments like temples, could become objects of interest for bypassing tourists. Physical places like this are resources with a limited capacity that demand measures to stay undamaged.

Financial resources
The website requires financial resources to be developed, hosted on a custom domain, and further supervised and managed.

Co-creation
For creating unique and memorable experiences, it is crucial that both tourists and locals are engaged and participate in co-creating such experiences.

Value Propositions

What value are we providing the customers, and what problem are we trying to solve?

Problems
The initial problem for the residents is that tourists do not engage with tourist providers in the secluded villages, making it difficult to manage viable tourism businesses there. However, a higher success rate is observed in some neighboring villages, where many make a living from hotels or other tourist-related services.

Most visitors do not know about the villages and the existing possibilities, as they mainly receive information about established tourist destinations. This is fine for most travelers because they get what they came for. Yet, this is a missed opportunity adventure tourists. Their main problem is the lack of information about the small villages. Few sources list the villages as potential destinations, and even fewer inform about the possibilities of staying there and exploring the local culture.

Value creation
The residents offer value to the adventure tourists through authentic village experiences. In return, the tourists generate revenue by staying and eating in homestays and engaging in local activities.

Customer Relationships

What kind of relationship are we aiming to establish with each of our customer segments?

Tourists
The tourists feel safe choosing the Mustang Village Trail for a unique experience. The website provides reliable information that creates precise expectations for the trip.

Local residents
The local residents trust the Mustang Village Trail to reach the target group on their behalf. If they disagree with the information presented on the website, they feel safe to contact the website administrator to correct the errors.

Channels

What communication channels will be used to reach the customers?

Website
The website will be functional for both phone and mobile to reach users at home and on the move. This will be the general information channel to inform of the service.

Email/phone
Based on what the homestay provider prefers, communication about accommodations bookings will happen by email or phone.

Marketing
Facebook and WhatsApp groups are common sources of information for travelers in the area. These channels will be used to inform tourists about the new hiking route.

Customer Segments

Who is the target group?

The service is designed for both tourists and local residents. The purpose of the service is to increase tourism in selected villages in Lower Mustang, as the local residents in the villages request. They wish to create a viable and profitable environment for tourism providers based in the villages. To accomplish this, tourists must be considered as the target user group of the service. For the business model, the local residents will be defined as providers, while tourists are defined as customers.

Cost Structure

What are the most important costs in our business model? What activities and resources are most expensive?

Website costs
Development, hosting, and website maintenance are the service's most urgent and demanding costs. This will require some investment and depends on SAMAJ's economic support for the website's development part. Further funding for website maintenance and hosting depends on the local community's interest and commitment to take over the responsibility for the website.

Revenue Streams

What are the customers willing to pay for?

Accommodation, meals, and activities
The tourists are willing to pay for accommodation, meals, and activities. They pay directly to the provider arranging the relevant service.

9.5 Digital Platform

The digital platform unifies the brand strategy and on-site experiences, and presents the Mustang Village Trail experience directly to the user group. For the delivery of the Master's thesis, it is presented as a high-fidelity Figma prototype. The development of the website will take place over the summer, resulting in a functioning website in time for the upcoming tourism season in Lower Mustang this fall. The plan for further work extending the lifespan of this thesis will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.7. Further Implementation and Maintenance.

As described in Chapter 6.1, our project's digital platform should address the following questions:
• Who owns it?
• Who manages it?
• What kind of information is included?
• How is the user flows?
• What kind of transaction happens?

The question of ownership and management still needs to be clarified, as described in Chapter 9.4. As we will address this later in the report, we will only discuss the other questions in more detail here.

What kind of information is included?
The primary information tourists wish for related to Lower Mustang is what you can do and where you can stay. The digital platform, therefore, assembles this information. There is one main page for things to do, one for places to stay, one of all the villages, and one with a map showcasing all the accommodations and attractions. Additionally, there is a home page introducing the trail and the area. This means that we have excluded one of the main topics from the initial website hierarchy, namely practical information. Tourists preferred to find this from other sources and rather include the most important practical information where it seemed natural on the other pages. In general, one main finding from the staged participant observation (page 76) was that many travel sites about Lower Mustang were too detailed and that the participants preferred more concise information. This was also confirmed in conversations with tourists during our field trip. Therefore, we decided to keep it concise. A figure on page 194 shows the final website hierarchy.

The information on the website comes in several formats, like photos, a video, illustrations, maps, and text.

As seen in the staged participant observation in Chapter 4.2, all participants focused most on the photos of Lower Mustang. The images on the website are, therefore, essential. All the images are taken either by us, our travel companions, or by local residents. All have confirmed that we can use their photos. Therefore, there are no issues related to copyright when the website is published. All images have been edited in the same style to give a consistent impression. We have also made a video and an interactive map to give information alternatively to text and photos.

The text is based on information from conversations and descriptions by residents and tourists. We have kept it concise to avoid being boring to read. We have also tried to convey the information engagingly to give a true feeling of the site and the experiences without explaining too much. To make it more personal, we have included some local tips for several homestays.

We will delve into more of the details of each page and its information starting from page 196.
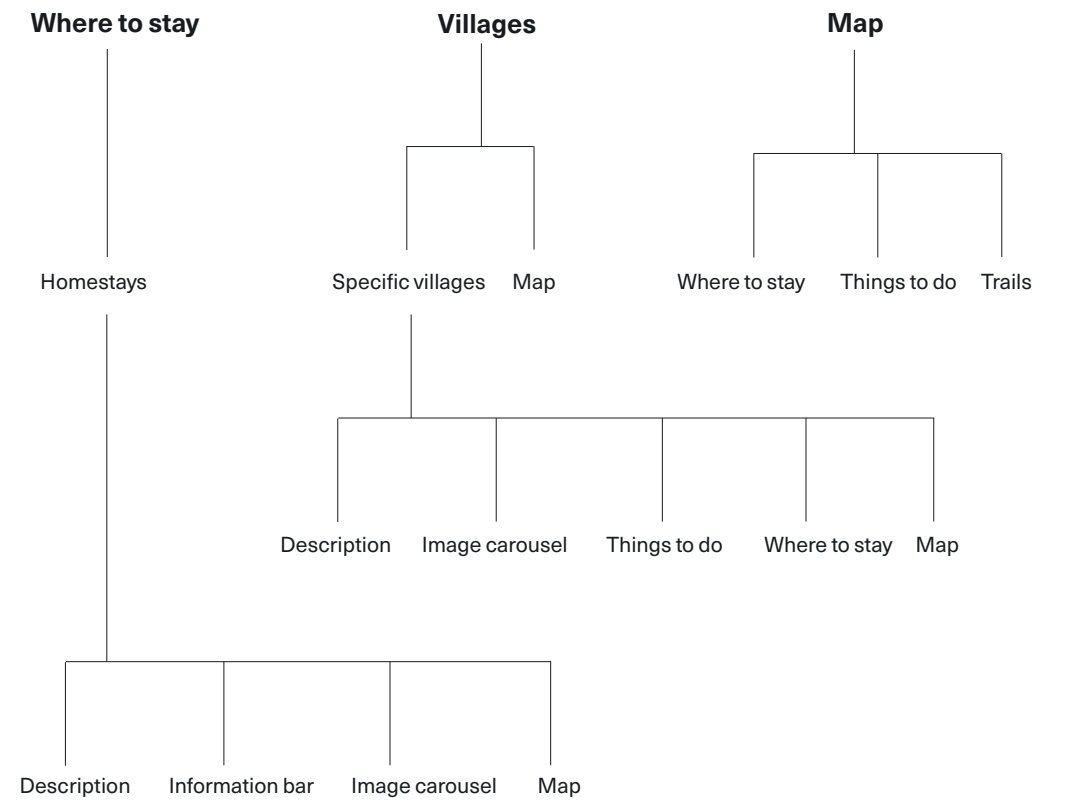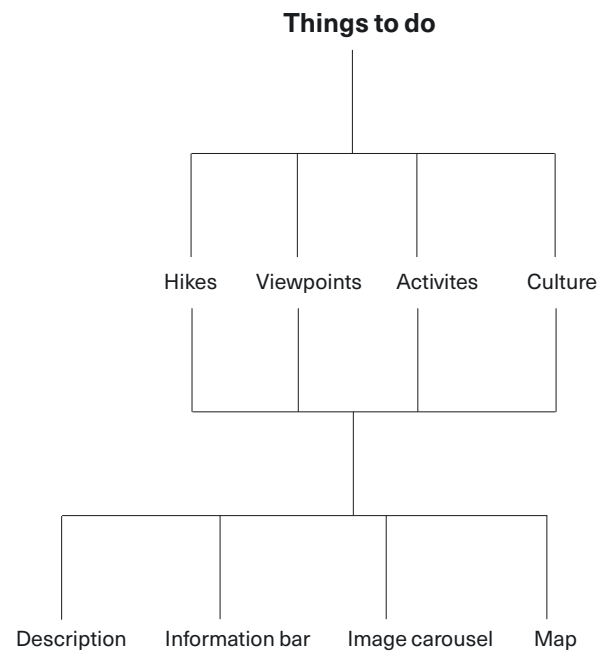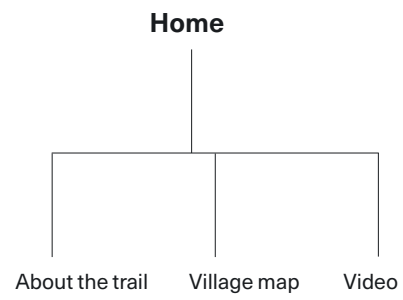
How is the user flows?
The user flows (see page 208) are simple, and you can easily navigate the different pages using the menu bar. On the "where to stay", "things to do", and "villages "pages, there are "cards" that you can click on to get to a page with more information about the accommodation, activity, or village. There are two reasons why the user flows are so simple. Firstly, we wanted the page to be clear and understandable to users. Secondly, we had to keep the development costs low due to SAMAJ's limited budget for developing the page. For this reason, all pages have a similar layout, and complicated interactions requiring comprehensive backend development are ruled out.

What kind of transactions happens?
No transactions will happen through the website. There are several reasons for this. A booking solution is somewhat premature, as the concept is not sufficiently tested and developed. Additionally, there is a lack of technical expertise among local residents, and the homestay owners prefer communication by Email or phone. Not least, it is much easier and cheaper to develop a page where no transactions will happen.

Page Structure

Home

About the trail   Village map   Video

Things to do

Hikes   Viewpoints   Activites   Culture

Description   Information bar   Image carousel   Map

Where to stay

Homestays

Description   Information bar   Image carousel   Map

Villages

Specific villages   Map

Description   Image carousel   Things to do   Where to stay   Map

Map

Where to stay   Things to do   Trails

The Website

The goal of the website is to appeal to tourists looking for experiences off the beaten path. It has also been important to design a website that the local communities approve of and are satisfied with. The prototype has therefore been created through an iterative process, with changes made based on user tests with local residents and tourists. Since the main function of the website is to deliver information about Mustang Village Trail, the interior pages are directed toward answering common questions when considering a travel destination. As shown on the previous page, the page structure consists of the following main pages:
- Home
- Things to do
- Where to stay
- Villages
- Map

Each page on the website will briefly be described and visualized here, but it is best experienced and described by using the Figma prototype. Do so by clicking **here**.

Disclaimers:
- Some image carousels and information boxes are placeholders.
- The filter function does not work for both "village" and "activity" simultaneously, as this is too complicated in Figma.
- It is a placeholder image of the video, as the video file is too big for Figma. We have

made the video and it will be used on the final website.
- On the map page, the intention is to have an integrated map view of Google Maps on the real website, but due to limitations in Figma, we had to settle with a photo.

The digital platform is designed for two separate formats: desktop and phone. The elements on the website are designed after a mobile-first approach. The first version of the website layout was therefore designed for mobile. This is because it is easier to scale up elements designed for mobile to a desktop layout than the opposite. After landing on a scalable layout base, we shifted our focus to the desktop design. The prototype made for the desktop is high-fidelity, meaning that it looks and acts almost like a real website. Most interactions are reacting as expected on a functioning website (except from the limitations mentioned in the disclaimers). The reason for focusing on the desktop design was because it was a more practical testing format when discussing the prototype with residents in Mustang. That being said, we have also made the mobile design, but only with example photos and information that can illustrate the end product to the developers. It will therefore end up as a functioning website on mobile too, even though the prototype works best on a computer.

Home Page

The home page is many people's first meeting with the experience and must give a good first impression. This page must convey the key aspects of the experience clearly and appealingly. As we learned from the Grunt test, the message you want to deliver should be clear within five seconds of visiting the website (Miller, 2017).

The home page has four sections: First, an image with the website name – Mustang Village Trail. The image shows mountains, a village, and the colors of Mustang, and by this, trying to gather the essence of the hiking tail. The next section is playful illustrations and short descriptions of the four main experiences in Lower Mustang – activities, culture, hikes, and viewpoints. Underneath is a call to action button leading to the "things to do" page. The following sections are an interactive map and a video.

The interactive map shows the trail and the villages to give a better geographical understanding of the area. A map is also a feature that gives associations to hiking and traveling, quickly communicating the website's theme to the visitor. The map is made interactive to give an explorative element to the website but is primarily made to inform. On hover, the village gets colored. By clicking on one of the villages, the visitor is taken to the information page for the selected village.

The video is meant to provide an experience of the Mustang Village trail. As mentioned in Chapter 3.5., videos are more effective than text and photos in evoking emotional responses from tourists (Lwin & Phau, 2013). The rest of the website showcases photos and text, so we chose to use the homepage to display a video of Lower Mustang to give visitors an idea of what it is like to be in the area.
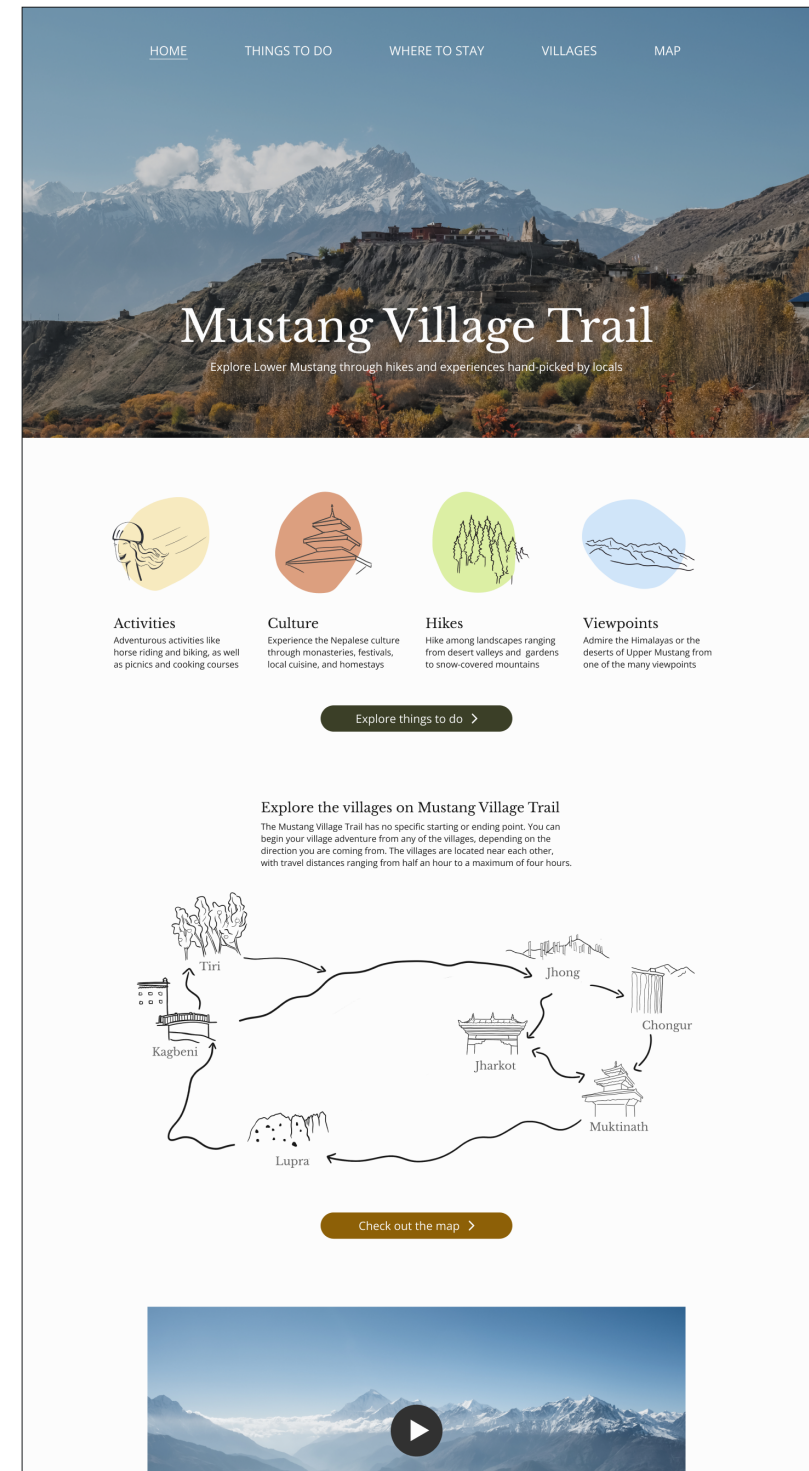
Things to Do

When observing how people research for an upcoming trip, one of the findings was that most participants searched for "things to do" + "location name" to find information. It is probably because most people want to find a travel experience that matches their interests and purpose. Creating an independent interior page for things to do, therefore, creating an independent interior page seemed like a logical choice. On this page, visitors can explore things to do in the area surrounding the trail. The experiences are filtered by the categories "Activity," "Culture," "Hike," and "Viewpoint," in addition to the possibility of filtering by the different villages. The filter function is created to make finding experiences that match your preferences easy. Every experience is presented on a "card" showing a photo of the experience as well as relevant key information, like location, category, cultural cautions, and duration.

If any of the experience cards seem interesting, you can click on them for more information. You will then be sent to an individual page describing the experience in more detail. Here, visitors can view additional photos of their chosen activity, hike, viewpoint, or cultural facility, along with a summary of important details and a written description of the experience. To better understand the location of the experience, a map is provided for visual reference. A description of how to get there and the coordinates of the experience are also presented here. We wanted to make the coordinates visible and easily accessible so the user can paste them into an independent navigation app for directions. Though it is not the most user-friendly way to give directions, we chose to do it this way because of technical limitations. This will be further explained in the section for the Map page on page 206.
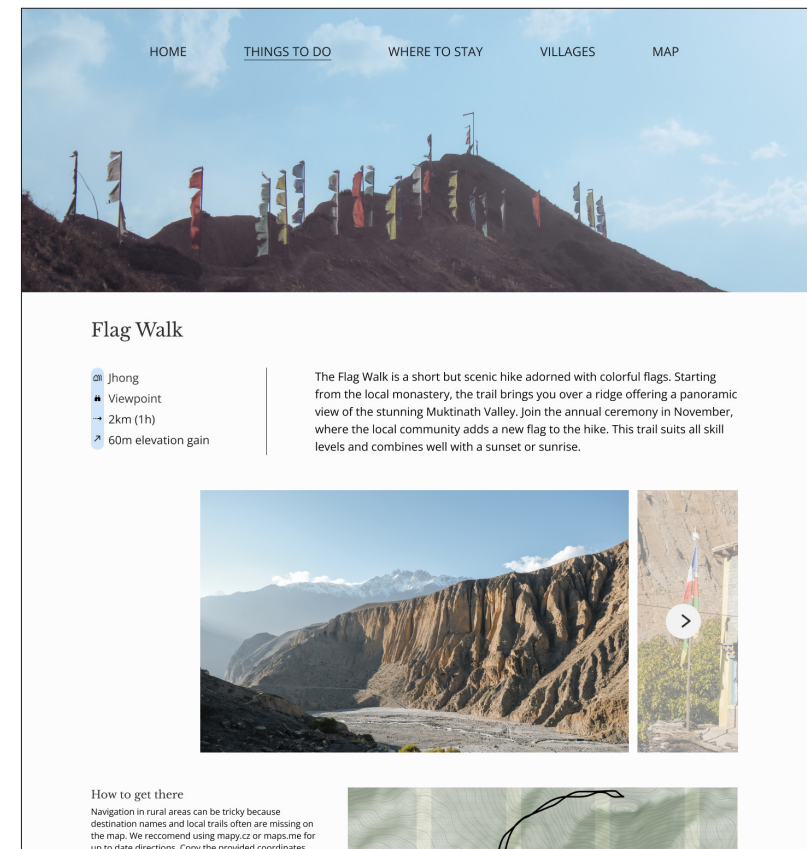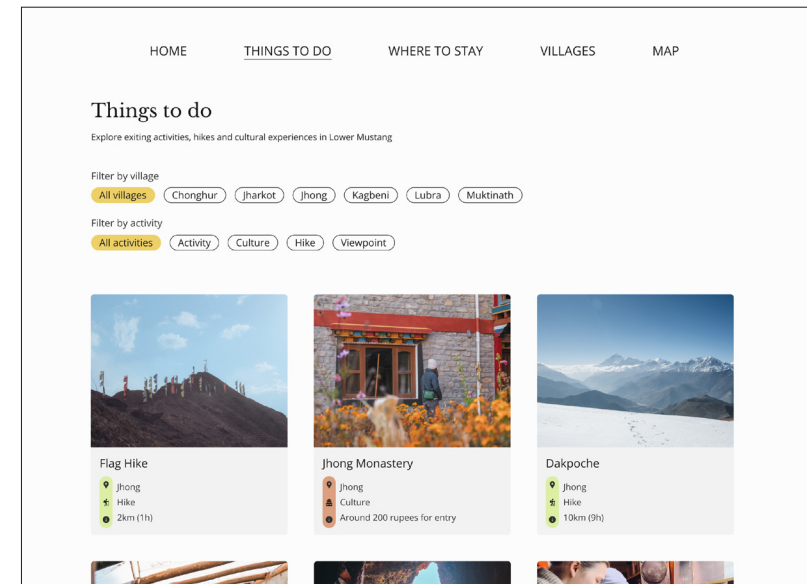
Where to Stay

The "Where to stay" page is the main linkage point between the local residents and the tourists. Here, visitors can browse accommodation possibilities, filtered by the different villages. Just like under "Things to do," they are presented on "cards" with essential information and a photo. This is to create a consistent and understandable design and to make the front-end development less time-consuming.

We wanted the website to feel authentic without mentioning this explicitly, based on our findings about authenticity in website design in Chapter 3.5. Therefore, we rather wanted to do other measures to make it feel authentic. The results from the exercise in Chapter 4.5, aiming to discover what people perceive as authentic, showed that the presence of people in a photo made it seem significantly more authentic. Additionally, the survey from Chapter 4.6. showed that authentic culture was reported as the most important factor when choosing a place to stay. Therefore, most homes are presented with a photo of the owner in front of their house to support the feeling of authentic accommodations where you get close to the local culture. Contact information for the homestays and what village they belong to is also presented on this page.

Every accommodation has a dedicated page with a short descriptive text of the home. To emphasize the down-to-earth brand voice, some of the accommodation pages show an inside tip from us, who have stayed there ourselves. The tips are mostly small things, like a recommendation for a special spot or encouragement to ask for a local tale. The accommodation pages also display a map showing their location.
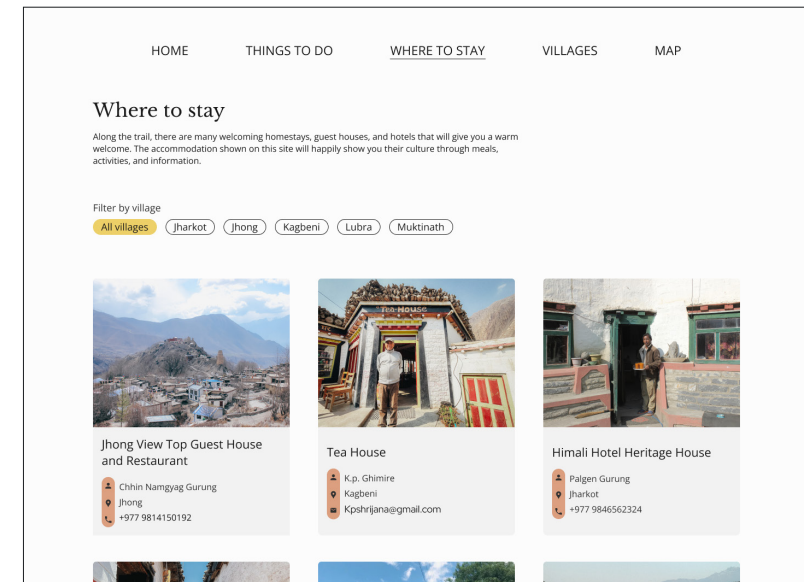
Villages

The Mustang Village Trail consists of seven villages, each with unique characteristics. The village page displays a card for each village with an image and a sentence explaining the village, along with a map showing each village's location in relation to the others. Once again, the cards are similar to the ones on the other pages for consistency and ease the development. The map is the same as the one found on the home page. In combination with the village cards, you get an even better understanding of the walking route as a whole.

By clicking on a specific village, visitors can access a short description and an image carousel to glimpse the village's atmosphere. Our insight has shown that people usually fancy less text and more images during travel research. The text is, therefore, very brief and is meant to build upon an overall impression of the village rather than factual information. The page further lists the various activities and accommodations available in that particular village. These village pages are helpful for visitors who want to compare and contrast the villages and choose which ones best fit their interests.
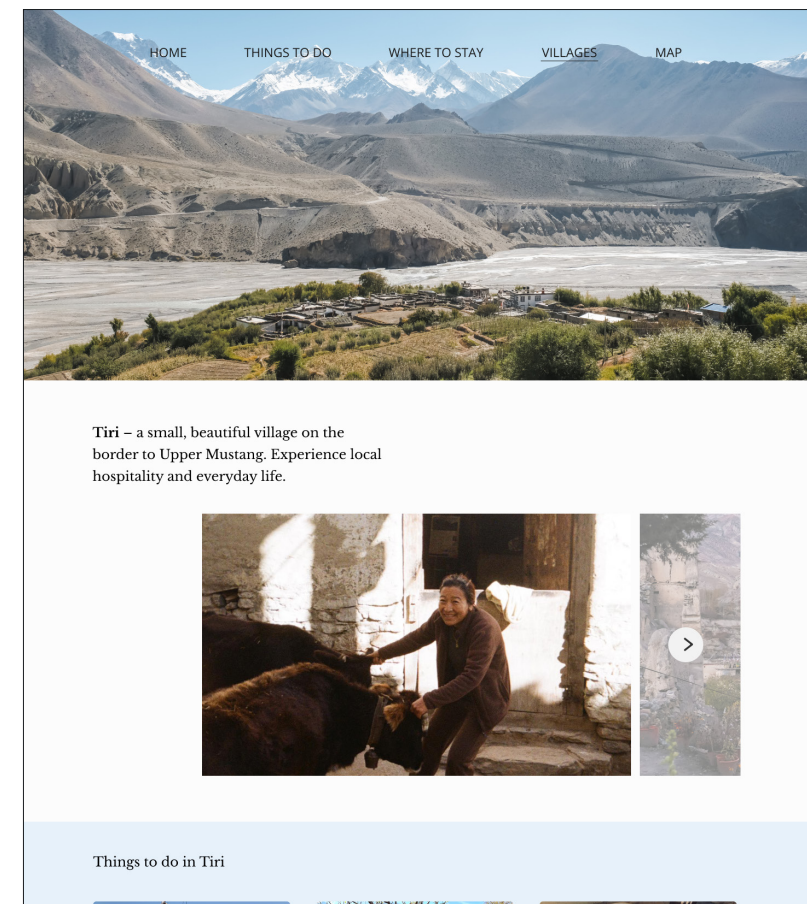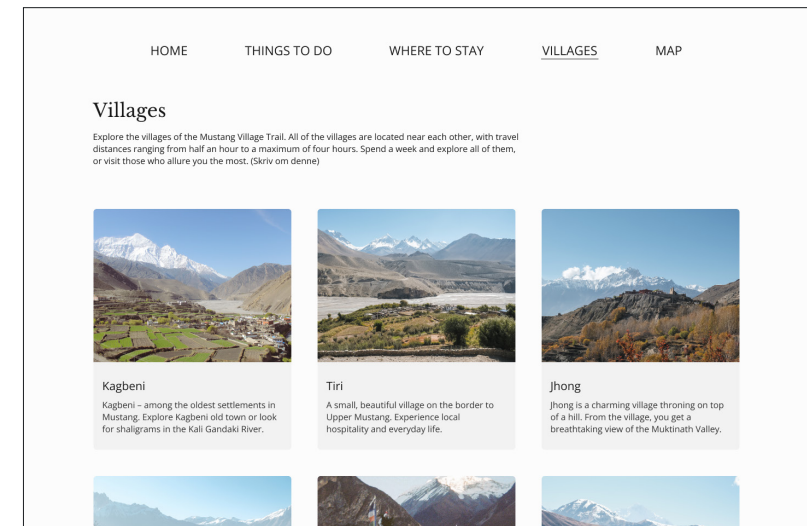
Map

The map page gives the visitors another level of information about the experiences showcased on the "things to do" page. Here tourists can see the exact location of the experiences and how far away they are. Since building a map application from scratch is very complicated, and the navigation app market is already saturated, we decided to use an existing service.

There are many challenges connected to using an existing service. None of them have all the necessary functions to create a custom map in Lower Mustang with all the information needed. Eventually, we decided that the map matching most of the crucial functions we needed was Google's service, "Google My Maps." It is a map feature within Google Maps where you can create your own travel plan. It also has a function where you can retrieve the code belonging to the app and easily embed it on

an independent website. Using this service, we have created a custom map where all experiences connected to the "Mustang Village Trail" have been pinned and categorized the same way as on the website. The path of the village trail has also been marked on the map to make it easier for visitors to plan their travel itinerary.

A limitation of the Google Maps service is that it lacks location data for most local trails and many destinations in Lower Mustang. It is, therefore, impossible to get directions for local trails with the service. Luckily, there are other navigation apps with a more detailed detection of trails that can complement the lacking feature. We have, from experience, seen that the navigation apps mapy.cz and maps.me are well-functioning and much-used alternatives in Lower Mustang. Therefore we have created a three-step guide explaining how to use the coordinates provided on our website to get valid directions.

User Flows

Home

Mustang Village Trail

Activities
Adventurous activities like horse riding and biking, as well as picnics and cooking courses

Culture
Explore Nepalese culture through temples, festivals, local cuisine, and homestays

Hikes
Hike through landscape... from d... to sno... moun...

Explore things to do

Explore the villages
The Mustang Village Trail has no specific starting or ending point. You can begin your village adventure from any of the villages, depending on the direction you are coming from. The villages are located near each other, with travel distances ranging from half an hour to a maximum of four hours.

Chongur   Jharkot
Lupra   Muktinath
Kagbeni   Tiri

Navigation bar

X

Home
Things to do
Where to stay
Villages
Map

Navigation to all interior pages

Horizontal scrolling to see all categories

Mustan...

Activities
Adventurous activities like hor... riding and biking... well as picnics an... cooking courses

Exp...

Vertical scrolling on all pages

Map

Mustang Village Trail
Together with locals, we have collected unknown and unique spots for tourists wanting to move outside of the usual tourist trail....

Villages
Explore the villages of the Mustang Village Trail. The villages are located near each other, with travel distances ranging from half an hour to four hours. Spend a week and explore all of them, or visit those who allure you the most.

Tiri
A small, beautiful village on the border with Upper Mustang. Experience local everyday life.

Jhong
A charming village throning on top of a hill, with a

Interior pages

Things to do
Explore all the exiting activities, hikes and cultural experiences along the Mustang Village Trail.

Filter by village
All villages Chonghur Jharkot Jhong

Filter by activity
All activities Hikes Culture Viewpoints

Jhong Monastery
📍 Jhong 👤 Culture 📍 (28.79918, 83.79296)

Cards on interior pages leading to information pages

Where to stay
Along the trail, there are many welcoming homestays, guest houses, and hotels that will give you a warm welcome. The accommodation shown on this site will happily show you their culture through meals, activities, and information.

Filter by village
All villages Chonghur Jharkot Jhong

Homestay
👤 Name 📍 Village 📞 Contact

Information pages

Footprint Hike
📍 Jharkot
🥾 Hike
→ 4km (1h)
↗ 120m elevation gain
📍 (28.79918, 83.79296)

A legend says that the footprint of the god Guru Rinpoche can be found in the small cabin, making the cabin a popular location for meditation. The cabin is just a 2 km walk from Jharkot and passes through lush, green fields, allowing for glimpses of local farming and stunning views of nearby villages and steep mountains. Several popular picnic spots are also located along the path.

Back button from all information pages to the interior page

X

Home
Things to do
Where to stay
Villages
Map

Footprint
📍 Jharkot
🥾 Hike
→ 4km (1h)
↗ 120m elevat...
📍 (28.79918, 8...

A legend says tha... Rinpoche can be... the cabin a popu... cabin is just a 2 k... through lush, gre... local farming and... and steep mount... are also located a...

The navigation bar is available from all pages

Tea House

Booking by email
👤 K.p. Ghimire
📍 Kagbeni
✉ Kpshrijana@gmail.com

Tea House is one of the few homestays located in Kagbeni. Here you can get amazing local dishes for a very reasonable price and a look over Kagbeni from the roof of the homestay. The family running the Tea House uses profits from the homestay to fund school attendance for kids coming to the local boarding school. Staying there is therefore not only a good experience in itself but supports a good cause as well.

Inside tip:)

The chart shows the main user flows. Other interactions can be experienced by testing the Figma prototype.

Experience Journey

The experience journey shows a visual description of how the service is experienced before, during, and after embarking on the Mustang Village Trail.

Before the trip

A curious traveler wants to visit Nepal and decides to do some research on where to go
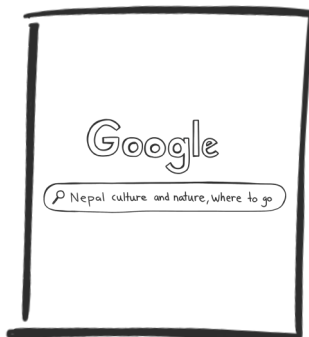
As she enjoys experiences close to nature and is fascinated by foreign cultures, she uses affiliated keywords when researching

Her research leads her to the website of "Mustang Village Trail"

She is intrigued by the many activities and inspired by the video on the website

She realizes that the trail is easily combined with the Annapurna Circuit and adds the village trail to her travel itinerary

During the travel

In Nepal, she treks the Annapurna Circuit

After passing the tough Thorong La, she is tired when arriving in Muktinath, where she spends the night to get some rest
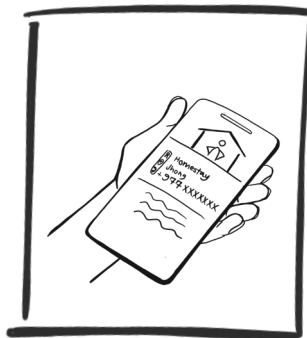
Through the website, she contacts a homestay in one of the smaller villages, where she can check in the next day

After the trip

During the next few days, she uses the website to explore hikes, attractions, and viewpoints far away from big crowds and car roads

The highlight of the trip is when one of the homestay owners shows her how to make local dal bhat

After the trip, she thinks back on the journey as a special experience and on the local connections she got in Lower Mustang as unforgettable

9.6 Testing

Testing has been an important activity during the development of the prototype. Changes have iteratively been made to the website based on user feedback throughout the design process. As we started finalizing the prototype, we performed tests in an increasingly systemized manner. The testing procedure included the Grunt Test, usability testing, color contrast test, sharing the prototype in an Annapurna Circuit Facebook group with a feedback form, and sending the prototype to local residents for their thoughts on the prototype. All testing methods presented above will be presented in this section, along with the key findings from the test.

Additionally, we have sent the prototype for review by three experienced designers. This includes our two co-supervisors and a Polish Senior Designer with a strong connection to Lower Mustang, whom we met during our first field trip To Nepal. He has followed the project from the start and has good insights into the ethical and social aspects of tourism in Lower Mustang.

The Grunt Test

What?
As previously discussed (page 112), the Grunt Test is a short user test for websites, controlling if the website message is adequately clear. For the test to be passed, the visitor has to be able to answer the three following questions within five seconds of entering the page:
1. What do you offer?
2. How will it make my life better?
3. What do I need to do to buy it?

Why?
We wanted to see if the brand of the website is clear enough for users to understand the purpose of the digital platform.

Who?
5 people of different ages with no or little knowledge about the concept.

How?
We let the participant explore the prototype for 5 seconds, then closed the desktop before asking them the three questions in the Grunt Test description.

Key Findings: The Grunt Test

What do you offer?
Most participants stated that they would expect to find information about where to stay and things to do in the relevant area because the header was among the few things they managed to process in five seconds. This corresponds well with the website's main function, which is to deliver information about Mustang Village Trail.

How will it make my life better?
The participants assumed the website could improve their life by easing their planning process and maybe improving their upcoming travel to Nepal.

What do I need to buy it?
The participants were unsure but assumed there might be some way to book a place to stay or activity.

We were already aware that there are few call-to-actions on the website. As we address in Chapter 1.1, it is not the right time for a digital booking system. It would not be the most user-friendly solution as many homestay owners would not know how to manage the bookings. Instead, we have to use this feedback as a reminder to explain interaction possibilities like booking and navigation clearly, making it seem as simple as possible.

Usability Testing

What?
Usability test of the prototype, controlling if the content and interactions are understandable and if the website feels easy and desirable to use.

Why?
By performing a usability test, we can discover if any common misunderstandings occur when using the service. By observing people use the webpage, we can discover what interactions are intuitive and not. This type of testing provides valuable arguments for what changes should be made to the website.

Who?
7 people of different ages with no or little knowledge about the concept.

How?
We conducted usability tests by asking participants to explore the website while thinking aloud. We asked to imagine that they were considering traveling to Nepal and came across an online information page. We aimed to observe how they navigated the website with minimal guidance by providing limited information and asking few questions.

Key Findings: Usability Testing

Overall Impression
Overall, the participants found it easy to navigate the website and locate the information they needed. The concept was clear, and they formed a positive impression of the area. However, most users wished for more context when first entering the website. As a response, we added the sentence "Explore Lower Mustang through hikes and experiences hand-picked by locals" underneath the title.

Information
One participant suggested that the information pages should be presented more visually instead of in text paragraphs. The remaining individuals expressed satisfaction with the current length of the text.

Inside Tip
All participants commented that they appreciated the personal touch of the inside tip. This may indicate that exploring ways to personalize the website would be beneficial.

Villages
Based on our research workshop, we initially planned to remove the "Villages" section from our webpage due to the belief that users found pages with too much information overwhelming and were uninterested in specific village details. Additionally, few people were interested in knowing more about specific villages at this stage of their travel research. However, during usability testing, we were surprised to discover that users found the village information useful and wanted more context. Consequently, we created specific village pages, which later received positive participant feedback. One participant even compared the experience to opening a book and feeling the true essence of the village come through.

Map
Some participants were confused by the three-step guide on the "Map" page. They thought it seemed easy to perform and believed that dividing it into three short steps prevented it from seeming overwhelming. However, there was some confusion regarding the content of the three steps. The title saying download led some participants to believe they had to download the locations. It was also reported that the content text of each step should not increase in length to make the steps clearer. Based on this, we have to make the titles of each step more informative and the content text more concise to improve the map guide.

Sharing with Travelers

What?
Sharing the prototype and a feedback form in the Facebook group called "Annapurna Circuit Trek" and with acquaintances who have traveled in the area.

Why?
Our project targets Annapurna Circuit Trekkers and adventure tourists, and we were seeking their feedback on the finalized prototype. Unfortunately, they are not easily accessible for physical user tests, so we had to obtain digital feedback instead.

Mustang Village Trail

Website feedback

We would love to get your opinion on our beta website.
If there's anything we could do better or something you especially enjoyed, tell us here!

Key Findings: Travelers

Mobile Design
One visitor stated that the website's content was excellent but that there should be more focus on the mobile design. Since the shared link leads to the desktop format, this is a factor we were aware of. A mobile version of the website is designed and will be developed for the real website. Still, it is a nice reminder that trekkers on the move usually seek information by phone and not on a desktop.

Seasonality
One suggested including information on what to do during the different seasons, like festivals, natural attractions, etc. Local residents also suggested including festivals on the website, and we are planning to include this but are waiting for images and information.

Bibliography
One suggested adding links and a bibliography for people who want to know more about the destination before deciding to go. This could be a way to provide information without making the website too detailed.

Visual Signage
One suggested a visual information system should be applied in villages and trails to complement the website. We also recommend this for the project's continuation, but as mentioned, this has been down-prioritized because of time constraints.

Sharing with Residents

What?
Sharing the prototype with local residents and asking about their thoughts.

Why?
For the local residents to feel increased ownership of the service, including them in the design process and listening to their opinions is important. We wanted each homestay owner to ensure they feel well represented on the website. The local community knows the area best and can also tell if we have shared wrongful information on the page. Their feedback is, therefore, very valuable for the credibility and authenticity of the website.

Who?
Homestay owners and other residents involved in the project.

How?
We shared the prototype with local residents in two rounds. First, we sent each homestay owner their respective accommodation page for their consent and suggestions for changes. When their changes were made to the prototype, the full website was sent to the local residents that have been most actively included in the project for overall feedback.

Key Findings: Residents

Accommodation Pages
The feedback for the accommodation pages resulted in minor changes to the information texts and photos, but the owners were generally satisfied with how their accommodation was displayed.

General Feedback
The local residents we contacted were generally satisfied with the outcome and believe that it could be really helpful as a tool to inform tourists.

Mobile Design
A local resident stated that we should consider development for IOS and Android. As previously discussed, a mobile version of the website will be developed for the live website.

Color Contrast Test

What?
Color contrast testing controls whether the contrast between two colors follows the universal standard.

Why?
The test is an important measure to ensure a universal website design.

How?
We performed the test using a plugin available in Figma (Color contrast made by Aleksandra Walczak). The color contrasts have been controlled for all color combinations used for text on the website. The test is performed by adding the colors to the controller and receiving feedback for the level of contrast certification. AAA is the highest level of certification and should always be aimed for, but the requirement standard used in Norway is a minimum AA level, which is lower than AAA (uutilsynet, n.d.).

Key Findings: Contrasts

AAA Contrast Level
All color combinations used for text on the website passed the AAA level of contrast and are therefore considered sufficiently readable.
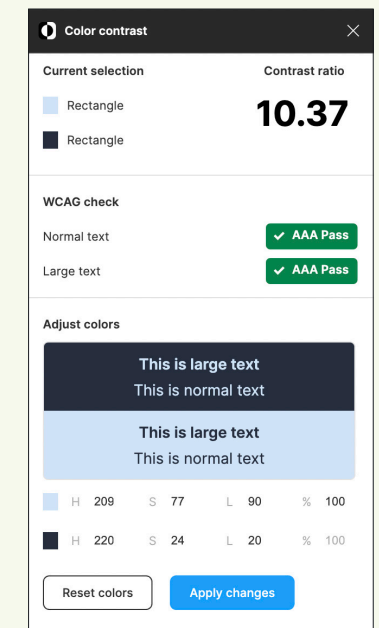
9.7 Further Implementation and Maintenance

The actual implementation of the website is crucial to test the effect of the concept since internet presence is the most efficient way to reach upcoming travelers. Since the monsoon pauses tourism in Lower Mustang during summer, the next tourism wave will reach Lower Mustang during fall this year. The website should therefore be up and running within October when the tourism numbers pick up. For this task, we have engaged Pango, a student-driven consultancy firm with designers and developers from NTNU. After meeting with them for a brief of the website, they provided a project estimate, suggesting an implementation plan for the website. They will implement the Front-end and Back-end of the website. This includes a functioning backend system connected to a domain name and web hosting of the site. The website's design will correspond to the Figma prototype we created during this semester. A time estimate and budget have been delivered to SAMAJ, who has agreed to fund the implementation of the website, making the launch realistic. The delivery date is set to the 1st of August, so it will be finished before the next tourist season.

Next semester, two students from Industrial Design at NTNU will continue with the project. An important task for them will be to test the effect of the website launch. Has it actually helped the local community to reach more tourists? If so, is this a positive or a negative change? Based on the development after launching the website, a new direction should be set for the project.

For the website to function as a long-term solution, someone from the local community needs to take responsibility for the maintenance on a long-term basis. SAMAJ will eventually move on to new projects, and updates to the website must be made by someone else. One possibility is to create a user-friendly interface where changes can be made to the website without any development skills. Another solution is to assign the task to a developer and update the business model and strategy to consider the maintenance of the site as an ongoing cost. These possible strategies depend on the effect of the website launch. If the website has little or no effect at all, there is little use in recruiting someone to maintain it. The fate of the website has to be decided after the concept launch effects are revealed and should be further discussed and interpreted by the descendants of the project.

Important questions that should be investigated based on the outcome of the website launch:
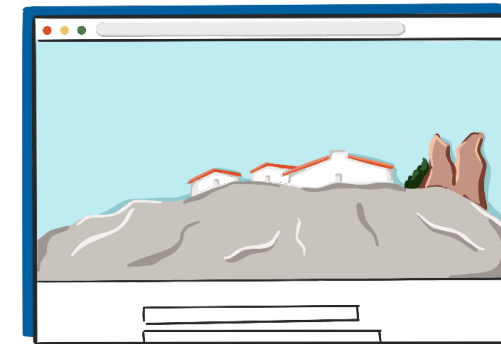
Launch of Website

Increased Tourism

Why are the tourists coming?
Is it connected to the website?
Is the change positive?
Should the project be continued?

Unchanged Tourism

Nave people noticed the website?
Why are people not coming?
What can be done differently?

Reduced Tourism

Why are the numbers decreasing?
Is it connected to the website?
What do the tourists wish for?
What do the locals wish for?

Closing Remarks

The final chapter will reflect on relevant topics and then make a short conclusion on how the project answers the objective. The reflection points are as follows:

- Designing in a different cultural context
- Sustainability
- Economic distribution
- A digital solution in a rural setting
- Stakeholders involved
- Challenges in conducting user insights
- Language barriers
- Promoting authenticity
- Changing the movement pattern of Annapurna Circuit trekkers
- The new guding rules
- Balancing farming and tourism
- Mismatch in stakeholders' expectations

10.1 Reflections

Designing in a Different Cultural Context

Doing a design project in Nepal differs significantly from doing a design project in Norway. As Norwegians, we are used to efficient and digital systems designed for an impatient population. However, bureaucratic and digital tasks are more time-consuming and manual in Nepal. For instance, we spent two days getting a research permit on the field trip because we had to physically travel to an office located in a different city to retrieve the permit. After many unexpected encounters, we learned that dedicating sufficient time to address them leads to successful outcomes.

Culturally it was also some things to familiarize ourselves with. However, as this was our second semester working on a project in the area, we experienced that many things were more manageable during the second field trip. We knew more people, better understood the culture and geography, and were generally better prepared. Getting familiar with a new culture takes time, and we especially got a lot out of working with local experts and stakeholders and questioning assumptions and biases (as the third and fourth principles of Akpem's book (2020), described on page 49.) However, even though we are starting to get quite a good cultural understanding of Lower Mustang, we will always be outsiders of the culture. We must be aware of this when introducing a new concept and digital platform.

When doing an educational design project in another country, it is essential to consider the potential pitfalls. As page 49 describes, one common issue is 'Design Tourism,' where the project's goal is solely focused on the personal and academic growth of the students, resulting in a concept that lacks practical implementation potential. To avoid this, we kept Lower Mustang's cultural context in mind and consulted with the local community and representatives from SAMAJ to ensure our project's viability and feasibility. We also had meetings with the consultant company Pango to make a plan for developing the website. As two students will continue the project this fall, we have planned a meeting with them to ensure good knowledge transfer for the project. Hopefully, this will equip them with good prerequisites to carry the project forward in a good direction.

Ethics

Throughout the process, we have thoroughly discussed the ethical aspects of our project, particularly whether it is justifiable to work towards increased tourism. Our Manang observations (page 152) have shown that tourism can negatively affect local communities by making them over-dependent on tourism and changing the culture to adapt to Western tourists. However, Chapter 2.2 highlights how tourism benefits economies, promotes intercultural exchange and plays a crucial role in heritage preservation. If tourism is managed carefully, it can have positive effects on the local community. In Lower Mustang, the residents have expressed a desire for more tourism and believe they can manage it. However, their focus on the benefits of tourism may impact their willingness to welcome more visitors, as they may overlook the drawbacks.

A prerequisite for launching the website and hiking trail has been that it is possible to terminate the project if there are negative impacts. However, there are two challenges with this. First, there is no obvious owner of the project as of now, and therefore might not be someone who takes responsibility for following this up. Secondly, the consequences may not be noticeable in the short term but might happen gradually over time. Although we have not delved into how to assess this, we recognize its significance.

Sustainability

Can tourism to Lower Mustang increase in a sustainable way? Tourism causes negative consequences like waste generation and resource consumption. Another Master's thesis from NTNU, connected to SAMAJ, explores the issues of waste management and resource use in Lower Mustang. It is crucial to consider these topics when planning for tourism growth. We believe a gradual and careful increase in tourism is necessary to avoid damaging the natural environment. It is therefore important to emphasize that our website does not aim to draw as many tourists as possible to the small villages. Our website seeks to attract a niche group of tourists interested in experiencing village life and encourages them to explore Lower Mustang authentically. This form of tourism has several sustainability advantages, including using local food instead of importing Western produce. It also helps to distribute economic revenue more evenly among the community.

Tourism can potentially contribute to more sustainable development in the area. Currently, Lower Mustang faces challenges like migration and job shortages. By creating jobs and making the area more attractive, tourism can contribute to economic and social sustainability.

Economic Distribution

We aimed to create a solution that benefits the local community as a whole. However, being realistic, it will potentially just benefit the local residents promoted on the website in the first place. This includes a few residents in each village. Chapter 7.3 discusses a community homestay solution to benefit the community, but we concluded that this solution relies on engaged local residents for management. Future project owners could, however, examine and facilitate this.

Economic benefits to the local communities are critical to social and economic sustainability in Lower Mustang. In the book called Sustainability in Mountain Tourism, the authors East, Luger, and Inmann (1998, p. 9) write: "Without material benefit, local mountain communities are degraded by the resource depletion the tourism helps to cause, and increased poverty and outmigration are the inevitable results." As the local communities have to use more resources when welcoming tourists, they have to actually benefit from it. When tourism increase, the benefits must increase accordingly so the local residents do not go in the red.

A Digital Solution in a Rural Setting

Several issues are related to introducing a digital solution in a rural setting. We choose to do so anyhow based on engagement from the local communities, SAMAJ, and a demand for digital information among tourists. Some things went better than expected, but we also met some challenges.

The digital platform is primarily intended to assist tourists during the planning phase, but it should also be functional while traveling. Despite concerns about connectivity in Lower Mustang, we have observed that both cell and wifi connections are gradually improving. During our last field trip, we had only a few hours of connection loss in total. Several articles have claimed that phone use when hiking is very common, corresponding to observations we made during the field trip. Most tourists use their phones for navigation, downloading different navigation apps to lead the way. Therefore, it seems feasible and realistic that tourists could use the website for information during the trip.

The technical expertise among local residents is quite low. During our field trip, almost all homestay owners said they prefer bookings by phone and that a digi-

tal booking solution would be demanding. To adapt to this, we have only included the contact information for the homestay owners on the website. This is a challenge because it goes at the expense of the website's usability. Most travelers are used to user-friendly booking sites where a reservation is just a few clicks away. Some travelers could perceive the current booking system as too old-fashioned and slow. Still, an old-fashioned way of booking accommodation matches our goal of facilitating an authentic travel experience. Developing a platform with booking functionality would also be more complicated, expensive, and difficult to manage. Even if a booking feature could increase the usability from the tourists' point of view, it would have decreased from the local residents' point of view. It would therefore be premature to implement this type of functionality. With a focus on feasibility, displaying the contact information seemed like the most reasonable solution.

The lack of technical expertise among local residents has proved to be a challenge when discussing further maintenance and responsibility for the website. Some of those interested do not have the technical competence, while those with the competence have moved abroad and have other time-consuming jobs. One of the weak-

nesses of our project is that we have not managed to find someone specific that can take responsibility for the website. What happens if someone wants to remove their homestay from the website or if someone new wishes to sign up? If someone from the local community were responsible for the website content, it would be easier to guarantee updated information on the site. The current plan ensures one year of funding from the website domain. After that, the life of the website depends on engagement from the local community. Luckily, the project does not end with us. There is still time to further investigate the issue when the work continues this fall. As a temporary solution, our supervisor has agreed to be an available contact person if any villagers want to withdraw from the project. She can then give further notice to the developers, that can modify the website content. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, several ways exist to solve the problem, either by designing an interface for content management or finding someone with the technical competence to maintain the site.

Our work has mostly focused on digital information rather than physical information. This prioritization was made because of time constraints and because local residents and SAMAJ have suggested the digital platform for several years. Still,

physical information would also be beneficial and should be incorporated alongside the digital platform. Signage is crucial for Annapurna Circuit trekkers when deciding where to stay and eat, as many do not plan this before they arrive in a village. We have suggested a sign for ACAP (see page 182), but its approval and implementation remain uncertain. This interaction with ACAP is just a starting point, and physical signage should receive more attention in the project's continuation.

We encountered a challenge with Lower Mustang being a rural area when wanting to embed maps in our solution, as described on page 206. Google Maps is commonly used for this on other platforms. However, as Lower Mustang is very remote, most of the area's trails and roads are not marked on Google Maps. Therefore, we explored the possibility of embedding Mapy.cz or Maps.me, as most trekkers use these for navigation along Annapurna Circuit. We discovered that those maps do not have the possibility of saving locations for sharing. Therefore, we used Google Maps, which has this possibility, and then included coordinates that can be copied and used for navigation in the other apps. While this may not be an efficient or user-friendly solution, we found it to be the best option, as developing a new map service

for the website would be too time-consuming and expensive, and none of the other options were better than Google Maps.

Stakeholders Involved

During our Design 9 project, we familiarized ourselves with Lower Mustang and the stakeholders involved in tourism in the area. Due to the remote location and rural culture, relatively few stakeholders are involved in the tourism industry there – tourists, local residents, guides, travel agencies, ACAP, and the local municipality. During our first field trip, we interviewed tourists, residents, guides, and travel agencies. Because of our permit type, we could not talk to ACAP or the local municipality. Therefore, we ensured the correct research permit for this field trip. When in Lower Mustang, we visited two ACAP offices but did not obtain much information about the tourism situation, as the office personnel was only responsible for signing permits. However, when visiting the ACAP head office in Pokhara, we had a helpful discussion with four employees. Although they did not have specific knowledge about Lower Mustang, they were eager to learn about our findings. We also contacted representatives from the local municipality, but they were busy or did not reply. It would be helpful to talk to them better to understand the plans for tourism in Lower

Mustang. However, we got an understanding of the tourism work on a village level by talking to two village leaders.

The selection of local residents involved also had its limitations. As tourists traveling around, most people we naturally met and talked to were somehow engaged in tourism. To reach out to a broader audience, we got a local translator. This helped us reach out to people we would never have met if the translator did not bring us there and translated the conversation. We also experienced that many found it easier to express their opinions to another local. Still, it was a tendency that most of them were very positive towards tourism. This can be because most local residents are positive, but it can also be that we did not get to talk to the ones who are not or that some felt uncomfortable talking about it in person. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, we created a survey to gather the opinions and feelings of even more local residents towards tourism and our concept. One of the local residents most involved in our project was supposed to translate and share the survey with local residents. However, because of connectivity issues in Upper Mustang, he had problems with doing so. The survey is made and ready to be shared when he returns home.

Challenges in Conducting User Insights

While conducting user insights in Lower Mustang, we encountered some unexpected obstacles. Lower Mustang is a mountainous region, so our target group of trekkers is always on the move. This made testing and interviewing difficult at times. One specific case was during two days in Muktinath, where we planned to interview tourists and let them test the digital platform. However, all trekkers passing by were tired and heading towards their hotel to get some rest. This was because they had done Thorong La on the same day. We completed the same route a couple of weeks before and could easily understand why the trekkers were not ready to be interviewed right after arrival. Since Muktinath is the only place in Lower Mustang with many trekkers, we lost the chance to interview and test our prototype with as many tourists as we wanted. If we knew that this would happen, we would instead show the prototypes during the Annapurna Circuit trek, but then we only focused on trekking and informal interviews, as we planned to do the testing in Lower Mustang.

Due to the rural and remote context, some tasks were also simplified from our original plan. For instance, we planned a

workshop for local residents but decided to stick to interviews and show prototypes to avoid confusion. Except that, as this was our second field trip to the area, we had quite realistic expectations for conducting insights. We focused on the benefits of natural conversations and responses from interviews along the trails instead of trying to do formal and structured interviews that are not ideal for the context.

Language Barriers

When doing research in a different country with a foreign language, information can be lost in translation. Many local residents do not speak much English, and we often simplified information to fit their vocabulary. Both parties can misinterpret questions and answers, and errors in the collected insight are expected. We brought a translator when interviewing people with limited English competence to minimize this tendency. Still, information could be lost when the opinions of the interviewees are translated to us. Another risk is that people feel less comfortable talking in English and to strangers. Many could feel it is difficult to open up to us and share their genuine opinions. The survey explained under "Stakeholders Involved" could contribute to getting more honest views from the local residents.

Promoting Authenticity

Our concept aims to offer tourists authentic experiences, which many adventure tourists desire. To achieve this, we have explored what authenticity means to tourists and whether they truly prefer authentic experiences. As expected, we found that authenticity is very subjective. Some tourists may want certain experiences to be authentic, but not necessarily the toilets or beds. We also encountered differences in the definition of authenticity between local residents and tourists. Some homestay owners complained about tourists claiming to want authentic experiences but then complaining about low housing standards. On the other hand, some tourists may desire authentic food and activities without necessarily associating standards with authenticity. However, based on our research, we have found that the difference in definitions between tourists and locals is not a major concern. Our survey (see page 84) and field trip indicate that most tourists who engage in this type of travel place little importance on standards.

During the authentic experiences workshop, participants agreed that natural experiences not explicitly designed for tourists felt more authentic. This led to a conversation about whether promoting local village experiences would sacrifice authenticity. To truly experience authentic culture, many tourists venture off the typical tourist path and avoid overcrowded tourist attractions. Promoting Lower Mustang as an authentic cultural destination may contradict this idea and make it seem like a typical tourist spot. The concern arises whether increasing tourism in the villages to promote authentic experiences would eventually lead to commercialization and loss of authenticity. However, we believe that the increase in tourism resulting from the website will be so small that this will not be a problem, and we have tried to focus on giving a not-commercialized feeling.

Changing the Movement Pattern of Annapurna Circuit Trekkers

Our solution targets Annapurna Circuit trekkers. They are in Lower Mustang anyway, and it would not require a lot of resources to make them stay a couple of days longer. However, many trekkers prefer to head straight to Pokhara or Tatopani for comfort and warmth after completing the challenging Thorong La section of the circuit. Still, some trekkers were interested in spending a few days in Lower Mustang after Thorong La. This could be enough trekkers to increase tourism slightly and with control. Additionally, all trekkers do not have to follow the entire Mustang Village Trail for it to succeed. If some stay a night or two in one village, and others stay a couple of nights in another village, this will, in total, make a difference for the local residents.

The New Guiding Rules

As page 153 describes, the new guiding rules require Annapurna Circuit trekkers to bring a guide. The Nepalese government proposed these rules at the end of March and planned to implement them on April 1st 2023. However, ACAP, the organization responsible for permits in the area, did not receive any information from the government and therefore did not enforce the rules. As a result, many stakeholders in Manang and Mustang, including tourists planning to do the Annapurna Circuit, are confused about the rules. ACAP and others believe that if the rules are implemented, it will only be for a short time.

Since the rule changes were suggested long after we started our project, and it seems like they will not be implemented, we chose not to focus on the rules for our solution. Our project targets individual trekkers, and if the rules suddenly were to be implemented, the solution should focus more on targeting guides and travel agencies in the future.

Balancing Farming and Tourism

Several local residents have stated that they struggle to balance farming and tourism, and this pain point has been addressed several times throughout the report. Still, we decided not to try solving this with our solution. Since our understanding of the everyday lives of local residents is brief, we did not find ourselves in the right position to consider how they should structure their work lives. Currently, they collaborate by sending tourists to neighboring hotels if they are too busy. They expressed little complaint about this arrangement. Though, this could be an issue causing increasing stress following increased visitation numbers. It should, therefore, be considered again if the number of visitors eventually increases.

Mismatch in Stakeholders' Expectations

During the project's development, a dissonance occurred between the expectations of the local residents, us, and SAMAJ. As a popular area for researchers within many study fields, the local community in Lower Mustang has gotten used to researchers bringing empty promises of great changes to their lives. Some local residents had little belief that our project would turn into action and were tired of projects that led

to nothing. We, on the other hand, were determined to complete the project and deliver something of real value to the local community. When discussing this with SAMAJ, it turned out they were skeptical of continuing the project since the local community did not seem determined to take over responsibility for the projects themselves. In other words: The local residents want SAMAJ to do more, while SAMAJ believes the local residents must take more responsibility.

Our current conversations with the local community and SAMAJ seem to lead to a solution. SAMAJ has offered to fund the website project, which has been well-received by the residents. However, we still need to address some concerns regarding a local takeover. To achieve this, we will maintain communication with the community and SAMAJ. Additionally, this will be a key recommendation for the students who will continue the project in Design 9 the autumn 2023.

10.2 Conclusion

Our thesis aimed to promote tourism in secluded villages in a way that benefits both the local communities and the incoming tourists. The hiking trail concept, consisting of branding, on-site experiences, a sustainable digital platform, and local community involvement, facilitates the introduction of visitors to homestays and other authentic local experiences. By letting the local community welcome tourists, the concept allows them to benefit from tourism.

Rural tourism plays a significant role in Lower Mustang's economic and social development, addressing challenges such as unemployment and migration. However, to preserve the natural environment and culture in the area, tourism must increase gradually and responsibly. Tourism growth can be challenging to control, but by targeting a specific tourist group and implementing a sustainable business model, we believe it is achievable.

For the project's long-term success, we consider local ownership of the project vital. Hopefully, our stakeholder inclusion and participation in Lower Mustang have laid a solid foundation for this. Still, this is an unanswered question, and further efforts are required to maintain and strengthen this aspect of the project.

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Appendix 1: Suggestions for ACAP

Suggestions for ACAP

Erle Drejer
Nora Kastellet
Magnus Petterteig Mo

We are three Master's students in Industrial Design at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. We are currently doing our Master's thesis about tourism in Lower Mustang.

As part of our thesis, we have been on a field trip to the Annapurna Conservation Area. First, we spent 10 days doing parts of the Annapurna Circuit (Besisahar to Muktinath). Thereafter, we spent 2 weeks in Lower Mustang (Kagbeni, Tiri, Jhong, Jharkot, Chongur, Muktinath, Lubra, and Jomsom). During our field trip, we observed the situation of tourism in the area and talked to different stakeholders (tourists, guides, and locals) about tourism. Our focus area has been to redirect tourists to the smaller villages mentioned above. Local community members have expressed concern over tourists passing by their villages unknowing of the existing lunch and accommodation possibilities. The low number of visitors makes it difficult for the locals to manage viable tourism businesses. One of the main reasons for this problem is the lack of information about the remote villages. Our project, therefore, focuses on informing tourists about the existing facilities and activities in the small villages. The end product will be a website that aims to reach the tourists in the planning stage of their travel, and hopefully draw them to the local villages. In the process of attracting tourists to secluded villages, there are several measures where ACAP could contribute to distributing tourism benefits more evenly among the local communities.

This document will summarize our main findings from our field trip and suggestions for measures that should be considered for the upcoming budget meeting.

Main findings

The new guiding rules
- The new guiding rules requiring tourists to have a guide when trekking in the Annapurna Conservation Area have raised concerns among tourists, locals, and even some guides.
- Many tourists posts on Facebook and WhatsApp groups for visitors to Nepal that they consider skipping trekking in the ACAP area due to the new rules. Some argue that it will be too costly to hire a guide, while others prefer to trek individually.
- We encountered many trekkers along the Annapurna Circuit who moved up their departure to avoid the new regulations.
- Many trekkers doubt that the new rules are meant to enhance safety and believe that it's more about making money. This has left them feeling skeptical about the authorities' intentions.
- Local communities fear losing visitors as guides tend to select larger villages and hotels when planning treks.

Spreading tourism to the smaller villages
- Locals in smaller villages like Jhong, Chongur, Jharkot, Lubra, Kagbeni, and Tiri are keen to attract more tourists but face challenges in doing so.
- Tourists find it difficult to obtain information about these villages, such as available activities and accommodations.
- Some visitors seek more authentic experiences, which could be provided in these smaller villages.
- Several tourists are interested in staying at homestays but lack knowledge on how to book their stay or whom to contact.

The state of the hiking trails
- The construction of roads in Lower Mustang has altered the trekking experience. For instance, many tourists dislike walking along the road between Muktinath, Kagbeni, and Jomsom due to dust, noise, and traffic.
- The condition of smaller hiking trails varies. Some trails have been improved, while others require attention.
- Tourists find it unclear what hiking trails are safe to choose because some trails shown on the map are not to be found in real life.

Signs and physical information
- Some information signs are unclear or poorly situated.
- There is a lack of information about homestays and things to do in the smaller villages. Some locals tried to solve this by putting up a sign with information, but it was removed.
- Some tourists mentioned that there are no maps that can be used for navigation in Lower Mustang. However, most use digital maps and did not perceive this as a problem.

Suggested measures

Hiking route
Establishing a hiking route between the proposed villages (Kagbeni, Tiri, Jhong, Jharkot, Muktinath, Chongur, Lubra) focusing on exploring Nepalese culture through homestays and meetings with locals. We have tested different routes between the villages, and suggest the route marked on the attached map. This route avoids the most trafficked roads, creating a more pleasant hiking experience. There are already signs directing hikers toward the closest villages on the trails, and the path feels safe to follow. The only missing factor is information about the hiking trail. Official markings on maps found in the ACAP office could be a way to inform tourists about the trails. We suggest the following name for the hiking trail: Mustang Village Trail. This is meant to set the expectations for the visitors in the area. If ACAP has any standardized protocols for promoting new hiking trails, this would be preferable to apply on Mustang Village Trail as well.

Suggested route:
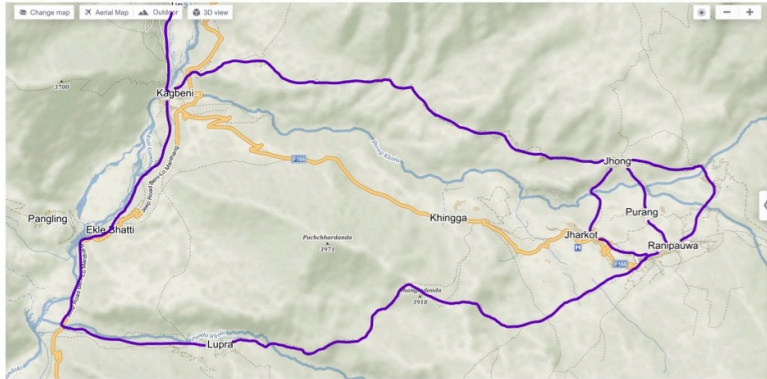
Suggested information sign:


Information about trails
Providing tourists with information about the trails outside the main road (Muktinath-Lubra-Jomsom and Muktinath-Jhong-Jharkot) through the distribution of flyers/maps at the ACAP offices and by placing physical signage in the villages. There are physical signs today, but the signage should be even clearer and more strategically placed.

Information signs in villages
Installing information signs in each village that display a map with homestays, restaurants, and guest houses marked to help visitors easily locate these places.

Signs and improved trail to Dakpoche
Dakpoche is a nice one-day hike from Jhong that offers great views of the Himalayan mountains and Upper Mustang. The trek could be popular among tourists, and we, therefore, suggest installing signage and improving trails to Dakpoche. The signs should include the altitude and the remaining distance in kilometers.
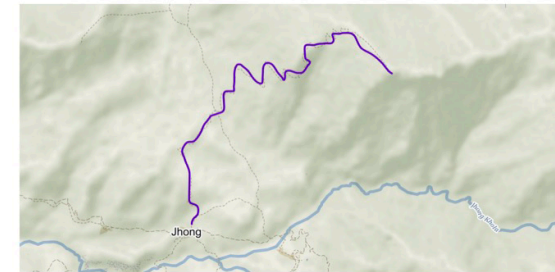
Signs and improved trail to Puchchharanda
Puchchharanda is a nice one-day hike from Khingga, Jharkot, and Muktinath. The trail to Lupra can be followed almost to the top, but the last kilometers are not marked. We think this trek could be popular among tourists, and therefore suggest installing signage and improving the trails to Puchchhardanda. The signs should include the altitude and the remaining distance in kilometers.
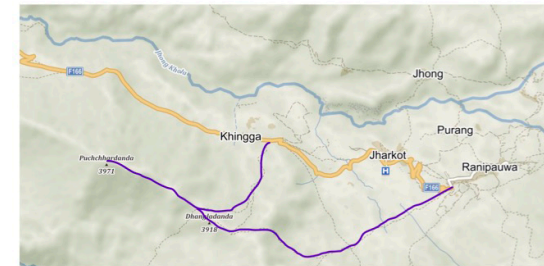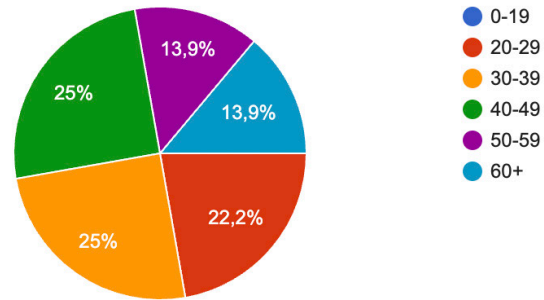
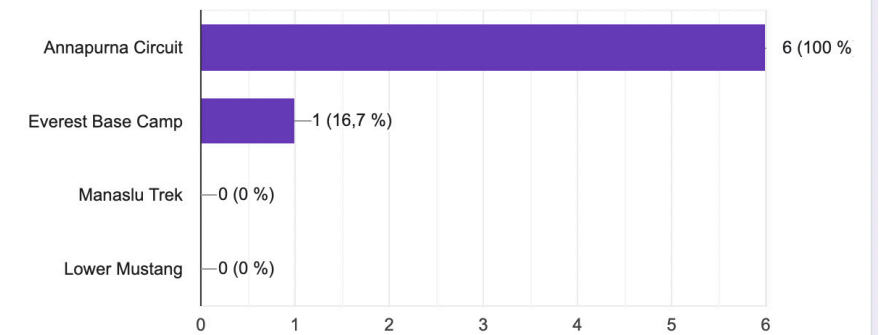# Appendix 2: Survey for Nepal Travelers

How old are you?
36 svar

- 0-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

13,9%
13,9%
25%
25%
22,2%

Kopiér

What country are you from?
36 svar

Kopiér
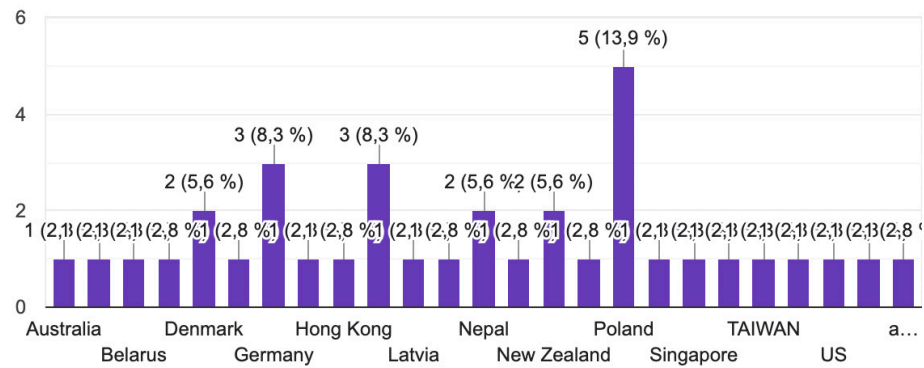
5 (13,9 %)

3 (8,3 %)   3 (8,3 %)

2 (5,6 %)   2 (5,6 %) 2 (5,6 %)

1 (2,8 %)

Australia   Denmark   Hong Kong   Nepal   Poland   TAIWAN   a...
Belarus   Germany   Latvia   New Zealand   Singapore   US

Where are you going? (You can choose more than one)
6 svar

Kopiér

Annapurna Circuit	6 (100 %)
Everest Base Camp	1 (16,7 %)
Manaslu Trek	0 (0 %)
Lower Mustang	0 (0 %)

Why did you choose this destination? (You can choose more than one)
6 svar

Kopiér

Nature/views	6 (100 %)
Trekking	6 (100 %)
Explore culture	4 (66,7 %)
Meet other travelers	1 (16,7 %)
Meet local people	2 (33,3 %)
Pilgrimage	0 (0 %)
Spiritual purposes	0 (0 %)
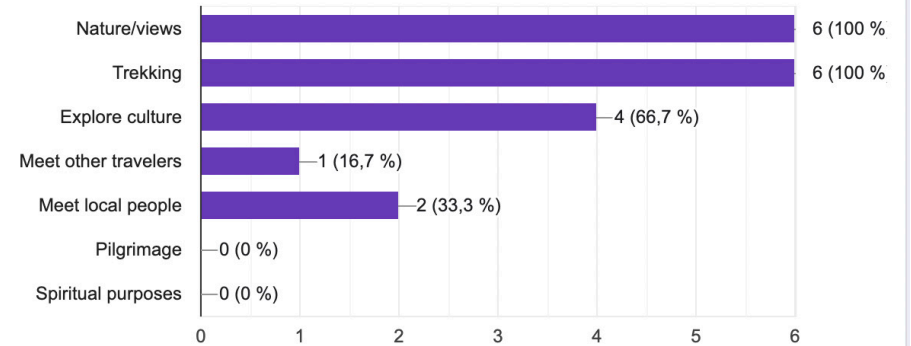
Why do you seek these experiences? (Choose the ones that feel most relevant)

Kopiér

6 svar
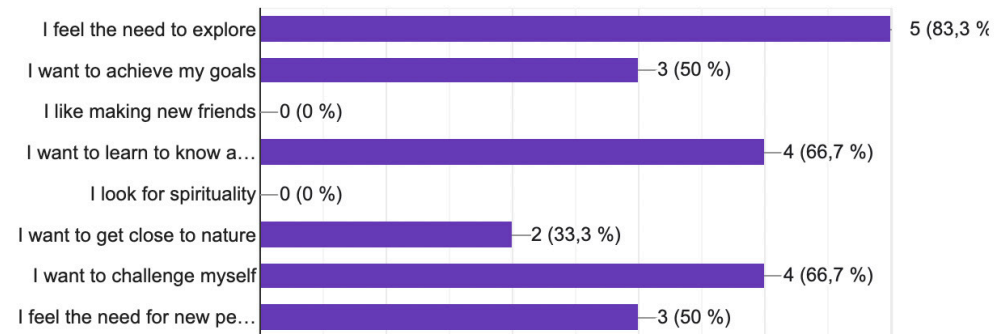
Response	Count
I feel the need to explore	5 (83,3 %)
I want to achieve my goals	3 (50 %)
I like making new friends	0 (0 %)
I want to learn to know a…	4 (66,7 %)
I look for spirituality	0 (0 %)
I want to get close to nature	2 (33,3 %)
I want to challenge myself	4 (66,7 %)
I feel the need for new pe…	3 (50 %)

How interested are you in the following attractions? (Scale from 1 to 5)

Kopiér

Categories: Longer treks, Known tourist attractions, Hidden spots, Local history

How interested are you in the following attractions? (Scale from 1 to 5)

Kopiér

Legend: 1- Very uninterested, 2- Uninterested, 3- Neutral, 4- Interested, 5- V…

Categories: Monasteries, Viewpoints, Cooking with locals, Hom…
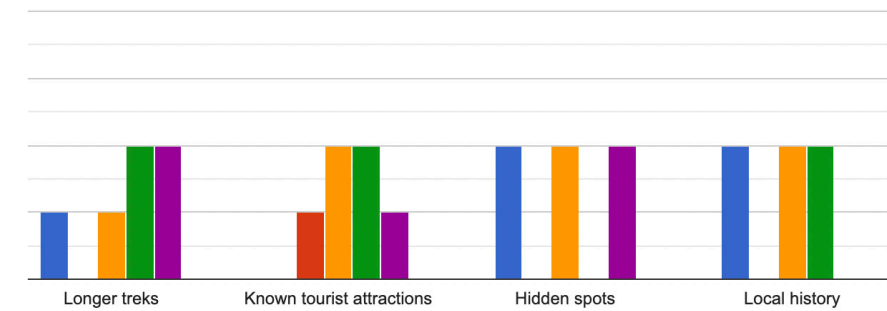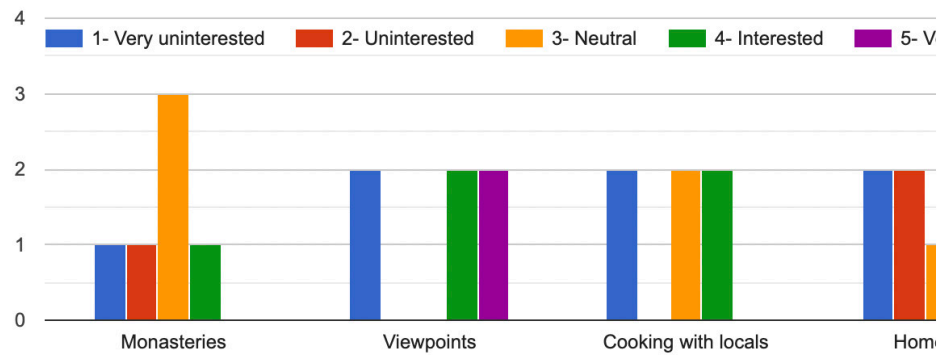
What channels do you use for research when planning the trip?

Kopiér

6 svar

Channel	Count
Guide books	2 (33,3 %)
Travel blogs	6 (100 %)
Instagram	1 (16,7 %)
Pinterest	0 (0 %)
Whatsapp groups	0 (0 %)
Facebook groups	6 (100 %)
Travel tips from friends	2 (33,3 %)
I am not planning much	1 (16,7 %)
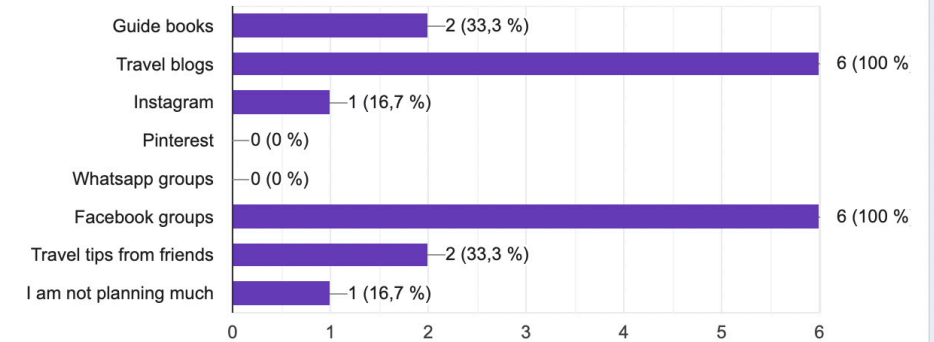
How far in advance do you prefer to book accommodation?

6 svar
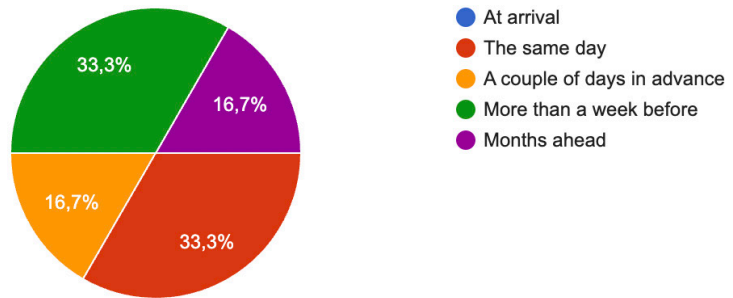
- At arrival
- The same day
- A couple of days in advance
- More than a week before
- Months ahead

33,3%
16,7%
16,7%
33,3%

How important are the following factors to you when choosing a place to stay? (Scale from 1 to 5)

- 5- Very important

ernational food is offered · There is a western-style toilet · Warm shower · Authentic Nepalese culture

How important are the following factors to you when choosing a place to stay? (Scale from 1 to 5)

- 1- Very unimportant
- 2- Unimportant
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Important
- 5- Ve

The price is low · There is wifi · Local food is offered · International f
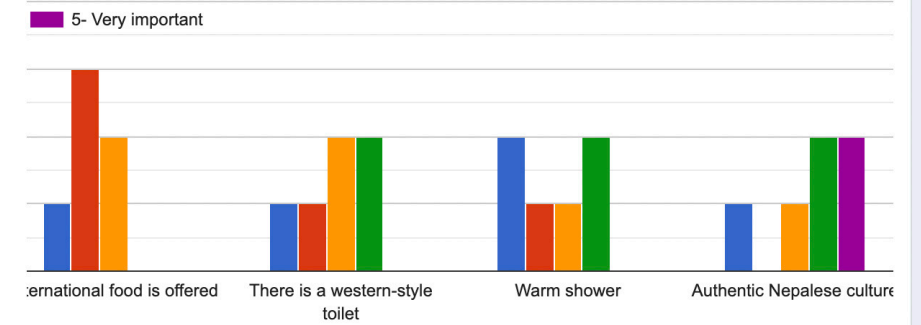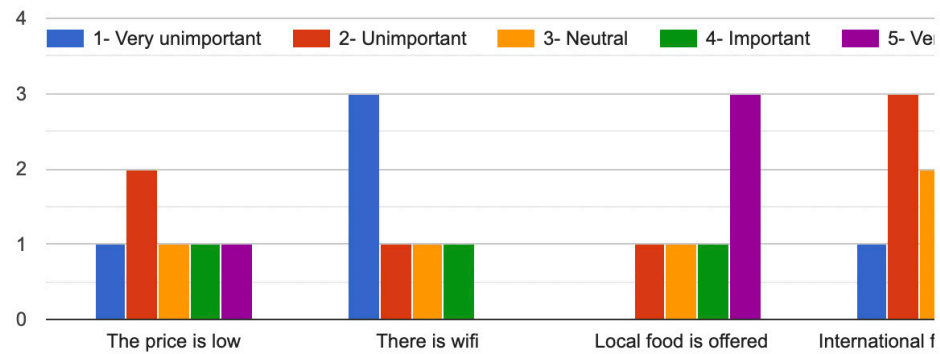
Previous travel

Where did you go? (You can choose more than one)
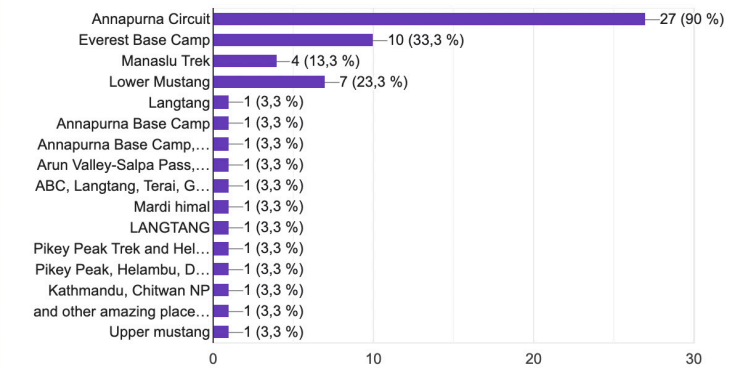
30 svar

- Annapurna Circuit — 27 (90 %)
- Everest Base Camp — 10 (33,3 %)
- Manaslu Trek — 4 (13,3 %)
- Lower Mustang — 7 (23,3 %)
- Langtang — 1 (3,3 %)
- Annapurna Base Camp — 1 (3,3 %)
- Annapurna Base Camp,… — 1 (3,3 %)
- Arun Valley-Salpa Pass,… — 1 (3,3 %)
- ABC, Langtang, Terai, G… — 1 (3,3 %)
- Mardi himal — 1 (3,3 %)
- LANGTANG — 1 (3,3 %)
- Pikey Peak Trek and Hel… — 1 (3,3 %)
- Pikey Peak, Helambu, D… — 1 (3,3 %)
- Kathmandu, Chitwan NP — 1 (3,3 %)
- and other amazing place… — 1 (3,3 %)
- Upper mustang — 1 (3,3 %)

Why did you choose this destination? (You can choose more than one)

30 svar

Nature and views	27 (90 %)
Trekking	27 (90 %)
Explore culture	25 (83,3 %)
Meet other travelers	6 (20 %)
Meet local people	19 (63,3 %)
Pilgrimage	2 (6,7 %)
Spiritual purposes	5 (16,7 %)
	1 (3,3 %)
Wild camping	1 (3,3 %)
Relaxation, photography	1 (3,3 %)
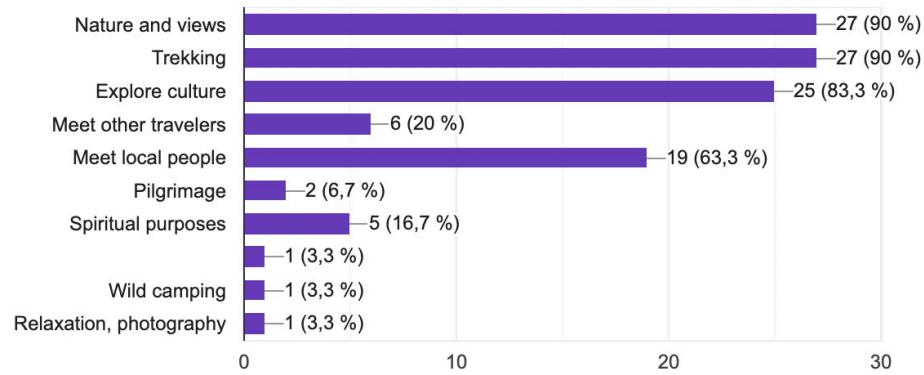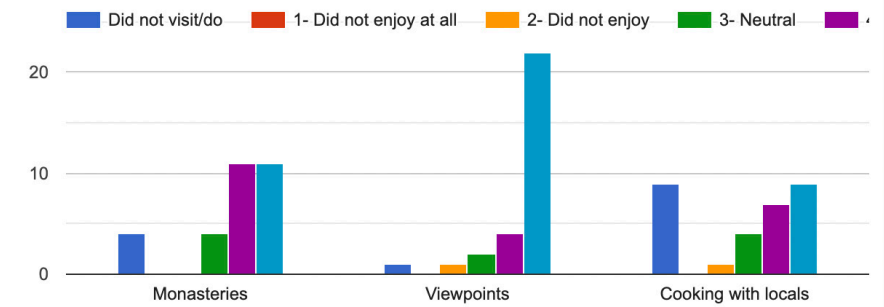
Why did you seek these experiences? (Choose the ones that feel most relevant)

30 svar

I feel the need to explore	19 (63,3 %)
I want to achieve my goals	6 (20 %)
I like making new friends	2 (6,7 %)
I want to learn to know a…	13 (43,3 %)
I look for spirituality	4 (13,3 %)
I want to get close to nature	23 (76,7 %)
I want to challenge myself	19 (63,3 %)
I feel the need for new pe…	11 (36,7 %)
	1 (3,3 %)

How much did you enjoy the following attractions (Scale from 1 to 5)?

Legend: Did not visit/do — 1- Did not enjoy at all — 2- Did not enjoy — 3- Neutral — 4-

Monasteries, Viewpoints, Cooking with locals

How much did you enjoy the following attractions (Scale from 1 to 5)?

Legend: 5- Enjoyed a lot

…estays, Longer treks, Known tourist attractions, Hidden spots

250

251

What channels did you use for research when planning the trip?

30 svar

Channel	Count
Guide books	15 (50 %)
Travel blogs	19 (63,3 %)
Instagram	6 (20 %)
Pinterest	1 (3,3 %)
Whatsapp groups	2 (6,7 %)
Facebook groups	22 (73,3 %)
Travel tips from friends	11 (36,7 %)
I am not planning much	2 (6,7 %)
YouTube	3 (10 %)
Internet	1 (3,3 %)
Trekking Agencies home…	1 (3,3 %)
you tube	1 (3,3 %)
Traveled to Nepal severa…	1 (3,3 %)
Youtube travel vlogs	1 (3,3 %)
General internet searches	1 (3,3 %)
Google Research and Yo…	1 (3,3 %)

How far in advance did you book accommodations?

30 svar

- At arrival
- The same day
- A couple of days in advance
- More than a week before
- Months ahead
- Didn't book on the circuit. Booked hotels in cities few days in advance
- By the agency

How important are the following factors to you when choosing a place to stay (Scale from 1 to 5)?

Legend: 1- Very unimportant, 2- Unimportant, 3- Neutral, 4- Important, 5- Ver…

Categories: The price is low, There is wifi, Local food is offered, International f…

How important are the following factors to you when choosing a place to stay (Scale from 1 to 5)?

Legend: 5- Very important

Categories: …national food is offered, There is a western-style toilet, Warm shower, Authentic Nepalese culture

Was there something during the trip that did not meet your expectations?

22 svar

No

Having to walk on roads

"Wild /aggressive" tourism agancy style of doing business. They treat Europeans like walking ATMs so we did solo treks and enjoyed a lot

Love it. Even the smelly shoddy tea house in Shree Kharka

no

The room, bed, blanket, toilet, hot shower, warm water to wash your face and washing your hands before taking meal.

The guide rushed us too much

the skyrocketing prices for tourists in the popular trekking areas

Hygienic toilets in high Altitude

Not really

-

45 Land and rockslides at the ACT.

Nothing really

Air Quality (too much Smog) , poor trail quality due to Chinese investments in the Annapurna region (most of Annapurna Circuit has turned into dusty roads)

no. it was great experience

Rubbish/ plastic in Whole nepal

Do you have any other thoughts you want to share about your travel? Everything is helpful!

17 svar

It was really great experience!

Among various places visited around the world, coming back for solo trek in Nepal is something I would definitely pursue

Making guides mandatory just killed all my plans to visit Nepal again.

I traveled in 2000 and enjoyed that in 18 days I did not see a car.

Nepal government should allow free individual trekker or solo trekker to trek the ACT, ABC, EBC, Three Passes, etc.

I liked the route, the culture, the landscapes... It was an experience that changes your image of life and yourself

local villages rely so much on a healthy trekking population. it keeps their village a viable place to live and maintains their culture.

In general, Nepalese people have a fraction of what westerners have materially, yet are far happier with life. The things complained about in the west these days are so insignificant compared to daily challenges faced in Nepal. Wish this could be bottled up and sent to other countries so they to can enjoy this beautiful life we have been given.

Human beings are born to travel. Even as a local we explore new things everyday about Nepal must be same abroad too. Traveling is a best thing a person can do. Nepal is worthwhile too.
BTW I'm launching a cool travel tech startup - if you guys are into startups. https://stag.voyageonsnepal.com - 80% complete just about $3k required. lol

Would it be possible to send a copy of the research to me too, without the emails or names. I am a researcher as well

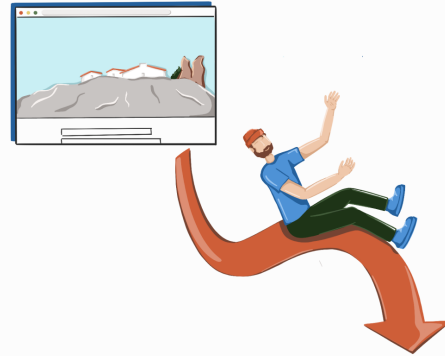Live! Travel! Adventure! Bless! Discover and dont be sorry. Explore! :)

I'm glad I travelled to Nepal when guides were not mandatory yet. With the news that guides will become mandatory on all treks I'm unlikely to return to Nepal as long as this new rule will be in place.

Appendix 3: Brand Style Guide

Mustang Village Trail

Among mountains and desert dunes in the shadows of the Himalayas, you find Mustang Village Trail – a hiking trail that gives you the best of nature and culture. The villages house a culture influenced by Tibet, India, and Nepal. Simultaneously, the spectacular nature calls for an adventure. It is the perfect location for a curious soul looking for a unique hike to add to their travel itinerary.

Mission

Our mission is to attract travelers to the secluded villages of Lower Mustang in a manner that benefits both locals and tourists. The local community should experience increased safety running a tourism business, and tourists should be able to explore local culture and unique nature along the village trail. By collecting and informing of all the special places and activities hiding in the corners of Lower Mustang, tourists can get a more unique experience when visiting Lower Mustang, and locals can get increased economic safety and development.
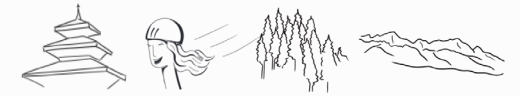
Vision

Mustang Village Trail should be a concept driven by helpfulness. Just like the cool friend recommending new music, Mustang Village Trail should be a place where you get honest travel advice – from one adventurer to another. It should be a safe place for locals to front their homestay. A place where open people connect with other open people.

Tone of voice

A playful expert voice

Mustang Village Trail should appeal to adventurous trekkers valuing independence and exploration. Therefore, the tone of voice should not be too serious or commanding. Still, the website should be perceived as a reliable source for travelers seeking information. The result is a delightful symbiosis of *a playful expert voice*.

The defined tone of voice should take form through a combination of graphical elements and text. The text describing activities and homestays should be professional and include safety warnings when necessary. Simple and playful illustrations, as well as casual travel tips, are used to make the site more exciting and explorative.

Inside tip:)
Fun tip from a fellow adventurer

Inside tip:)
We are experts in terms of knowing the area

Target Group

Adventure Tourists

The brand should first and foremost appeal to adventure tourists. To succeed in the mission to attract them to the villages, they should feel connected to the brand. The webpage's content should therefore be directed toward information desired by adventure tourists and trekkers.

Local residents

It is crucial that the local residents too can recognize themself and their culture in the brand. The service is designed on behalf of the local community and should reflect their values and wishes. The brand should represent the locals authentically and genuinely.

Primary Colors
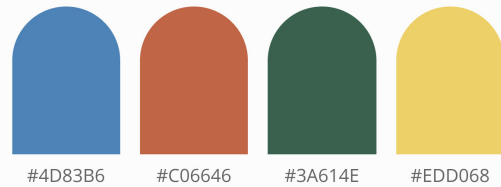
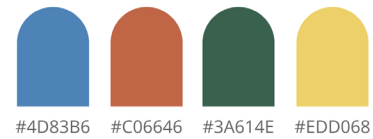| #4D83B6 | #C06646 | #3A614E | #EDD068 |

Down to earth and close to culture

The primary colors are inspired by four of the five colors represented in the Tibetan prayer flags. Blue represents the sky, red the fire, green the water, and yellow the earth. In contrast to the bright prayer flags, the primary colors are all set to earthy tones. This is to match the nature and architecture in Lower Mustang, creating a brand in harmony with its environment.
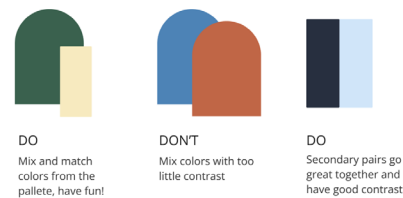
Full Color Pallette

Primaries

| #4D83B6 | #C06646 | #3A614E | #EDD068 |

Secondaries

Greyscale

DO
Mix and match colors from the pallete, have fun!

DON'T
Mix colors with too little contrast

DO
Secondary pairs go great together and have good contrast

Aa

Header font
Libre Baskerville

AaBbCcDdEeFfGg
HhIiJjKkLlMmNn
OoPpQqRrSsTtUu
VvWwXxYyZz

Content text
Open Sans

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgH
hIiJjKkLlMmNnOoP
pQqRrSsTtUuVvWw
XxYyZz

A playful, yet professional voice
Libre Baskerville is a trustworthy but kind font – just in line with our desired tone of voice. Paired with the readable and versatile Open Sanse, any message can be delivered playful yet professional.
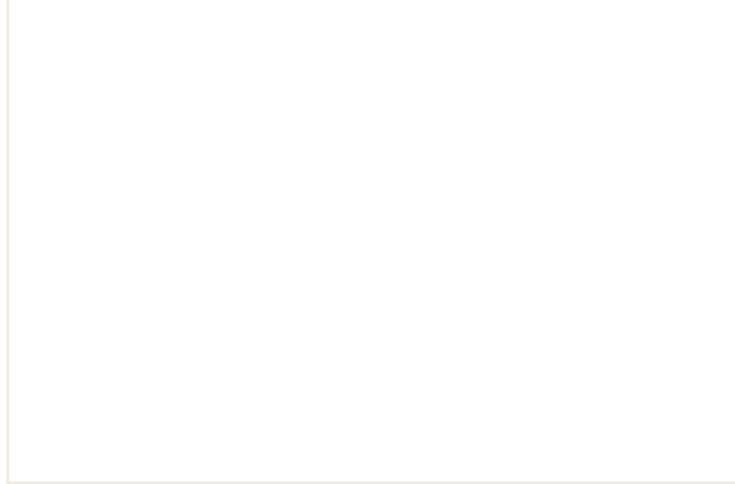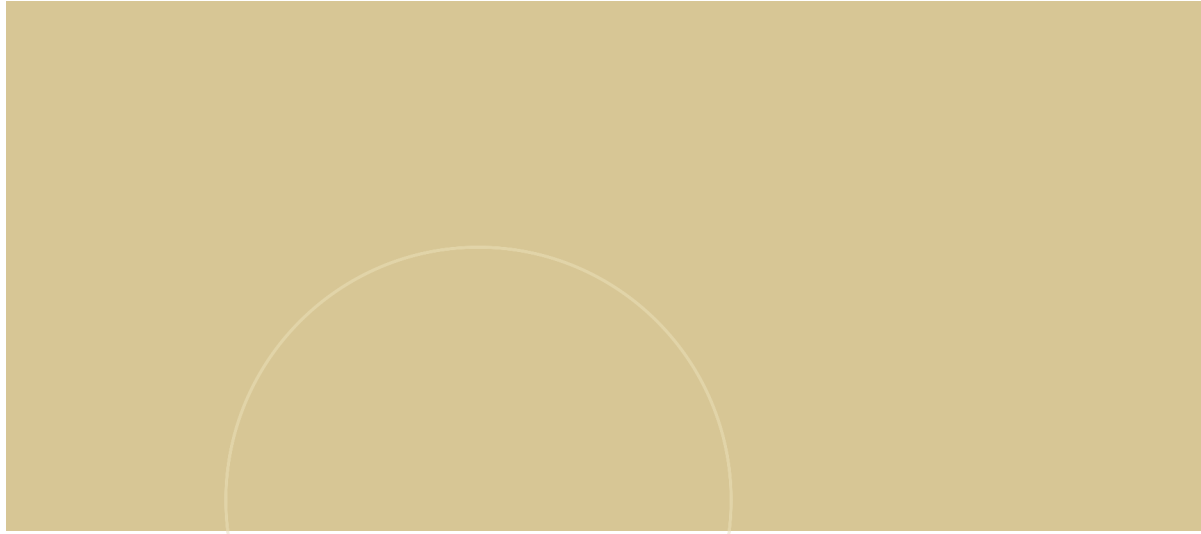
Desktop Type Scale

Headline 1	Large Header- 90PX
Headline 2	Medium Header- 64PX
Headline 3	Small Header - 34PX
Headline 4	Large Body- 32PX
Headline 5	Medium Body- 21PX
Headline 6	Small Body- 16PX
Headline 5	UPPERCASE- 23PX
Small text	Small Button- 13PX

Mobile Type Scale

Headline 1	**Mobile scale- 32PX**
Headline 2	Mobile scale- 28PX
Headline 3	Mobile scale- 25PX
Headline 4	Mobile scale- 22PX
Headline 5	Mobile scale- 20PX
Headline 6	Mobile scale- 18PX
Body text	Mobile scale- 16PX
Small text	Mobile scale- 14PX