

Institutionen för studier av samhällsutveckling och kultur – ISAK
LiU Norrköping

Backpacking in Ecuador

Identity, travel style and motivation

Juliane Bernstein

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Linköpings universitet

Linköpings universitet, LiU Norrköping, 601 74 NORRKÖPING



Linköpings universitet

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Abstract:

The thesis discusses the backpacking culture in Ecuador. It proposes a clarification of the issue and discusses the problem from two perspectives. Questions are raised about the backpacking identity, the backpacking travel style and how they use given facilities in the host country. The work focuses and analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the destination through the lens of a backpacker. The empirical material is taken from intensive interviews conducted in Ecuador.

A discussion reviews the backpacking identity, how and why backpackers travel; and the backpacker's opinion about sustainable tourism in South America. In addition, the thesis concentrates on the travellers' finances and how they prepare for an extended journey.

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1. Introduction

Vi upptäckte mer och mer och jorden blev större och större
Upptäckte ändå mer
Och jorden blev bara en prick
En liten leksaksballong i ändligheten

N. Ferlin (Vagabond 1987, Nr. 2)

Every year, over one and a half billion people visit different countries in the world (Lundberg 1995). Tourists have a huge impact on the world's economic income and recently tourism has become the world's largest economic sector. Tourism has the power to provide incomes for the holiday destinations, however, at the same time; tourism destroys elements of nature and culture. New innovative forms such as sustainable tourism and eco-tourism are needed (Lickorish 1988). These are forms of tourism, which provide economic support to the indigenous population and play a significant role in wildlife conservation. Additionally, they preserve the cultural variety in the regions. Nonetheless sustainable tourism covers the country's needs only in theory. In practice, sustainability and tourism are difficult to combine. The economic growth and profit stand in contrast to the preservation and conservation of future resources. Nevertheless, the tourism industry is aware that if a country lacked sustainable natural resources, tourists would choose other destinations to satisfy their curiosity (ibid.). The afore-mentioned comment gives basis to the argument that more sustainable forms of travelling are on the increase. For example, backpackers create the image of a being a responsible traveller, who seek to leave behind the hectic stress of the Western world and to find peace and tranquillity in foreign countries, especially countries belonging to the third world.

In Ecuador, the smallest country in South America, travellers discover a different lifestyle and language, where not everyone adapts to world tourism nor speaks English. Here the pace of life is based on history, past cultures and traditions (Kunstaetter 2001).

How can backpackers adapt to the conditions of the country and why did they choose Ecuador as opposed to Australia. This thesis aims to discuss and analyse the phenomenon regarding backpackers in Ecuador. Drawing on firsthand backpacking experiences, I will have a closer look at the strengths and weaknesses of travelling

the country. The main emphasis will lie on the motivation, identity and how backpackers use given facilities in the host country.

1.1. Motivation for the topic - Tourist scene

Backpacking as a tourist phenomenon emerged in the 1970s. In 1972, the anthropologist and tourist scientist Eric Cohen called these tourists “drifters” (Cohen 2003: 95-110). Cohen’s drifters and today’s backpackers share the same traits. Their image is further cemented through, for example, their luggage choice. A backpacker usually travels with a rucksack and the travel plan is not predetermined. Additionally, travellers prefer to stay in low budget hostels.

The hostel needs to be near the actual destination and the accommodation should be reasonably priced. In contrast to chartered tourists, the young drifters sought contact with the local population. Rucksack tourism was meant to be an alternative to mass tourism. The idea of self-identification is a central topic to most travellers. Backpacking has become a lifestyle and emerged into a business, which has grown steadily since the beginning of this century (ibid.). Low-fare airlines and low-budget accommodation are rapidly expanding throughout the world. Backpackers have conquered Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand especially. New techniques, such as digital communication and appropriate travel planning, make it easy to organise a long trip journey in all ways.

Backpacking became recognised as a new form of tourism with the advent of the Hippy trail, a road-based travel route from Europe to Asia. Southeast Asia was already a popular destination for alternative travellers during this time, due to cheap prices and the fascinating cultures, which was still completely unknown to the average Westerner (Cederholm 1999: 40). The Lonely Planet, the so-called bible for Backpackers, gave inspiration to travellers especially in the guide „South-East Asia on a shoestring” in 1973¹. Example journey routes, mentioned in the guidebook, became more popular and hotels and hostels were soon added. Alternative tourism

¹ Lonely Planet editor refers to the guidebook “South East Asia- on a shoestring” as followed: “This is the Yellow Bible - the one that started it all. We've been covering this region for over 30 years [...]” (http://shop.lonelyplanet.com/Primary/Product/Destination_Guides/Shoestring.jsp?bmUID=1231841917603)13-01-09

Tony and Maureen Wheeler, the founder for the most used travel guide, the Lonely Planet, wrote their first guide “Asia on the Cheap” in 1972, followed by “South East Asia- on a shoestring”. (<http://www.lonelyplanet.de/ueberlonelyplanet/index.htm>) 13-01-09

may be leading the way for a charter tourism innovation. Besides, the „old“ backpacker countries South-East Asia and Australia, new countries, like Northern and South Africa, became much more attractive to travellers (Richards, Wilson, 2004).

I have asked a lot of people what first springs to mind when I mention backpacking. The most frequent answers were Australia or New Zealand, especially amongst Europeans. The literature I found was based on the established backpacker areas with substantially less published about Africa or the Americas. New perspectives need to be published on different countries in these areas. This thesis shall take a closer look at the backpacker culture in South America, primarily Ecuador. I would like to examine whether backpacking in Ecuador has become charter tourism or stayed in its individual tourism original format. Due to its geographical location, Ecuador offers a great advantage for the tourists. It includes beaches on the west coast, the Andes in the centre of the country; and a jungle situated in the east. It is located near the equator, which provides warm and tropical weather all year round and in comparison, the mountains provide always spring temperatures (Rachowiecki 1997). Additionally, Peru is the neighbour country south of Ecuador, where the famous Inca ruins Machu Picchu are found. Ecuador belonged to the great Inca Empire and Ingapirca, the biggest Inca ruin in Ecuador, bears testament to this.

The building of community is a common reoccurrence in the culture of backpacking. The desire to meet other backpackers and the local population is a common trait. A backpacker community develops because people sleep in dormitories and share a kitchen and common room. Meeting each other in a small space allows backpackers to learn from each other, while saving money and time (Elsrud 2004, Cederholm 1999). Firsthand information about special locations, restaurants or accommodation is always a preferable topic for conversation.

I would like to examine if the original idea, exploring the country while getting to know local people and other travellers, still exists in Southern America.

1.2. Problem definition and goals

Young people discovering the world is not a new phenomenon, in fact, its roots go back, for example, to the *Grand Tour*, which was mainly spread among young English aristocrats (ibid.). Additionally, carpenters or other professions with a handicrafts background improve their knowledge and experience by „wandering“ through the world. To see Europe by train with a so-called Interrail-Ticket may be a predecessor of today’s backpackers. All forms of travelling pursue world experience and self-discovery (Löfgren 1989: 23).

In this study, I would like to find out the backpacker’s travel style. Low budget flights and cheap transportation give backpackers the opportunity of expanding their travels to different parts of the world. They are sometimes understood as the predecessor of charter tourism. This is very important to the science of tourism, in order to uncover which countries might be tourist industry leaders in the future. However, they have an influence on the culture and economy of the visited country. Backpacking in South America is rated less common than, for example, South East Asia (www.fernwehforum.de). This may show an alternative perspective on the phenomenon of Backpacking compared to previous studies concerning Asia, Australia and New Zealand, where backpacking is an important part of the economic income; and where they are welcome for the seasonal work market (Röör 2003).

To find out how travelling looks on a low budget in South America, several questions need to be answered. This includes questions about

- Development of backpacking identity and community
- In which way the backpacker travels, the reasons why they came to the country and how they use the given facilities
- The strengths and weaknesses of Ecuador as backpackers’ destination

The first two questions deal with the first part of my analysis concerning the backpacking culture in common based on interview answers from backpackers in Ecuador. The latter problem question deals mainly with Ecuador as a destination seen from the perspective of a backpacker visiting the republic. The analysis of the three questions creates a unity and provides an overview of the travel style of backpackers in Ecuador.

Backpackers believe that they belong to a special community, because of the fact that they travel cheaply and take notice of the local culture. But what is the reason for their way of travelling; and what makes the region of visit so interesting? This will also include the question of the variation of tourist attractions, such as nature and adventure experiences.

1.3. Literature Review

During the search for theoretical works, which support this field of study, I noticed that a decent amount of literature deals with the topic of backpacking. Basically, most of the works are studies implemented in the past decade. However, the first studies had already commenced in the 1970's. The information for the theoretical part was made by a literature research of primary and secondary sources, evaluation of technical literature, such as articles concerning the topic found in the *Annals of Tourism Research* or the *International Journal of Tourism Research*, magazines and internet.

For the overall development of the backpacking phenomenon, examinations made by Binder (2005), Cohen (2003) Elsrud (2004), Richard and Wilson (2004) were mainly used. No literature specifically dealing with backpacking in Ecuador was found. Most analyses dealing with rucksack tourism deal with Australia, New Zealand and lately even with South East Asia. The reason for this fact could be that those areas are frequently more used by independent travellers than the comparative ones in South America.

Jana Binder focuses in her book *Globality* (2005) while ascertaining her empirical material on globalizing processes. She elaborates how backpackers want to be distinguishable from other tourist groups and from their respective societies. The global perspective is based on the backpackers travel representation, their mobility and their physical interaction with cultural boundaries between the everyday and backpacking culture.

Erik Cohen was one of the few scholars who devoted their work to backpacking research. In the article *backpacking: diversity and change* (2003) the development of the today's backpacker is summarised. He illustrates how drifters became backpackers and how backpacking became a mass phenomenon. He examines the

change from the drifter² to the backpacker. The change includes attitude, ideology and practice.

Torun Elsrud concentrates in her dissertation *Taking Time and Making Journeys: Narratives on Self and Other among Backpackers* (2004) on long-term independent travellers who prefer to spend time in countries of the third world. She deals with identity creation as well as the creation of space and time on the backpacker's trip, whilst being lost in the home society of the traveller. Taking risks and going on adventures becomes a central topic in her work. Here she takes a closer look at gender in the travel business as well as what role the print media has on the backpacking culture. Elsrud elaborates the backpacker's attitude to the otherness and primitivism in comparison to the perspective of the 'western' identity.

Greg Richards and Julie Wilson edited *The Global Nomad: Backpacker travel in Theory and Practice* (2004), which contrasts a variety of backpacking studies concerning backpacking as a modern phenomenon and globalization as a result of the backpacking culture. This study incorporates the idea of backpackers as global nomads, placing emphasis on their mobility, the expansions of infrastructure and given facilities. Case studies are about behaviour, attitudes and motivations of long-term travellers; as well as growth development of the backpacking industry to the establishment of backpacking enclaves over the whole world.

The research about rucksack tourism started in the 1970's. In the 80's of the same century, less emphasis was put on the subject (Cohen 2003:95). New interest arose with the publicity of the book *The Beach*, by Alex Garland, and the movie with the same name (Binder 2005: 29). The 1999 novel *The Gringo Trail*, by Mark Mann, deals with the topic backpacking. It follows in the footsteps of Garland's bestseller only setting the story in the South American countries of Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Colombia. Here, Mann uses for the title of the book an actual travel route, namely the Gringo Trail, which is a travel trail mainly used by western tourists (See chapter 3.2. for further explanation).

Backpacking is, of course, a form of tourism and therefore can be discussed as tourism in a more general sense, which is relevant for the understanding of the

² See theory chapter for term explanation.

phenomenon of backpacking. Dean McCannel discusses in “The Tourist” (1999) new theories about tourism. He focuses on authenticity, sightseeing and social structures. The post-industrial age of the tourist is emphasised and he proposes an overview about modernity and production of cultural experiences.

The following titles deal with the economics and marketing of tourism.

Peter Burns illustrates in “An introduction to Tourism and Anthropology” (2002) the relationship between economics and the anthropology of tourism. Burns defines tourism and its typologies. Issues about globalisation and culture are also raised. The work explains the development of tourism and anthropology and that the latter is the key to understand that tourism is more than a collection of business actions.

“Tourism Economic” (1995) written by Lundberg et al aims to give an overview about the principles and concepts, as well as forecasting techniques for economic trends and conditions in the tourism sector.

Additionally, Alan Jefferson and Leonard Lickorish provide basic knowledge about marketing in their practical guide “Marketing Tourism” (1988). The authors examine the policies and strategies of joint marketing. They discuss the principles and developments of marketing plans and also show trends for the international travel and tourism sector. The work emphasises the relationship between destination and visitor satisfaction, which is the basis for sufficient marketing.

1.4. Demarcation

Ten intensive interviews are the basis for the empirical and analysing chapters of the study. In order to answer the research question, I analysed the individual respondent’s insight into the backpacking culture and identity, as well as their reasons for choosing Ecuador as a travel destination. Additionally, the study contains a product analysis about the destination Ecuador, which will be analysed in chapter 6.3. according to the country’s strengths and weaknesses.

The study deals with two perspectives on the topic backpacking. The first and main perspective concentrates on the backpacking culture, including the travel style of

backpackers. The second perspective discusses the tourist situation in Ecuador from a backpacker's point of view.

Both perspectives will examine the topic of backpacking in Ecuador from a Western point of view, because of the understandable reason, that I belong to this culture. This fact will shape my study highly, although it is not the final perspective on the subject. For example, a Japanese research scientist may find a different conclusion to a similar study question, because of the simple fact that he/she is from another culture, where travelling enjoys a totally different rating in life; and he/she experiences the Latin American world in a totally different way than I did (Alneng 2002: 127).

There are also intensive interviews with travellers from Israel. Important parts of backpacking research is devoted to them, because a lot of them go on journeys in between the finishing their time in the army and the beginning of higher education (Richards, Wilson 2004). South America serves their budget, because those countries are relatively cheap and therefore affordable for Israeli travellers.

In this thesis I will not focus on the differences between backpacking in Ecuador compared to other areas, for example Australia or South East Asia. To maintain such an analysis I would have taken an additional field study in the area of comparison. This, however, was not possible.

2. Tourists and Tourism

In this chapter terms such as tourists and backpackers are explained, and how they are illustrated by scholars dealing with backpacking culture and the tourism sector. The backpacking history explained in this chapter aims to ease the understanding of the backpacking culture and illustrate that backpacking is not a modern-day occurrence. The theory pertaining to tourism economics will help to understand the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Ecuador as a destination, to conclude with an explanation about the eco-tourist situation in Ecuador.

At the beginning, the phenomenon backpacking is described from the origin until its meaning of today. The definitions are not to be understood as universal, they are rather a help for the reader in understanding the meaning of those terms in the context I am using them. The explanations of the terms are suggestions combining the most common traits of the different tourist forms.

In order to identify and define what Backpackers are, it is important to find out the meaning of tourism and to find answers to the question: “Who is a tourist?” Tourism is associated with holidaymaking and leisure travelling. Hunziker and Krapf defined a ‘tourist’ to be a “person who travels outside of his normal environment for a period of more than 24 hours” (McCabe 2005: 87) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) suggested that, for example, pilgrims are tourists and that every travel journey is a sort of modern pilgrimage (Alneng 2002: 125). Most travel research has been undertaken by Western academics. Erik Cohen was one of the very first searching for answers in the field of tourism. He states that “tourism is essentially a modern Western phenomenon [and] adds, contemporary Japanese, Taiwanese, Koreans and members of many Third World societies are also tourists in the *western* sense of the term” (ibid.: 126). However, Alneng (2002) states that this point of view is inadequate and gives the following example:

Rich tourists from the West may view the glimpse of yet another poor peasant culture with profound indifference. However, the sight of rich Americans or Germans may be intensely pleasurable and produce great excitement in a peasant village (ibid 2002: 127).

With the help of this example we see that there is ‘tourism’ in the *Western* and in the *non-Western* sense. Both appear equal and create marvel and interest on both sides. It shows also that tourism is a worldwide phenomenon. International interaction made this fact possible.

In the tourism sector there are two types of travellers: the independent traveller and the package traveller. The latter is described as a tourist, who books a package, for instance, his/her air traffic, accommodation and perhaps even parts of sightseeing elements via a travel agency. In contrast, the tourism industry sees the independent traveller, as vacationers who have not booked a package, including air travel and accommodation with the help of a travel retailer (Hyde, Lawson 2003: 13). Travellers booking voyage elements through the Internet are considered to be independent travellers. The tourist type backpacking belongs to the independent travel market and it will become one of the “most important and growing sectors of worldwide tourism” (ibid: 13).

However, it is too simple to categorise tourism forms only by the way of purchasing travel elements. It is rather important to have a view on the tourist’s behaviour in the foreign country. Independent travelling contemplates a flexible itinerary, as well as long travel duration. Even booking a certain destination, accommodation or special activities can be decided subsequently. Furthermore, pre-planning may be necessary for certain groups of travellers and for others it is not even an option. Package wayfarers, in contrast, due to their limited available time are inflexible along their travel route, or at the destination concerning restaurants or sightseeing.

Backpackers are described as long-term and low-budget travellers. They follow their planned itinerary only partly, adding and striking out destinations and activities. Nevertheless, backpacking is merely one form on the independent travel market. The “lack of pre-booking of vacation elements” (ibid: 15) is the most common trait independent travel forms share.

2.1. Tourists

Scholars categorise tourists according to their purpose of visit. The post-modern motivation usually stands in connection with a search for a paradise substitute found in non-industrial countries. However, this characteristic does not distinguish the

tourist from the backpacker. This leads to the question: What is a tourist? The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) defines a tourist as someone who travels for at least a day and stays overnight a day or more at another place other than their home. This definition is all embracing and more or less everyone is counted; and tourist numbers in the industry are always shown as high as possible (Burns 2002: 42-43). Nevertheless, travelling people envisage themselves as a completely separate entity to that of the plain tourist. This depends on their motivation, for example golf- or adventure travelling.

In general, the term “tourist” always carries a negative connotation (McCabe 2005: 96-100). This applies to the attitude of the local population, as well for scholars in tourism research. McCabe explains as follows:

Tourism is [...] the leisure/recreational experience *par excellence* in that it enables a temporary escape from the centre, which nevertheless remains of peripheral significance. Tourism was conceived as a reversal of everyday activities but itself is devoid of meaning. (McCabe 2005:88)

The duration of travelling for tourists is limited and therefore they have only little opportunities and little time to seek authenticity. They are not risk-takers and usually stay at well-developed tourist destinations. The organised or the individual mass tourist will have little or almost no contact with the locals and relatively little immersion in the culture of the area, as they remain in a sort of “bubble,” shielded from the unknown. Mass tourists are known for buying all-inclusive, full organised and packaged holidays or they arrange everything from home, such as accommodation and excursions. Familiarity is very important to the tourist (Cohen 1974). Valene Smith, cited by Burns (2002: 46) developed a definition for the mass tourist. Traits are similar to Cohen’s description, though her focus differentiates. Her explanation is from the viewpoint of the tourist himself, whereas Cohen sees his definition from the point of view of the tourist industry. Smith says that mass tourists “are a continuous flux of visitors of middle-class income and values, expecting trained multi-lingual hotel and tourist staffs to fulfil their need as wanted. They expect Western amenities” (ibid.). This definition is neither overarching nor complete.

With the help of a discussion board, McCabe could trace different ways in which travellers and tourists see themselves. Participants named differentiating traits, which distinguished those tourist types from each other. The main characteristic was, of course, the different types of luggage and their way of dressing. One informant had an exact conceptualisation of how a tourist should look. The tourist wears a “knotted hanky”. Furthermore, most self-declared travellers, suggest that tourists only visit typical sights and never interact with the local population or never try endemic food. Most informants pointed out the lack of interest in terms of nature, intercultural exchange and contact (McCabe 2005: 98). This is one of the reasons why being a ‘tourist’ carries a negative connotation. While travellers, on the one hand, embrace and respect the new culture, tourists, conversely, destroy nature and culture. Unfortunately, tourists are constructed to be destructive, careless and irresponsible to nature and residents of the visited country.

Not everyone has the opportunity to be an independent traveller. Family and work restricts most people who would like to see more than what the average tourist visits. However, time is the main barrier and not everyone has the time to travel ‘off the beaten track’ (ibid.). Additionally it can be difficult to fulfil a dream trip with small children, who need restrictions and routines on their path to become an adult.

The Swedish Tourist Association (Svenska Turistföreningen) shows in the article *Resenär – Inte Turist!* (2003: 26-42), that the word traveller is mostly used symbolically; and it stands in combination of strengthening the self. It simply shows a person, who is able to manage exploring the world all by him/herself without the help of an operator. Young people especially place negative connotations on tourists, because they do not want to travel only to one place, but rather travel widely. Additionally ‘tourist’ is combined with the thought of going on an all-inclusive organised tour. Travelling, on the other hand, is more subjective and identity-rich, which has a connotation of open-mindedness and being tolerant. Of course those are traits everyone strives to achieve. In this sense, to describe oneself as a traveller is the safest option.

2.2. Backpackers

Backpacking is a common category and it happens to be a quite controversial topic. In general, backpackers believe they are true travellers in contrast to the mass tourist. Is that right? Research about this type of travelling began in the 1970's and Eric Cohen was one of the first concentrating on the topic of backpackers. In his early research studies he marked the transition from the drifter to the contemporary backpacker. Youth nomads began to travel early in the 17th century. It was called the *grand tour* and was practised mainly by upper-class young males in the 17th and 18th century. The main goal was not intentionally leisure; education was the primary reason for the journey (Elsrud 2003: 28). Wandering for employment became a role model for lower- and middle-class travellers, who explore the unknown (Cohen 2003: 96) in the 20th century and who went on journeys only for leisure or self experiences.

The search for the unknown, strange and fantastic was mostly widespread during the sixties of the last century among student groups in the United States and West Europe. A great amount of young adults travelled to Asia along the so-called *Hippie-Trail*, which is still today the most used journey route for rucksack tourists (Cederholm 1999: 40). Their goal was to create a distance from the "old life" and an alternative life-style, because of dissatisfaction with the way of their lives in the home country. To escape from those unpleasant emotions a "time-out" is needed. Self-finding, managing adventures and education gives back strength for the modern life (Binder 2005: 27). Characteristics are achieved while having a challengeable but enjoyable time in the world of the unknown.

Drifters, the first explorers of far cultures from the 1960's and 1970's, are described by Cohen (2003 originally published in 1973). They are the "trend-setters" for the backpackers, who follow in the footsteps of the former adventure travellers. Drifting means exploring the world of others by living and talking to the local population or eating their food and supporting their economy. The goal was to find "untouched" places in the world, where mass-tourism had not infiltrated the countryside and the local culture. To become an "ideal-drifter" has been difficult to achieve. Its meaning is to travel without a travel plan or a schedule, exploring remote and untouched areas. Backpacking, the drifter's succeeding form, becomes, according to Cohen

(2003), a mass phenomenon, which allows only a small amount of the drifter's original feeling. This is due to the adapting tourism economy in the foreign countries. Special itineraries are provided by customized infrastructure, such as transportation, accommodation and other facilities which a global traveller needs to feel comfortable. The principle of supply and demand regulated the standards of tourism.

It seems like rucksack³ travellers embrace the ideas and characteristics of drifters. That includes great interest for untouched sites, as well as encounters with the "real" life of the local community. However, a change in the idea of original backpacking emerged along with the *Vermassung* of this category (ibid: 98). The negative side effects of alternative tourism are that it sooner or later could emerge into a mass movement. The backpackers' frequented areas include similar traits as conventional tourism, which were rejected at the beginning. These backpacker „villages" demand the needs of the traveller i.e. shopping, food and accommodation, in the same way that a mass tourist requires.

Rucksack travellers spend a great deal of time in backpacker enclaves or travelling with buses from one enclave to another, following a route accidentally created by and for rucksack tourists. Only a few backpackers travel 'off the beaten track' and stay with local people (Elsrud 2004:30). The remainder makes their journey from one enclave to another, almost if they all share a "mental map" (Cohen 2003: 98). Backpackers seek the company of other like-minded individuals to share information and experiences about future and past activities. Word-of-mouth-recommendation is the most effective marketing strategy and partly more updated than the backpackers' bible, the guidebook "the Lonely Planet"⁴.

Travelling is a special institutionalized activity separated from everyday life. Extraordinary activities become the norm, which applies certainly for backpackers. Similar as the drifter, the backpacker makes a certain critique on the society by leaving the Western world behind and immersing into a world where otherness is ordinary and simple. This is one reason why backpackers choose to live a Spartan

³ Rucksack travelers and rucksack tourists are both synonyms for backpackers. The word rucksack is the equivalent for backpack, meaning carrying a bag or a sack on the back (compare: Concise Oxford English Dictionary 2004, 11th ed.). Rucksack tourists and backpackers serve the same.

⁴ Tony and Maureen Wheeler, the founder of the guidebook Lonely Planet, named the first guidebook about South East Asia "the Bible", because they claim to be the first one who covered that area. (www.lonelyplanet.de)

lifestyle with the least possible spending amount (Cederholm 1999: 16). To make an additional statement for alienation from the home society backpackers choose destinations with a great geographic distance from the home area and they prefer exotic locations, which have only little similarities to their home and society, flora and fauna. Backpackers usually try to stay abroad for a longer period than the normal two-to-four vacation weeks. By doing so, they intend to have higher chances to integrate into the foreign society and therefore are able to better understand the world of the others (McCabe 2005: 88-96). In general, backpackers share the same ideals, such as an interest of anti-materialism, nature and learning from different cultures of co-travellers and locals. They search for authenticity and they purport to find this in a primitive lifestyle in (hopefully) untouched worlds from the west (Alneng 2002: 128). Their main equipment is a backpack to store all their belongings. The dressing style is typical for this tourist category. Rucksack tourists try to blend in with the local population by buying local clothing. The goal is to avoid direct attention (McCabe 2005: 96-100).

Cited by Binder (2005: 27) Pearce gives the best-known definition pertaining to backpackers. This definition is adapted to European and North American backpackers travelling to Australia and includes five characteristics:

1. Preferring to live on a low budget: cheap food, accommodation and transportation. The intention is to stretch the travel time as much as possible. And it is an ideal to become closer to nature and to themselves.
2. Desire to meet other backpackers and locals: The idea is to expand the mind and to have the chance of receiving inside information about sights and locations.
3. An individual and flexible travel plan: It gives the backpacker the feeling of control and to demarcate from the “normal” , the charter tourist.
4. Surpassing long travel length: An abnormally long journey gives the chance to explore more of the country, but also dig deeper into the foreign world, because “real” travelling cannot be achieved through short term trips.
5. Desire for extraordinary activities: Having the chance to take risks and experience the extraordinary makes the backpacker a tourist of the other kind. In the foreign country he/she has the chance to take part in activities that are difficult to do in the home country. (Binder 2005: 27, Welk 2004: 80)

Every age group is represented among backpackers (Elsrud 2004), however most of these travellers are between twenty and thirty years old and they are in the middle of a junction in their lives, such as a gap year between school and university, or between changing jobs (Hyde, Lawsson 2003: 15).

Backpackers usually do not appreciate to be called tourists. Backpackers prefer to be labelled as a “backpacker” or “traveller”, as the more neutral synonym. They see themselves as more “cultural” or “authentic” (Elsrud 2004: 19) compared to tourists booking upper class hotels and destroying the scenery with their demand of vacation resorts.

2.3. Backpacking history

Scholars say that backpacking is a modern development. However, it did not materialise from nothing. The ideals and the mode of travelling arose during the 12th century. The culture of making a pilgrim’s voyage became commonplace⁵. Here, the traveller had the chance to experience the variety of culture, which Christianity was promising. Back then, religion was dominating the destination choices. However, the pilgrim had the chance to discover culture in the context of his belief combined with human experiences. Pilgrimage has a romantic image, especially in the 19th century, when mainly culture tourism was established. People sought a lost world and wished to rediscover their historical roots (Löfgren 1989: 23). The pursuit of the extraordinary became greater and the longing for harmony in society and an uncomplicated life grew stronger. Similar traits are found as today. For example, a journey to the East is loaded with the image of peace and otherness. Tibet and Buddhism have a connotation of a stress free and uncomplicated lifestyle. The desires and wishes have remained relatively unchanged in the heart of the traveller, only the destinations and the possibilities to visit them with the help of new technologies, such as airplanes. The search for primitivism and exploring the world of the others remained, in general, the same.

⁵ The Camino de Santiago de Capostela is an example for such a pilgrim journey. “The Camino de Santiago de Compostela, also known in English as The Way of St James, is a collection of old pilgrimage routes which cover all Europe. They all have Santiago de Compostela in North West Spain as their final destination. For more than 1000 years pilgrims have been walking along the Camino de Santiago.” <http://www.caminodesantiago.me.uk/> 07-04-09

Another precursor for backpackers is the phenomenon of the educational tour, the so-called *grand tour* (Elsrud 2004: 28, Cederholm 1999: 37). Usually, young aristocrats, sons of rich English families, went on a roundtrip on the continent to finish their education and gain foreign language knowledge. These journeys could take more than one year. At the end of the 17th century this travel form reached its zenith and a huge amount of young bourgeoisie visited continental Europe. The two major destinations visited were Paris and Bologna. These young men used pre-existing infrastructure and with their demand for sights, supplies extended and the journey along Europe became more pleasant. The education trip is also seen as the embryo for modern tourism (Andolf 1989: 58, Cederholm 1999: 38). In certain travelogues it was mentioned that the bourgeois traveller enjoyed to journey like a tramp. Because of the popularity of the educational trip, a sort of guidebook arose with watercolour paintings and poetry. Here, it was written what to see and what to experience (Löfgren 1989: 11). Peregrination was, similar to backpacking today, a gap time to gain a sort of examination of maturity.

How is it in the modern time? The successor of peregrination was train travelling in the 1970's and 1980's. This was the time when Interrail was at its peak. Following sights, fellow travellers became an important part of the experience. Getting to know people, who they would never have been able to meet at home, became new and fascinating to the wayfarer.

All three forms of travelling have the same characteristic in developing the personality, gaining knowledge, while casting off stereotypes and prejudices. In all cases it is a form of special study, which books are unable to truly unearth. **It is a self-study to analyse humans, their way of living and their environment.**

This short explanation and presentation of the origins of backpackers, has the simple purpose to show that backpacking is not a modern concept. It rather illustrates that it has been a process of a couple of hundred years, shaping the ideals and ideas of today's backpacking.

2.4. Backpacking and Tourism Economics

The word tourist is a loanword taken from the French language and it is based on the word *le tour* (travel, walk) and appears in most European countries around the 1830's as the noun tourism (Löfgren 1989:9). The wayfarer goes out into the world to learn, to think, to see and to experience. They have a desire for the land far away but also long for home at the same time. From this longing for the strange and fantastic, a global market and a worldwide industry emerged. New strategies to tempt visitors were realised, but the sector operates in established and traditional frames (ibid.).

What is important to attract visitors? This applies, of course, to both - the backpackers and the tourists. Tourism emerges when three conditions are present:

1. Something attractive must be there to entice,
2. There must be a good transportation system, public transport or/and good street conditions and
3. And a range of decent accommodation and restaurant must be at the destination.

Furthermore, a working tourism industry also needs people who have the time and the desire to go on a trip (Andolf 1989: 50).

Spare time and leisure is an achievement of modernism. During industrialism people had almost no spare time, because work and earning money was too important. Additionally, farmers could not leave their cattle unattended for more than one day. In the 1930's vacation of around two weeks were introduced (ibid.). Travelling was expensive but of a higher standard. Exploring the world by walking did not cost much more than the food the traveller needed. Accommodation was found in the house of friendly farmers. During this time, in the 1930's, it was a privilege to host wanderers. This attitude changed when transportation modernised: a railway system was established. Travelling by train was in so far the fastest and the most comfortable way to go on a journey. Until the 1970's and the 1980's it was the fastest, most commodious and the cheapest method of travelling. That is one reason why, for example, the practise of Inter-rail could be established (Andolf 1989: 54).

However, the attitude and the desire of humans to actually travel around is the most important condition for tourism. But what are their reasons to go on journeys? Only little research has been found about the travel reasons for backpackers. Since they

travel on low budgets they have not been interesting to the industry until recently. But the tide has turned and backpacking tourism earned more and more attention from the market because young adults are a growing income source and therefore will be more important in the future. Moreover, backpackers occupy the status to set new travel trends, by exploring new areas and sights. They open up new destinations and set the demands for a new market. The industry started to take notice of the backpackers and the tourism industry sector widens (Richards, Wilson 2004:7-8). The motivation or decision-making process is far more detailed for the backpacker, because of the travel length and the flexible itineraries. There are different factors pushing or pulling young adults into the world. Those elements are dependant on the environment and the social status of the wayfarer. Pulling elements are more personal and are combined with the self-interest of young adults. These characteristics and the personal development of the traveller lead to a decision and choice of destination. The following table illustrates the motivation process for destination among backpackers:

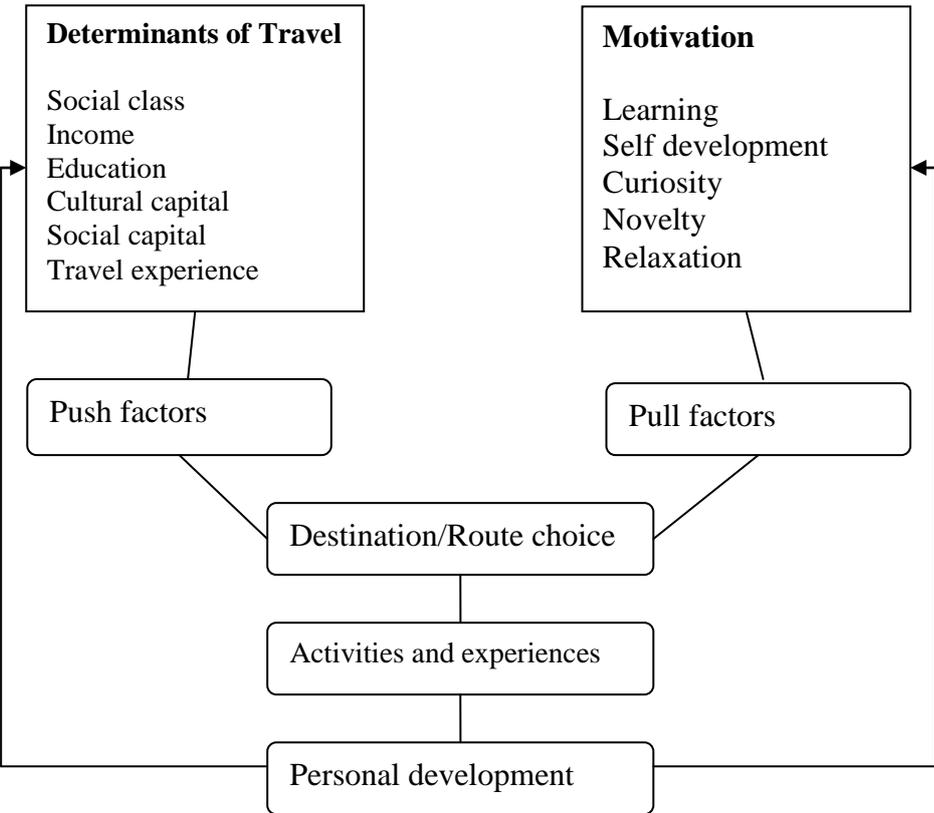


Table 1: Travel motivations of backpackers (from Richards, Wilson 2004: 9, compare also Burns 2002: 41)

The illustration shows some elements of tourist motivation and what influences the traveller from the outside (society) and from the inside (personal attitude and development).

Tourist economy theories also claim another perspective on the parameters of motivation, strengths and weaknesses.

According to the World Tourism Organisation, tourism is the biggest and fastest growing industry in the world. Tourism produces approximately six percent of the world's gross national product (GNP). The World Tourism Organisation controlled also the numbers for incoming and out coming tourism.

Tourism has an influence on the economical micro (travel suppliers) and macro (country and government) level. The micro level is the business directly serving the tourist, such as

- Accommodation suppliers: hotels, guest house, hostels, bed and breakfast
- Restaurants
- Recreation facilities: theatre, concert halls, national parks, nature
- Miscellaneous: shops and grocery
- The tourist attractions: natural wonders, museums, theme parks, gardens
- Travel expeditors: travel agencies, reception service, travel companies
- Transportation: car rental, bus, rail, cruise ship, airplane (Lundberg *et al* 1995 : 4)

These components serving the tourist, are all embracing of the needs of the tourist and are often rather small businesses interacting directly with the visitor. They are the opinion makers and motivation factors for a person to visit an area.

According to Lundberg et al (1995) it is the role of the government to regulate taxing and promoting tourism and to help out in critical situations. The government supervises the supply and demand at the micro level and, therefore, the potential of incoming tourism. Forecasting travel trends is the duty of the communities and regions. In order to find out trends, the country provides market studies and promotes motivation elements as a trigger for growing incoming tourism. This is also called the macro level (ibid). Both, the macro and micro level have to work together in order to establish a good working market for the traveller.

Image and prestige are very important ingredients for promotion. As mentioned in the definition paragraph, backpackers pursue a low budget and long time travel, but they also seek the extraordinary and a world different from their own. Therefore, cheap countries with a totally different culture are preferred. Every type of tourist follows different motivational patterns, but there are also common triggers for choosing a country in order to fulfil the simplest needs of the traveller.

Another primary parameter is time. Someone who is not able to take a gap year from work, for instance, will also never go travelling a year or for longer. A backpacker has this opportunity and travels around for a rather long time and visits usually more than one country (Jefferson, Lickorish 1988: 101).

The third element in decision-making is money (ibid. 102). The backpacker travels on a low budget, but that does not mean that he can travel without any savings. In contrast, most backpackers save a certain amount of money, which is supposed to last until the end of the journey or the traveller earns small amounts to extend the trip. In Australia, backpackers spend more money in total than a tourist. Richards and Wilson (2005: 24) came to the conclusion, that a backpacker spends ca. 2200 US Dollars compared with a tourist's 1470 US Dollar, during their stay in Australia. However, on a daily basis the amount of money spent by backpackers stands under the spending amount of a tourist. Nevertheless, backpackers are important to the national income of the destination.

Age and civil status are determiners, which influence the style and the choice of destination. That is also why most scholars noted that backpackers are usually young and single (Hyde, Lawsson 2003: 15). For the marketer, these two elements are uncontrollable. Additionally, weather is a secondary parameter of decisions making. People who prefer the sun and warmth try to escape the dull and cold weather at home.

The physical shape of the destination and history or heritage attracts visitors from abroad. It is the fact to gain knowledge and to experience different things while travelling. Therefore, a different culture with history and traditions or even another way of life is a parameter-inviting tourist (Jefferson, Lickorish 1988: 107).

Reasons for avoiding a country are, for example, political situations. People like to travel to safe countries, where their lives are not at stake. Taking risks is a trait common only among special types of tourist. Anxieties about language are a primary obstacle while being abroad. Communication is the key in mastering difficult situations. But also handling new currencies, food and, in the worst case, the medical system may discourage a tourist. For some destinations even the sanitary standards are a deterrent (ibid.). In the backpacker scene it is obvious that a lot of backpackers prefer to go to South East Asia and then follow on to Australia. Here, English is the lingua franca among the locals and backpackers. Learning English is a pivotal factor for travelling this route.

An analysis about the strengths and weaknesses of a destination, gives information about the potential of the market and it is combined with the motivation of the travelling choice. Ecotourism is an alternative combining tourism and nature. However, distracters, such as mosquitoes or polluted air, belong to the side of weaknesses (ibid: 60-62). Heritage, including mentality, music, cuisine and architecture, can be seen in both ways, negative and positive. Rotten architecture and an ugly city will hardly attract tourists. Conversely, they will deter them. The same applies for unfriendly encounters with the local population. Music, for example, is usually seen as strength of the country, because it can be the home of a certain band or music style. Latin America, for instance, is known for its music style and suitable dancing elements, such as mambo or salsa.

Nevertheless, the first impression is important. How is the accommodation, restaurant and, especially, how are the sanitary facilities? Transport communication is especially important for travellers landing by plane.

Motivation parameters stand closely in connection with the strengths and weaknesses of a country. The strengths are the triggers for the visit, while weaknesses conversely prevent the tourist by coming to the destination (Jobber 2006:335). In combination, both theories are of importance for the analysis to uncover the market possibilities from the perspective of the tourist-type backpacker. Ecotourism is said to be one of the biggest strengths of Ecuador. Because of its geographical position near the equator and playing host to a part of the amazons rainforest. Ecuador is combining tourism while preserving nature.

2.5. Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a form of tourism, which is based on nature and culture activities in combination with sustainable development. The goal is a non-consumptive and non-damaging working process, which protects and conserves the environment, on demand of sustainability and education. The right way of ecotourism means that it is tourism, which does not damage the environment, its wildlife or its people. Additionally the local population should benefit from the cooperation (Björk 2000).

A sustainable tourism development project has to be considered on a long-term basis. The local tourist industry will take it into account and include it in their marketing strategies. Ecotourism will provide an authentic countryside including possibilities for the tourist to maintain and take part in the area. They may admire, study and understand the eco-tourist territory, but also help to maintain untouched nature by enjoying and appreciating it. A balance between ecology and economy must be the main focus of the development and a long-term benefit should be a part of the engagement (Gould 1999).

The four main central factors in eco-tourism; tourists, tourist industry, authorities and the local people, work closely together and lead this tourist form to success. National and local administrations involved, whereas mainly the local level is dependant on sustainable tourism. All responsible players work together, giving input to each other. It includes a high complexity in the working progress among the four factors (Björk 2000: 189-202).

The concept relating to sustainability in Ecuador, aims to preserve the rainforest. By doing, so implementing tourist in recreational activities is an option and local culture and traditions have a chance to be preserved. When nature-based tourism occurs in Ecuador, locals have the chance to interact in the process and raise the economy. However, nature-based tourism is always dependant on one place (Gould 1999: 246) and only the economy in one region can be stimulated. Next to an economical upswing, the main goal is to protect and preserve the area and the local communities. The primary condition for functioning ecotourism is a relatively intact ecosystem to present to the visitor. In combination, the demand for service and transport is rising. Already established infrastructure, because of the oil exploitation, is used by nature-

based tourist activities. Transportation to the Oriente, the jungle, is the main necessary element to build up sustainable tourism. Roads from Quito to Tena and to the reserves make it possible to create an infrastructure for visitors. Roads originally built for oil transport give access to travellers to visit the jungle and, at the same time, invest in the local economy.

Ecuador attracts nature-based and adventure tourism (ibid: 249). Sustainable tourism is steadily growing in Ecuador. However, tourism adds only little to the national income. The banana and oil industry leads the economy in Ecuador. Trials have been made to combine both branches of industry, because “tourism may be the rainforest’s last best hope. It may also be the last best hope for the rainforest’s indigenous inhabitants as they seek to defend their lives, their homes, and some semblance of their culture” (ibid.). Ecuador is trying to save the countryside by leading groups into the forest. Here, tourists have the chance to learn and invest instead of destroying nature.

3. Method

This chapter explains in what way I prepared for the field study, how I collected the empirical material and where, as well as how the analysis is meant to look. First I will explain which tools I used for answering my problem questions to complete with an overview about the interview technique.

In this thesis, interviewees are also called protagonists. Normally, this means figures in fiction or drama. However, the title fits to refer to the subjects met, interviewed and simply interacted with. The reason for this choice is first of all that the respondents are the protagonists of their own story and secondly for stylistic reasons to avoid awkward expressions such as “the asked person”.

3.1. Data ascertainment

A mixture of different method styles for the data ascertainment and evaluation is usually worthwhile. There were basically two possibilities: a qualitative or a quantitative procedure. I decided to conduct qualitative interviews with backpackers. An interview is the best tool to find out something about the desired topic through the eyes of the respondents. The qualitative method, however, has the disadvantage of excluding a high amount of protagonists.

Using the qualitative method of interpretation, I will analyse and refer to the problems raised for this research. The goal is not to give a miniature viewpoint on the subject; it is rather to illustrate a general picture of backpacking culture. The qualitative procedure concentrates on the quality. The aim for the method is to receive new and deeper knowledge about the topic (Patel, Davidsson 2003, 102-103). The qualitative interview is a very detailed, emotional and powerful method to gain knowledge about experiences and the everyday life of a backpacker. The protagonist has the chance to express himself with his own words and from his own point of view (Kvale 1997, 25-40).

A distinctive attribute of the interviews, was the open questions with the respondents able to answer freely. All questions followed a red thread, which helped to ask

similar questions to all the subjects⁶. It was important to receive answers on the one hand about basic information, such as origin, age, occupation, duration of time in South America and particular in Ecuador. On the other hand, it was of interest to find out about the motivation, other backpacking experiences, travel itinerary, attitude to co-travellers and locals. An interview took approximately one hour and they were all taped with the help of a surveying apparatus. The answers were analysed based on their subject matter.

A practical and ideal interview location was the backpacker hostel⁷, because a lot of individual travellers preferred to stay overnight in this type of accommodation. Other locations were directly excluded, because of the risk of false answers from non-backpackers.

The intensive interviews were held in the lounges⁸ of the hostels, because it was the simplest way to find interested people who were willing to answer questions about their travelling experiences. In hostels with a practical and comfortable common room, it was easier to get in contact with the protagonists. With some of the subjects, I gained contact before the interview and others I asked directly if they would like to help me undertake my research. The cooperativeness of the backpackers was, in total, very high. To receive a wide view on the attitude of backpackers in Ecuador, no concentration for a specific location was considered.

In addition, an analysis about the advantages and disadvantages of Ecuador as a destination from the point of view of the backpacker was conducted. The interview questions were also designed to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses. The reason for this method is to obtain an additional perspective on the backpacker culture and how the destination fits to the expectations of a rucksack tourist. The goal is to view general aspects in the framework of the single traveller, equipped with theoretical matters.

⁶ See appendix for an example of a questionnaire.

⁷ A Backpacker Hostel is usually a low budget hotel where mainly low budget travelers stay overnight.

⁸ Lounges are common rooms at the hostel, where backpackers meet, occasionally watch TV and talk. Because of the limited place one has, usually not more than the own bed, one room of bigger size is needed to get in contact with like-minds or to do other activities. Privacy is a rare value while traveling on a shoestring.

The evaluation and the collection of the empirical material would usually be titled as the “soft method” (Binder 2005, 86). Nevertheless, it bears also strength in this type. One is a reflexive view on the data and an evaluation of observations, events and experiences can take place. The results of the evaluation may give ideas, information and show trends about the backpacking tourist sector in Ecuador.

3.2. Preparation

Performing an examination stationed at one spot was out of the question, because of the fact that this topic is dealing with mobility. To achieve the best possible results it was necessary to get acquainted with the field itself. The point was to visit as many places as possible and to live the life similar to the ones of the protagonists. An observing and participatory method was chosen to receive the answers for this study by intensive interviews. Practicing and taking part in the same experience as the subjects were going through, made it easier to understand the answers.

However, at the very beginning, a field study, or simply a journey, had to be organized. Like every other rucksack tourist I had to think of how to prepare for the trip: which vaccinations I needed, what to bring for clothes, warm or cold. Which travel route I might take and whom I will meet. For the two latter it was difficult to give a prognosis, because that was the whole idea of being a backpacker: being mobile and constantly meeting new people.

How could I secure my data? A laptop was impossible to bring, because of the risk of losing my equipment.⁹ In addition, it is impossible to worry about a computer when heavy rain occurred. Therefore to return to a pre-modern method was necessary and paper and pen would be great to work with. Still, there was a big risk of losing the backpack with the notes and the surveying apparatus. Additionally, a light version of material had to be found, because the equipment needed to be carried around Ecuador.

The whole idea of following backpackers in their footsteps (Binder 2005, 62) means researching different places to find the connection of geography and the backpacking

⁹ South America is considered to be more dangerous and robbery is rated to be more common in these countries than on other continents. During the preparation for the field study I was reading frequently about the fact of danger in the country.

society. This idea includes primarily the research of stories from travellers. The behaviour and the attitude of the protagonists differ from so called “home comers.” It was my goal to research the behaviour and opinions of backpackers while travelling and not after their journey. In the latter case, a conflict of the mind could appear and only the bright sight of travelling is remembered. The attendance in the field was important to understand the experiences of the respondents.

Nevertheless, a careful study of information accessible through the internet gave a pre-insight of the world of backpackers. It was possible to make global social contact with other travellers, by viewing homepages, commentaries at community websites, such as “face book”, or reading travel diaries at varies blogs.

3.3. The Field Study

Field study does not only mean the time while travelling with other backpackers. It also includes the time before and after the journey. Nevertheless, the observation and the intensive interviews are the main material of the analyses. Ecuador appeared to be a very interesting setting for the field study, but unfortunately, my research was taken during the low season. This was the reason for the low amount of tourists in the country. Moreover, the backpacking tradition in the South American countries is quite young compared to Europe or South East Asia.¹⁰

South America is a very attractive region for rucksack travellers. That gave me the guarantee to find prospective respondents to my questions during the short amount of time to study. I decided to limit my research to the country Ecuador, because the websites I studied in advance of my research trip considered the country to be a jewel among the South American countries and it was mentioned to be a safe place for single women travellers. Those were two reasons, which convinced me to travel to the republic. Furthermore, it is one of the cheaper countries in South America. Time and money limit gave no space for a comparison with e.g. Australia or New Zealand. Even though this gives the field study a slightly practical touch, it was my desire to explore the backpacker market on the South American continent. One reason, as earlier mentioned, is the lack of literature for the particular region and the second reason was a personal admiration for this area. The field study journey lasted exactly

¹⁰ Here it is necessary to refer back to the paragraph of backpacking history.

eight weeks. During this time I became acquainted with a fellow traveller, who I followed along the whole trip¹¹. Along with observing and having conversations with her, I interviewed other backpackers met in hostels. I wanted to know the style of their travel form and their motivation for the choice of region. Additionally, I was interested in the backpacking culture, the travellers' lifestyle and the country as a destination. My research is based on ten taped intensive interviews with backpackers, one field diary, observation and examination of private homepage and travel diaries on the internet about the experiences in Ecuador. Moreover, I studied three different travel guidebooks that were made by backpackers for backpackers. These were the Lonely Planet Ecuador, the Footprint Ecuador-Peru-Bolivia and the Insight Guide Ecuador. The first two are considered to be typical for low budget travellers. The latter gives general information about the country, its history and culture.

The entrance to the study field appeared very easy. At the beginning magazine articles, novels, travel shows on television/internet (www.lonelyplanet.tv) and Internet based forums gave me an insight and the needed preparation for the upcoming journey. For the travel route I decided to follow the so-called "Gringo trail"¹² where most backpackers went.

During the journey, it was not difficult to come into contact with co-travellers. In this field of study it is not necessary to know the circle of subjects. On the contrary, it is rather unusual to know each other in the community of low budget travellers. Everyone searches for the contact to one and other. Therefore it was an easy "study field" where I could blend in and find new contacts.

¹¹ We happened to have the same travel route and it was safer to travel in a couple as alone.

Freya (more explanation chapter 5) has backpacking experience from earlier journeys to Australia and around Europe. She was also glad to find a travel partner for the social aspect, but also to minimize the chances for violent acquaintance with locals. We also had the same interests for activities, such as mountain climbing, markets, horseback riding etc.

¹² The "Gringo Trail" is a synonym for a travel route most western tourist take. These are usually the most famous sights in the country. For Ecuador the "Gringo Trail" includes: Quito, Baños, Chimborazo, Cuenca, Guayaquil, Mindo, Vilcabamba, Montañita, Puerto Lopez, Otavalo and the Galapagos Islands (http://www.ecuaworld.com/gringo_trail.htm. 19-01-09).

4. Destination Ecuador – an overview

This chapter deals with the opportunities Ecuador offers to the backpacker. It includes information about the geography and facilities attracting backpackers.

Ecuador is the smallest of all the Latin American countries. It offers a diverse world with four different regions, with a fascinating history, culture and nature resources. Situated at the middle of two hemispheres it encapsulates two worlds, the ancient and the modern. Ecuador offers history combined with a fantastic landscape, its people and culture (Ecuador Tourist Board: 14-01-09). The country can be divided into four parts: the Amazon, in Ecuador known as the Oriente, the Andes, the Pacific Coastal Region and the Galapagos Islands.

The area of the Andes is covered with 30 volcanoes. The mountains form a line like a backbone through the Republic, where the Pan-American Highway passes through and follows the “Avenue of the Volcanoes (Insight Guide 2007, 17). Many small towns and villages are of interest to the tourist, because of the Indian markets and fiestas (Rachowiecki 1997: 18).

The Oriente located to the East of the Andean slopes retain the Amazonian rainforest with a river system crossing the whole area. The land opening for the oil industry in the 1970’s led to increased agriculture. However, projects for ecotourism develop, with the hope of trying to save the original face of this area with its fauna, flora and its people and culture. (Insight Guide 2007:19).

The coast is located between the Pacific Ocean and the mountains and Rainforest was previously abundant. The sandy beaches are covered with coconut palms and the ocean is warm the entire year round. Guayaquil, the largest city in the area, is economically most important. Here, the national park for the ecological system of dry forest is located and different whale species attract tourists (National Tourist Board 14-01-09).

The Galapagos Islands are an archipelago approximately 1000 km from the mainland of Ecuador in the Pacific Ocean. Most of the fauna and flora are endemic (Kunstaetter 2001: 392). Today, wildlife is still the main attraction and one reason is

the tameness of the animals. Never needing to face an enemy, the birds, iguanas, turtles and tortoise have no instinctive fear for man.

Human settlement is limited on the Islands, but it occurs to be an Eldorado for Ecuadorians (Kunstaetter 2001: 394). The island Santa Cruz is the home of the most populated town, Puerto Ayora, and it is the main tourist centre in the archipelago. Santa Cruz has around 15,000 inhabitants (ibid).

There are predetermined characteristics for infrastructure, such as climate and geographic location (mentioned above). Socio-technical structures are useful for the society, for example roads, telecommunications and tourist accommodation and so forth.

It is no problem to find shelter in Ecuador and it is always possible to arrive late and still receive a bed. Almost every town has a place where the traveller can stay overnight; however, in the remotest areas no hostels are found. In the largest cities, Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca, luxury hotels in a European standard are available. Prices differ in the various categories. The low budget traveller pays for the cheapest bed ca 3 dollars. Accommodation chains establish along the “Gringo trail”. Usually, these hostels were from the beginning made from backpackers for backpackers. With the higher amount of travellers those hostels grow more popular and their names are found in different edges in the country.

In Ecuador getting around by air, bus or boat is the most common. The transportation system is convenient and sufficient. Additionally, Ecuador is a small country, making travel distances short in kilometres and hours. Most frequently used are buses, followed by plane or boat.

In 1908 the railway system was opened cutting down the travel time from 12 days to 12 hours, from Guayaquil to Quito. Train transportation is nowadays a tourist attraction and not used as normal public transport anymore. The *El Niño* phenomenon in the 1990’s destroyed major parts of the railway track (Insight Guide 2007: 331).

The republic has two major airports, one in Guayaquil and one in Quito. Internal flights, with the exception to the Galapagos Islands, are cheap and reward with a

fantastic view on the countryside. Air transportation is well-developed, especially to tourist places at the coast or to the Oriente. 34 airports are in use to connect the Sierra and the coast with the Amazon region (Rachowiecki 1997: 98). Next to the plane, boat travel is the principal transportation style in the Oriente. It is common to arrive by bus at the major cities, then to continue by motorboat or canoe. Some jungle lodges are only accessible via waterways, and so are different sites, such as animal rescue stations.

Since 1950, the road network has expanded and the conditions of the streets are fairly good (Insight Guide, 2007: 331). Central bus stations are found almost in every town, which means the traveller does not have to switch location by changing buses. Buses are frequent and inexpensive, which makes it easy for the tourist to travel to the next stop of their journey (Rachowiecki 1997: 98). Overland buses are usually on time. However, if the bus is only half full it will spend its time collecting more passengers. The driver's assistant is yelling out the destination to attract more people journeying.

The recent trends in Ecuador's economy are marked by the struggles of the past years. In the middle of the 1990's, Ecuador was at war with Peru concerning their border. Only a couple of years later, the *El Niño* devastated the landscape. During the same period, inflation in the republic was so high¹³, that the incumbent president decided to implement the US Dollar in the country. The republic's economy stabilized in 2000 after it hit the bottom and a balanced budget was proposed (Kunstaetter 2001: 439). Today Ecuador earns its money by exporting oil, roses, bananas, shrimp, cacao and coffee.

Tourism, as an international income, continues to develop and became the republic's third most important source of foreign earnings. Over one million tourists entered the country in 2008 (www.turismo.gov.ec, 14-01-09). Most visitors come from the neighbour countries Colombia (200.487) in the North and from Peru (147.420) in the South. Since the peace treaty between Ecuador and Peru many Peruvians contribute to the tourism business in the South of the country. However, most travellers came from the United States (244.406) in 2008 (ibid.) The Galapagos Islands are a major tourist destination, especially for visitors from western countries. Recently, eco- and

¹³ About 75 % at its peak reached the inflation in Ecuador during this time (Kunstaetter 2001: 439).

ethno tourism became increasingly popular, especially in the Oriente and the highlands. Nevertheless, tourism is mostly concentrated in special areas, for example the places along the so-called *Gringo Trail* (ibid.)

Ecotourism,¹⁴ in the right way, is very important for the region of the Oriente. Here, the social differences between the jungle residents and the tourists are aggravating, which sometimes leads to misunderstanding or even corruption. This is one reason why for example the Cofanes tribe tries to avoid contact with the western world (Davies1998:25).

The Galapagos Islands have a fragile ecosystem and tourism is not helping the circumstances on the archipelago. 20 years ago only 40 000 visitors came to the island group, rising to 70 000 in the 1990's. Today there are 140 000 tourists coming to the islands. The ecosystem is under huge pressure. Along with mass tourism a demand for lifestyle quality follows. More than 20 000 inhabitants try to accomplish the needs of the visitors, which includes bars, taxis, massages, accommodation and even laundry salons. Graham Watkins, the Director of the Charles Darwin Research Station, states that the Galapagos archipelago could be destroyed in 5 to 10 years if the treatment of the islands continues as before (Merian 2008: 111-113).

*Artesanias*¹⁵ are found throughout Ecuador. Travellers admire the woven clothing and handicrafts in the Ecuadorian style. These woollen clothing and Andean artefacts are usually sold by *indígenas*¹⁶ in colourful ponchos and skirts. Tourists are attracted by *artesanía* markets. The biggest market is located in Otavalo, only two hours north of Quito. Woolen clothing, tapestries, blankets and belts woven in typical Ecuadorian pattern are found at these bazaars (Davies 1998: 60). Leather goods in every variation are sold as well on markets or in special tourist towns, for example in Baños.

In 2008 the development of a marketing plan (el Plan de Marketing Turístico del Ecuador) continues. The aim of the plan is to promote Ecuador worldwide with a closer cooperation with travel agencies in México, Brasilia, the United States and Canada, as well as Argentina, Chile and Colombia. Ecotourism and the preservation

¹⁴ See chapter 2.5.

¹⁵ Artesanía means latterly arts and crafts.

¹⁶ Indigenous inhabitants of Ecuador are called as well indígenas.

of the biodiversity shall be promoted with the help of the institution Rainforest Alliance (www.globaledge.msu.edu, 14-01-09).

5. It's all about Backpacking

In this chapter the empirical material will be examined. In the beginning, the protagonists are introduced to obtain an overview about the backpacking situation while I was on the field study. Furthermore, the chapter concentrates on the backpacking identity and community making. Hereby financial aspects and the preparation for the journey are added to conclude with a discussion about the pull factors for visiting Ecuador. Sustainable tourism will be the future and therefore the protagonists were asked about their opinions concerning the topic.

Ecuador is an interesting place for backpackers to travel. A lot of travellers choose to come to South America and on their way south they pass through Ecuador. All kinds of nationalities are represented. During my field study I encountered travellers from Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, England, Wales, Ireland, Australia, Chile, Israel and Scandinavia. Backpacker hostels are found almost everywhere and a lot of enterprises are established and specialized for Backpackers, especially in the fun and activity sector.

5.1. The protagonists – a presentation

The ten interviews, which is the basis of the analysis, were taken throughout my travel from Quito to Vilcabamba, situated in the South of the country. Most of the protagonists were women (8 from 10 interviews). However, that was no specific intention of mine. It simply was the result of my encounters and friendships with the chosen subjects. As a result, I noticed that women tended to answer my questions in more detail, which was of great help to examine the rucksack tourist culture in Ecuador. The interviews were written down and analyzed to understand the backpacking situation. This way a pattern and connection between the answers could be made.

The protagonists' ages ranged from 20 up to 27. Six out of then respondents had finished University or had been working for a couple of years; and three subjects wanted to go travelling before entering their higher education. The duration of travel over all on their trip was as long as from three months up to eighteen months. About two weeks up to seven month was the average travel length in Ecuador.

Sonja

Sonja, 26 years old from Canada is staying 5 months in the country. Before coming to Ecuador, she had backpacked in 15 other countries. Her reasons to come to the republic were mainly to improve her Spanish, and to work in an interesting project as a volunteer¹⁷. She does not see herself as a backpacker in Ecuador, because of the fact that she is working there and not moving around from place to place. Her intention is to gain an insight into Ecuadorian culture. She would like to avoid staying in a so-called “bubble,” which a hostel creates, while moving from place to place. Before her journey she did not prepare much. She only read a bit in her guidebook, the Lonely Planet, and searched on the internet. Her way of getting around the country is by bus and hitch hiking, because those two variants are the cheapest alternatives. The main reason for choosing accommodation is the price. A hostel has to be cheap and also give good opportunities to meet other likeminded individuals. In general, Sonja is travelling alone, but she enjoys the combination of both, travelling by herself and with company.

“It’s good doing things on your own, and then you become your own person. You meet more people and different things, than with a companion you know. You’re more spontaneous! But on long bus rides or when you arrive early in the morning at a place it’s nice to have someone.”

Sonja is spending about 8 to 20 dollars a day. She invests her money mainly in food, accommodation, internet, bar, cigarettes or sightseeing. Extras for spending money are for example climbing a volcano, where a guide is required, or whale watching at the coast.

Juliane

Juliane is 27 years old and comes from Germany. Previously she has been to Ecuador backpacking. Now, it is her second time in the Republic doing volunteer work in the jungle. The lengths of her stay overall amounts nine months, and seven of them she will stay in Ecuador. Already having visited Australia, New Zealand and South East Asia, Juliane is familiar with the travelling style.

¹⁷ I have interviewed three volunteers, because I consider them to be a big part of the backpacking community, especially in South America. Before or after their volunteer work they travel and explore the country further. Since it is not the main target group for this research only three representatives have been asked. While researching different travel agencies, volunteer work was promoted primarily for South America, whereas for Australia work and travel seems to be a huge issue. (compare: www.worktravel.org, www.statravel.se and www.voluntarresor.se 27-01-09)

Coming to Ecuador was marked by no special intention. It was rather the choice of volunteer work, which stressed the choice of the country. Nevertheless, she fell in love with the culture and its people. Before her trip she did not prepare very much. Just like others, she had heard how great Ecuador was from different people at home and on previous journeys. She searched a bit on the Internet and scanned through books and television documentaries. Juliane sees herself as a backpacker: "I have a big backpack. It is my home. Everything is in there!" Finding accommodation is easy by asking fellow backpackers and in an "emergency you can take the Lonely Planet". Getting around in Ecuador is very easy, because bus connections are found to every place and bus riding is cheap.

"Going with the bus on bad road conditions is what makes it real being in Ecuador; otherwise you can stay home and speed over the highway."

In general, Juliane prefers to travel with a companion. One reason is safety and one is being able to share the emotions and experiences. However, it is fascinating that one is never really travelling alone because there are always enough individual travellers around searching for the contact to the other. As a characteristic for a backpacker, Juliane lives on a small budget and her investments for the day range between ten to fifteen dollars a day, spending money on food, accommodation, bus rides and activities.

Freya

Freya is from Germany and 24-years-old. During her journey, she will stay in total three months in South America with two of them in Ecuador. In her previous trip, Freya backpacked around Australia, New Zealand and in Mexico. In order to come to Ecuador she bought a guidebook, the Footprint, because it was highly recommended on the German Amazon website. Further, she talked to other people and searched the Internet. Freya sees herself as a backpacker, because like others she wears a backpack and lives on a small budget. She always wanted to come to South America and Quito seemed like a good start. She heard that Ecuador offered activities such as horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking. The country is small and relatively safe. Freya is fluent in Spanish and therefore could encounter difficult situations and

resolve them easily. Meeting other backpackers is important for her, especially if one is travelling alone.

You meet backpackers from all over the world and you learn from them a lot. I was hanging out with Israelis and I learned so much. I wasn't aware they don't believe in God¹⁸. They know a lot about Europe and we have no clue about their country.

Next to food and accommodation she invests her budget in extras, uncommon among backpackers. Despite the price, she went to the Galapagos Islands:

“You never know when you come back again. Next time I come to South America, I wanna see Patagonia. And just coming up for the Galapagos it's not worth it.”

Expanding experiences through interacting with co-travellers and observing the local population was one essential reason for Freya to come Ecuador. She also enjoys travelling with a companion because it is safer in general.

Rotem

Rotem is 24 and comes from Israel. He will stay ten months in South America and around one month in Ecuador. He started his trip in the United States, travelling through Central America and going further south direction Argentina. He wanted to come to Ecuador, because it is considered to be a quiet country and not hosting too many tourists. He definitely enjoyed staying on the Galapagos Islands. Rotem did not prepare a lot for his trip; he simply wants to listen to what co-travellers recommend. Thereby he likes to travel with all nationalities to exchange culture. In his opinion “Backpackers are prepared for all activities, [...] activities such as hiking, surfing and diving. They have the gear with them and carry it around the country”. Rotem noticed the local population as “really warm and [they] wanted to help, even if they don't know”.

Karen

Karen, 27 years old coming from Ireland, will stay a total year in South America and about one month in Ecuador. It is her first time backpacking, but everything has been as expected. She is travelling with two other friends who planned the trip about one

¹⁸ Here, Freya was referring to a conversation she had with Shira the day before. She imagined that everyone in Israel was a god believing Jew. Shira told her that she sees herself as a Jewish person but she does not necessarily believe in God.

and half years before their turn off. Karen planned the trip about six months before going to Ecuador. She decided for the Rough Guide, but she was not satisfied. By asking her why she came to Ecuador she was not sure herself:

It's a strange country. It's not the country most people want to go. They go to Peru, Argentina or Brazil. And we hear it was quite dangerous to go to Ecuador.

Even though the country was considered to be dangerous, Quito is well known for its language school. Karen and her friends want to teach English and make some money while travelling to the south of the continent. Moving around the republic has been no problem. In her opinion, the infrastructure is good. She never experienced any trouble with safety on the bus or in hostels. Even though the roads are not the best to travel on one always reaches its destination.

Renate

Renate is from Holland, 22, and she is studying international relations and history. Overall she will stay 18 months on the continent and three weeks in Ecuador. After school she was backpacking in Australia and gained her travel experiences. Coming to Ecuador, she studied her travel guide, the Lonely Planet, carefully to know how to move and what to expect in Ecuador. In Bolivia she met an Ecuadorian woman who was romanticizing her country and explained her how beautiful the country is. She has not found the contrast so far staying in the republic. Renate marked her style of travelling as backpacking, because

you own a backpack and all your belongings are in there. You don't plan. You go with the flow. I am also highlighting the things I want to see. But you can't see everything, because you don't want to rush through the country.

Choosing accommodation at night is done with the help of the Lonely Planet. During the day she looks around and searches for the cheapest bed. She likes to have breakfast and a hot shower included. Renate prefers to travel alone because she believes that is the best way to experience backpacking the best by contacting the locals and being fully independent.

Kelly

Kelly is also from Holland and she is 20 years old. The two Dutch girls were recorded at different places. I met Kelly in Quito and Renate in Vilcabamba. Kelly stays three months in South America and two to three weeks in Ecuador. She started her trip in Nicaragua and wants to travel further to Buenos Aires with 900 Euros on her account. Guidebooks are unacceptable for Kelly. She rather prefers talking to people and thereby hearing about the delights of the area. The Lonely Planet is only for emergencies, when “you’re stuck alone somewhere.” Before starting the trip Kelly took Spanish classes for a week. However, she was not afraid, because she is convinced to be understood through other matters:

There is always a way to express yourself and there is always someone who helps you on the street. And if they don’t speak English they ask if someone speaks English to help out. If that does not help you only point at food and give them money and they hand the right amount back.

Kelly really enjoyed the backpacker scene in Quito. She had the feeling the whole town was so alive and she experienced Ecuador as a rich country compared to her previous layover in Nicaragua. She chose the hostel, because she wanted to stay in a small hostel, not recommended by the Lonely Planet.

Shira

Shira, coming from Israel, is 20 years old. She came to South America after finishing the army and will soon start medical school. She came with her boyfriend and together they are travelling for eight months. They are planning to stay in Ecuador for around six weeks. Before coming to Ecuador, she bought a lot of camping equipment. For the country in particular she did not prepare at all. Her motivation in coming to Ecuador was a cheap flight from Israel to Quito, compared to other cities in South America. Shira made a distinction between European- and Israeli travellers. Male backpackers have long hair and a beard. They wear a black rain cover over the rucksack and everyone is wearing hiking sandals. Those attributes fit to almost every male backpacker. However, she noticed that European rucksack tourist wear brands, such as North Face. To the backpacking situation Shira had to get used to.

I don’t like a couple of activities, such as jumping of a bridge, hiking or rafting. I rather enjoy places and meeting people. It’s different than travelling in other countries. There you stay longer at one place. Here it is always a search for activities. What can this place offer me?

In general, Shira enjoyed being a backpacker and dressing as such. However, she did not feel fully comfortable with the backpacking situation in Ecuador.

Julian

Julian is 27 and comes from Germany. I met him on the Galapagos Islands. He recently finished University and before entering the work force he decided to explore the world. His father is from Uruguay, which gave him the advantage in not being seen constantly as a Gringo. He was quite fluent in Spanish, which eased communication with the local population. His trip duration is about three and half months and ca two weeks he stayed in Ecuador. Julian's main motivation was coming to the Galapagos Islands. He mentioned that it is sad not getting to know the culture.

You don't notice much of the culture. It's difficult to absorb and understand the country in such a short time. Usually you talk only to a bartender, and yes to a lot of taxi drivers. They are nice, but I never know how they live. It's all superficial.

Julian did not prefer a special sight. He went to places he likes and it did not matter to him if they were touristy or not.

Mariam

Mariam is from Canada and 22 years old. She was staying in Ecuador for five months, doing volunteer work. During her trip she also went to Peru and Columbia, because she heard it was amazing. For her everyone is a traveller. She does not like to make a distinction between rucksack- or charter tourist. In Ecuador, she prefers to travel by bus or even hitchhike, because those two are the cheapest alternatives of moving around. In cities she walks. This, as well, saves money. Choosing accommodation is mainly driven by the expenses. It is not a priority that a hostel has warm showers or other fancy equipment. Price is the main decision maker. Being a long time backpacker Miriam is not anymore excited meeting other backpackers.

The conversations are always the same. I want to have a real conversation instead of Smalltalk. It's a lot of drinking among travellers. There is always a reason. It's always someone's last night.

She rather meets the local population to really understand the culture and to improve her Spanish. She prefers the areas where Gringos are nothing special anymore, because those are places to get easily in contact with the locals. Here, they are willing to show their traditions.

5.2. Backpacker's identity

According to the contemporary theory, identity making is a process and therefore is not stable. The backpacker's identity today is reflexive and developing (Elsrud, 2004: 39). For a lot of backpackers travelling is about getting to know the inner self from a new perspective. By doing so, the world around gives the necessary input (ibid.).

The contemporary rucksack tourist is aware of being some kind of tourist. Because of the negative connotation of the word 'tourist' people try to find alternatives. However, it is known that every person visiting other places is, in one way or another, participating in tourism. Hereby the homogenous group of backpackers needs to distinguish themselves from mass tourism (Binder, 2005: 112). Character attributes for a distinction were found among all of the subjects asked during my field trip.

Kelly for example concentrated on the fact of cultural contact with the local society:

A backpacker is a person that is interested in the country and its culture. When abroad and travelling as a backpacker you're able to experience different ways of living. You simply let go of things from your life at home. Because you're travelling such a long time you can take the time to observe and get to know the country. But you won't learn Spanish, because usually you use English or your mother tongue. As a backpacker you try a lot of new things.
(Kelly)

It is very important for the individual tourist to get acquainted with the country of visit. Feeling a binding and understanding the world around the backpacker is unique and proposed to only happen to backpackers. The reason is, claimed by rucksack tourists, that real travelling is only possible if one is on the road for quite a long time. This is especially aimed to the fact of observing the country and how it creates the personality, and therefore the identity, of the traveller.

Juliane, on the other hand, stressed different indications about backpacking, such as money and travel style:

I'm a rucksack tourist, because I'm with a backpack on the way. Tourists have a suitcase and travel for two weeks. I'm also a sort of tourist, but not a charter tourist, because, as I said, I've got the backpack. I also watch my money. I live on a low budget while travelling around. Backpacking is the cheapest way of travelling.

As a backpacker you travel individually. To plan sucks. I never book or organize in advance, because you get to know so many people. So you change your mind constantly. Then you follow other people or you wanna stay longer at a place where you like it very much. You're so independent! (Juliane)

Juliane points out that a backpacker goes on a journey with a rucksack. To underline her opinion she compares her luggage with the baggage of a charter tourist. This was only a visible distinction between the types of tourists. The topic of money is very sensitive to backpackers, because they are living on a small budget during the entire journey. To reduce expenses backpackers try to get jobs at hostels. In exchange for their work, they receive free board and lodging (Cederholm, 1999: 53). The idea is to save money or spend as little as possible. Ecuador is a very inexpensive country and gives individual tourists the chance to travel with only a small budget. Transportation is especially cheap. For one hour travelling, approximately one Dollar needs to be paid.

Juliane is talking about the freedom and the independence of travelling as a backpacker. This freedom includes the choice of space and time. Going when and where is only possible if one is visiting another place for a longer duration. It is a very remarkable indication for backpacking having the free choice of going wherever you want (Binder, 2005: 90 ff). The rhythm of movement seems to be a game to the traveller. It is part of their identity, compared to the "normal" tourists who spend their time at one place for a short duration. Freedom and independence means that the traveller is bound to timetables and appointments at home. Furthermore, the backpacker enjoys the actual physical movement. It seems like a release to be free from e.g. the office chair or the university surrounding. The variety of places and occupation is wide and there is no need to restrict choices. In contrast, the backpacker goes with the flow and tries to "take" everything passing along his way. Being independent and making free choices only concerning the individual is what

makes backpacking unique and very different from the daily routine in the home country (ibid.).

Not only with the lifestyle, have backpackers differentiated themselves from other types of tourists. It is also the appearance or the style of dressing which distinguishes backpackers from charter tourists. Julian and Shira let me know their interesting experiences about tourists in Ecuador and explained them to me as followed:

A tourist is a real Gringo. They are lighter in their colour of skin and they always show their camera pretty obvious. I don't know, they have a special appearance. Tourists talk loudly in their mother tongue and look confused. (Julian)

You can see who is a backpacker and who isn't. But European backpackers look richer than those from Israel. Europeans wear brands, such as North Face. A backpacker has long hair and a beard. At least the men do (laughs), you know. And they wear sandals, hiking sandals. Israeli backpackers have a black cover over their backpacks. I haven't seen too many Europeans with those. (Shira)

In Ecuador, basically everyone who does not look Ecuadorian is perceived as a tourist. This is due to the huge differences between appearance and social classes. Julian mentioned, next to skin colour, the behaviour of the traveller. In his point of view, body language is very direct in telling whether you are backpacking or not. Clothing and expressions belong to the main distinctive non-verbal communication for backpackers to find themselves in their homogenous group. It is part of the identity presentation (Elsrud, 2004: 49). Even among backpackers differentiation occurs, as Shira pointed out. Rucksack tourists from different parts of the world express themselves with expensive or more affordable clothing. It is a way of showing their origin and gives other co-travellers the chance to spot them among all other backpackers. It is their way expressing their affiliation to a certain group.

5.3. Style of travelling

Despite the discussion about a possible modification of local cultures and their environment, Ecuador adapted to the steady flow of western tourists coming to the country. Next to identity, which mainly characterizes the low budget form of travelling, accommodation, transportation infrastructure and the interaction between the voyager and the locals mainly underlines the features of a backpacker.

There are no charts or investigations made concerning only backpacking tourism in Ecuador or in South America. However, the increasing spread of “guidebooks, a growing service infrastructure, travel advertising, travel related websites and the fact that backpackers are present everywhere” (Sörensson, 2008:46) means that the backpacking tourism form is growing in general and forms its own market.

Guidebooks easily show the rucksack tourist how to travel in Ecuador. They give examples of the closest and cheapest hostel or restaurant, or they point out the most important sights of the country. Every adventure and every step has been made by the authors of these books. It is the choice of the traveller to copy and paste the very individual backpacking trip. Nowadays, everyone who owns a rucksack is also a backpacker. That is how the backpackers and the tourist business in Ecuador identify this certain group of tourists.

The travel market’s subsectors are service facilities, such as accommodation and communication centres. The demand for cheap housing, transportation and restaurants is followed by the supply in those categories. Hereby, word-of-mouth and travel guide recommendations set the trend where to go, where to eat and where to sleep on a small budget (ibid.)

Choosing accommodation is, for most backpackers, a simple act. Price was the most frequent answer among the interviews I conducted. When I asked Mariam what is the major feature housing has to offer, she answered without thinking and very fast that she chooses a hostel by the price for a bed. Other criteria were added later on and with more careful thinking. The same action was noticed throughout all protagonists. Next to the pricing, the location and the safety in the hostel and the surrounding area was a big issue. The last named criterion for selecting housing is the liveliness of the hostel. In her opinion it is fun when the hostel is lively, because that is the easiest way meeting co-travellers with similar interests.

Me: Why did you choose to come here to this hostel? Or in common, how do you choose your accommodation?

Mariam: Cheap hostels! or couch surfing. Couch surfing is really, really cheap. But I didn’t like it.

Me: Why?

Mariam: Oh, I stayed with two Germans, who only talked German. I didn’t feel comfortable.

I choose the cheapest hostel named in my Let's Go, and it should look like a lot of fun. Sometimes, it's even a lot of fun. For this hostel here in Quito, it said in my guidebook that it is really lively. But it must be cheap and have breakfast. Yea, and the hostel should be in a cool area, not too far from everything. (Mariam)

Other travellers book their accommodation in advance, either for the first night or when they believe that the area is so crowded that a reservation is needed to get the cheapest hostel, or simply the nicest hostel in town. Karen told me that she and her friends booked through the internet on the website: www.hostelworld.com. Trendy hostels with a good reputation do not need a guidebook or entries on web pages. Everyone anyway follows the recommendations heard by other backpackers. It is the way to secure that the hostel is in a good standard and hygienic, which is not always given at this price range. Housing chosen via a guidebook does not always fulfil the demands of the traveller or even match with the description given.

Most backpackers follow the Pan-American Highway crossing the whole continent. In Ecuador it goes directly through the Andes. All the protagonists were telling me their main conveyance is the bus. This is due to the reasonable price¹⁹ and the solid roads. Using airfare increases with the need for time cutting and lower prices among backpackers. Travellers coming from other South American states to Ecuador rate the transportation infrastructure as very good. Kelly told me that the roads are very good in Ecuador, compared to Nicaragua. She was amazed not to find the roads in bad condition. Her impression was mainly formed from the Pan-American Highway and roads in the capital.

Freya chose the bus as a means of transportation, over flying in Ecuador. One reason is the short distances which were covered. Another fact is the good connection between the major places. Even in rather isolated places it is always easy to find a truck that will take the traveller along for a couple of dollars. However, riding the bus is not the same as it is in Western countries. It is rather an adventure. The bus starts at the main bus terminal, known as the "terminal terrestre." Foreigners mainly embark at the terminal. The locals, on the other hand, board on the streets, while the bus driver's assistant screams out loudly the destination on the street. Approximately every five minutes, the bus stops to collect more passengers. When the bus

¹⁹ In Ecuador busses charge one Dollar for every hour. That means going from Quito to Guayaquil costs approximately eight to nine dollars for the eight hour ride.

approaches its destination all passengers are released whenever it suits them. There are no rules. Mark Mann²⁰ describes a bus ride in Ecuador as follows:

I woke from a doze to find the bus was overtaking a car that was overtaking two trucks on a blind corner with a sheer drop off one side. A truck was aiming straight towards us, headlights on full beam and horn blaring. [...] Just in time, all three vehicles swerved back onto our side of the road and the oncoming truck thundered past. That's Ecuadorian driving. (Mann 2006:28)

The abstract shows that transportation serves two goals: The straight meaning of switching places and the second aim is the search for the old-fashioned and adventurous excitement of a simple act.

Overall was the transportation infrastructure in good condition, or in the state of renewal. Buses are on time and in good shape. The bus driver and the assistant take care of the passengers' luggage and hand out the baggage only to the respective owner. They manage to remember who owns what, throughout the whole trip.

The backpackers do not get a closer insight into the culture of the local population. A major reason for this fact is the language. Most people coming to Ecuador do not speak any Spanish or rather poorly. However, some of the protagonists able to speak Spanish more or less fluently stated that it is difficult to enter the local culture.

Julian, quoted earlier (page 45), was able to communicate with the locals. He mentioned the lack of possibilities to get in touch with the Ecuadorian culture. Usually the only locals a low budget traveller encounters are staff in the hostel, bartenders or transportation personnel. These people exchange little of their cultural heritage in the short time of encounter. It is understandable that they will not share their life story with a stranger. Freya stated:

It's difficult to notice something of the culture, because we don't live with the locals. The easiest way to learn about the culture is in the countryside among all the locals. But in Quito you're only hanging around with the backpackers and people in cities are more Western like than in the country. That's why we don't get to know too much from their culture here in Ecuador. They also don't make a lot of advertisement about their culture, like the Maoris in

²⁰ Mark Man wrote the novel "The Gringo Trail" telling his experiences about his backpacking trip to South America probably in 1999. A lot has not changed since 1999 and 2008, when I was out in the field studying. However, the style of driving did not become safer, according to Western standards.

New Zealand. They invite tourist and locals to a festival. I know it's touristy, but at least you get to know something. (Freya)

Freya had the advantage of being actually able to communicate with the residents. However, she felt unable to get in contacts with locals. Like everywhere else, trust and reliance play a big role in building up friendships. Short layovers were not a perfect precondition for solid friendships or a closer encounter with residents. Nevertheless, backpackers do believe that they, overall, receive a better insight view about the foreign lifestyle. The fact that they live in different conditions compared to their home countries gives them the feeling to be part of another world. This sort of primitivism gives the backpacker the feeling of authenticity. However, most backpackers do not spend time with the local population; they instead meet other backpackers while travelling (Sörensson 2008: 47). Elsrud (2004) and Sörensson (2008) describe the backpacker's journey as an "arena for identity work [and] for expressing individuality" (ibid.).

5.4. The backpacker's finances

The ten protagonists may not match the overall backpacker's investments, but they give an idea in which dimensions travellers think and spend money for particular things and reasons. Money is very dominant in the wayfarer's mind. It even steers actions, because most activities require spending money. Most of the interviewed subjects stated that they had been saving money before coming to Ecuador. Saving money in advance of the journey is necessary, because it is difficult to find work in South America. Backpackers coming to the continent are aware of this fact. Jobs available are, for example, teaching English or working in hostels for free board and lodging.

Karen and her friends started their one year trip in Quito because they heard rumours that it was easy to receive work as an English teacher in the capital.

I'm gonna try to earn money during the trip. I did a course for teaching English at home. I need to apply for jobs. I should have applied already in September. Now everything was gone. The season started and we came too late.²¹ (Karen)

I asked her for the amount of money she saved before going on the trip. She had 4000²² Pounds saved, she used a credit card and she was waiting for her tax refund, which would give her an extra saving in the process of the year. However, she was convinced that the stored money could not last during the entire year. That means she was dependant on finding work in the next countries of South America.

Like Karen and all protagonists, Julian also saved money before his journey. He worked while studying and received a decent amount from his family when finishing university. As a reward to himself he planned the trip to South America. For his stay of three and half month he had saved 6000 Euros. For each day he was planning in 20 Dollars which covers mostly the essential needs of a human. Around 10 Dollars were thought for food a day and 5-10 Dollars he was willing to pay for accommodation. Approximately 6 Dollars he spent on alcohol. Alcoholic drinks are not expensive, but the high quantity of consuming them uses a great amount of the backpacker's savings. In Ecuador it is not common to cook. Reasons are the bad kitchen facilities and the price for food. Julian mentioned that it is not worth to cook because it cost as much as dining at the local restaurants where almuerzos and meriendas²³ are served. Depending on the length of the trip, the backup savings and the interests budget travellers invest in different types of activities, such as mountain climbing, where a guide is required, or wild water rafting, horseback riding and so forth. Julian planned to spend money for his trip to the Galapagos Islands, for an additional boat tour on the coast and souvenir shopping.

Because most travellers had control over their savings there was no need to talk about how someone manages to pay for all the expenses. Backpackers I met granted themselves a lot of extras, for example massages or eating every day at Western restaurants. However, travellers choose cheap accommodation and restaurants to be

²¹ Karen and her friends entered Ecuador in October. Before that they stayed in Mexico. Because the school year starts at the end of September in Ecuador, Karen applied too late for a teaching job in Quito.

²² 4000 pounds are approximately 6000 US Dollar.

²³ Almuerzo and meriendas are available at local restaurants. The cost is between one and two dollars a meal. The dish includes a soup, main course and drink for the lunch menu (almuerzo) and a main course for dinner (merienda). The customer can choose between fish, chicken and pork, served with rice and beans or lenses.

able to invest in activities, relaxing massages and occasional good food. It seems to be a ritual to compensate the exertions of e.g. an exhausting hike or eating day in day out the local food of rice and beans.

5.5. Preparation

Preparation for a journey includes, first of all, the choice of destination. Next to clothing, equipment and vaccination preparation for the trip the traveller usually gets in contact with the destination by reading guidebook, listening to other backpackers' stories, meeting locals at home or on previously trips or simply combing through the internet.

Before I went on the field study, I knew I was interested in examining the backpacking scene in South America. Because of the limit of time and money I had to choose a more specific destination. I scanned through the internet and local library to find out which country I am personally most interested in. I decided for this particular tactic because I believed if I do so someone else would think similar. When I decided the destination I read about Ecuador's culture and countryside.

When I asked the protagonists about their way of preparation for their trip to Ecuador the standard answer was that they have not prepared at all or only very little.

Rotem came with an outdated Lonely Planet to Ecuador. He sees the guidebook only as a help in case of dire emergencies, like if the police or an ambulance is needed, but even while travelling alone without any contact to other people the guidebook gives suggestions where to spend the night. Besides taking a guidebook along and reading in it occasionally Rotem did not prepare at all for his journey.

I didn't prepare. I didn't want to hear something before. I wanna hear what's good from other people. I ask other backpackers what's special to see and they recommend me sights and the hostel. (Rotem)

This attitude is common among backpackers. In general backpackers coming to Ecuador do not invest a lot of time in preparation their journey. It is mainly a side activity next to finishing the examination paper or next to a full time job. The main preparation is learning Spanish. Shira and the Irish girls took classes more than a year before. Others, like Rotem or Renate, learned Spanish shortly before their trip in

an intensive four-week course. Furthermore, consulting the Internet is usual in obtaining a first impression about Ecuador or talking to other travellers who have visited Ecuador. Here, stories and experiences of a former traveller in South America is an important source for preparation. This includes travel gear and behavioural rules, but also the activities or sights which are so special that it is a shame to miss them.

Shira explained to me a possibility why backpackers did not prepare thoroughly.

Most people travel more than this short time. That's why they don't prepare that much for Ecuador. They go to Argentina, to Bolivia and Peru. It just would be too much to prepare. In Peru backpackers go trekking and in Colombia they relax, because the beaches are nice over there. Other countries have better beaches than Ecuador. Ecuador is not that common and known to travel to. It's not as touristy. A lot of tourists just pass through. (Shira)

Backpackers do not see Ecuador as a country that is the main attraction on their travel list. It is rather the country where tourists pass through coming from the fine beaches of Colombia, heading to Peru to try to do the Inca trail. The Galapagos Islands, however, are not a backpacker magnet because of the immense sum charged for flight and entrance. The Amazon attracts backpackers because it is easy to enter the rainforest from Quito. However, that is only used by wayfarers who have not been to the jungle in another South American country.

The lack of preparation is typical for the backpacker. He wants to "explore" the country on his own terms and rules. Discovering the foreign world with its history and people gives the backpacker a feeling of authenticity. What he does is real, not bound to rules, timetables, cultural norms or other people. Going unprepared to the journey creates a feeling of discovery, just like drifters did or even like the explorers of the 15th century.

5.6. Reasons for travelling

A long trip journey with a rucksack opens up new dimensions. The Around the World Ticket gives the traveller the chance to "conquer" the whole world, preconditioned the flight is cheap and the approximate destination, naming huge areas, such as South America, South East Asia or Europe, squares with the destination airport.

Shira and her boyfriend wanted to go to South America after completing their military service in Israel. The first spot on the map was not important. The flight route Israel to Quito happened to offer the cheapest flight to South America. Therefore they decided that Ecuador would make a perfect start for their journey south on the continent. Furthermore, they knew that the weather would be good during the season they arrived. Shira came to the republic in mid September when it was still raining, but it was said to be sunny in the mornings and cloudy in the afternoon. This is perfect for volcano climbing, which was one big wish for Etai, Shira's boyfriend and travel partner. The greatest pull factor for coming to Ecuador was the Galapagos Islands. After booking the flight to Quito the couple informed themselves about what to see in Ecuador. Already in their preparation, they decided to see the unique wildlife on the islands. However, this special sight was not the major decision maker for their choice of destination. Mariam also did not state particular reasons for coming to the republic.

I've a lot of interest for other cultures and I wanted to live abroad. When I read about the project I thought Ecuador sounds cool, but nothing special. I just wanted to go to South America. Before the trip I had no clue about the country. I only knew there were a lot of bananas in Ecuador. There was nothing particular which drew my attention. (Mariam)

When I am honest, at my first trip to Ecuador, I didn't even know that the Galapagos Islands belong to Ecuador. (Juliane)

This aspect of not having a distinct motivation for choosing the place to visit was found almost among all the protagonists interviewed. As Mariam clearly mentioned, she could not find anything particular which caught her eye while getting familiar with the thought moving to Ecuador for five months. Not even major attractions, such as the Galapagos archipelago, stay long enough in the travellers mind to make that a major focus for a visit to the republic. Only Freya gave me an answer mainly as expected.

I always wanted to come to South America. The weather and the people are great. My Spanish teacher told me a lot about Ecuador and I thought that would be great start to begin my journey. It is not too big and it has everything, the mountains, the ocean and the Amazon. And it has all the activities I enjoy, horseback riding, hiking and cycling. It is a safe country compared to others in South America. All the other countries have as well mountains, beaches and the jungle, but they are bigger. Ecuador is so small so you reach everything in one day. (Freya)

The way Freya described her reason for choosing Ecuador was, at the beginning, an answer I expected. Freya's opinions about the country's advantages are also promoted by the official Ecuadorian tourist board. However, as I noticed in the answers of the selection of subjects, it does not reach everyone or even the majority of rucksack tourists in the western world. This can be considered as a weakness of the Ecuadorian marketing. Ecuador as a tourist destination needs still improvement in their promotion in order to improve this sector.

Another reason for going abroad mentioned by the respondents is the fact of taking a time out. Most of the protagonists were over 24 years old. They finished their graduate education and decided to travel once again before entering the next step of their lives. Some even worked already for a couple of years and needed a "time out" before it is too late. Backpackers, older than 24, usually had previous experiences in travelling or living abroad. They told me that they had travelled in Australia and South East Asia after finishing High School, or lived a year in the United States as an Exchange Student.

Sonja, for example, used to travel with her parents at the beginning to continue backpacking on her own in around 15 other countries. At nineteen, she went to Australia and to New Zealand backpacking. Here she had a gap year in between High School and University. Juliane, as well, went to Australia for eight months and one month to New Zealand after completing her secondary education.

When talking to the respondents and other fellow travellers, a common denominator was previous travelling experience. Collecting experiences in other countries is important, because the South American continent is overall considered to be dangerous. Knowing how to move and how to react seemed to be very helpful to a lot of rucksack tourists. Taking a "time out" (Binder 2005, 94 ff, Elsrud 2004 78 ff) means to be between stations in life. It does not simply mean taking off the watch and losing time. "Time out" includes rather a break from social and everyday patterns in the home country, such as duties and following transportation times, work- or school schedules. It is the time to "go with the flow" and only do what pleases. Freya told me that she enjoys it so much not to force herself to wake up early and sit in front of the computer writing her diploma paper. Now she could do whatever she wants to and read as many simple and plain books as possible.

Taking time off and go travelling was for the protagonists essential. Especially having the feeling of doing “nothing” or only doing things filled with joy was the major goal to go abroad. Karen quit her job to come to Ecuador. She wanted to have a once in a lifetime experience and escape the duties of life in her hometown.

The main reason for travelling is to explore other cultures. When backpacking the rucksack tourist gets in touch with the host and other cultures from all over the world. Juliane and Freya especially, mentioned the intercultural exchange as their main motivation for travelling. It is their way to gain knowledge about themselves and the world. Seeing other countries where different essentials drive the everyday life makes the rucksack tourist appreciate but also criticize the society at home. In Ecuador small children work for a couple of pennies to buy food. In comparison, children in the Western world think about which brand of clothing is mostly up to date and necessary to possess. To understand different worlds contributes to global unity.

5.7. Sustainable tourism

Ecuador is a country with a huge biodiversity. The biological variation is expressed in different natural and cultural attractions situated in the four tourist regions named earlier; the Galapagos, the Coast, the Andes and the Amazon. Ecuador contains around 70 per cent of the world’s biodiversity. In the last 40 years conservation has gained impetus in the country, especially since the Galapagos Islands have been declared as protected in 1959 (*Plandetur 2020*: 12). Currently, around 4.7 million hectares are protected, thereof became 18.5 per cent national parks. Around 26 per cent of the Ecuadorian rainforest is protected, especially the jungle of the Amazon region. That is approximately 2.4 million hectares (*ibid.*). The main branch in the tourist economy is service, such as transport, accommodation, and travel guides. To reach the plan of 2020 Ecuador will work constantly for a stable ecotourism, cultural tourism and sport- and event tourism. The star product for Ecuadorian ecotourism is the Galapagos Islands. The archipelago will always attract travellers and bring money to the country. Therefore it is the duty of the Ecuadorian tourist board to concentrate on other parts of the country

The protagonists had strong views about sustainable tourism. Sonja, for example, is convinced that “there is no such thing as sustainable tourism”. By flying into the country environmental damage has already occurred. In her opinion, sustainable tourism is involved with community tourism. For example an indigenous community in the Amazon wants the tourist, but not tourism. They would like the money without putting any effort into tourism. Those who do care cannot maintain their lifestyle. This destroys, according to Sonja, the local culture. Mariam, on the other hand, has a contrary opinion. The community of Otavalo adapted to the demands of tourism and made their culture to a unique ingredient. In her eyes this is the only way in which the indigenous population preserves their culture.

It's a shame that tourism makes it possible that cultural heritage and the environment gets preserved. But a lot changes as well. People working in tourism learn English, for example in restaurants or lodging business. Ecotourism seems to happen, because Ecuador has the highest deforestation, even more than Brazil. If development is not directed to tourism, this include foreign money and investment, there is no hope. With tourism comes running water and electricity to the villages. Water and light comes as a by product to the community. It's a shame. (Mariam)

Mariams and Sonja statements show that tourism has advantages and disadvantages. If the communities receive elements of the modern world, they quit living in their original conditions. However, those are the aspects the tourist wants to see and pays for. Traditional cultures can be lost if the community fails to preserve their heritage in an appropriate way. Some communities adapt adequately to the needs of modernity, like the Otavalo community, others draw back from foreign attention like the Cofán tribe. According to Freya the lack of education courses the problems of mistreating tourism and sustainability. Sustainable tourism is hardly possible without borders for overfishing or deforestation. When booking an eco-tour it is possible that the tour is sustainable, however the surrounding is not. In general people throw their rubbish on the streets without noticing that they destroy the environment. It is the duty of the government to teach the population about sustainability and how to prevent nature. Unfortunately a backpacker does not have the money to book eco-tours. It is impossible to afford sustainable tourism while travelling on a low budget. Environmental protection is expensive which applies for every aspect in daily life.

6. Discussion

This chapter will discuss and reflect the results of the paper's problem questions concerning the backpacking culture, their motivation for choosing Ecuador and their travel styles. To conclude the product analysis a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses from the viewpoint of a backpacker follows. Additionally, the pull factors are, for example nature, accommodation, transportation and tourism development in the country.

6.1. The backpacking culture

The backpacking culture has changed over the decades. Basically, only the ideology, the travel duration and sometimes even the search for the inner self has survived throughout the modification of the tourism category. Ecuador is both a positive and a negative backpacking destination. The republic does not contain major attractions for the today's South American backpacker, except for the Galapagos Islands, which are in general too expensive for the low budget traveller. However, exactly the seemingly unattractiveness makes Ecuador to a quiet and an under-populated country by tourists.

The backpacker culture in Ecuador is calmer than in other parts of the continent. This is due to less number of backpackers over all. Backpackers meet in hostels and exchange experiences about activities, accommodation, restaurants and so forth. Shira explained in the interview the backpacking situation. She did not like it in particular, because travelling in Ecuador is mainly about activities. When Shira was visiting India it was normal to stay longer at one spot and enjoy the place and the people. However, in Ecuador people come to a town and think about what this place can offer them. For example travellers visit Vilcabamba, because it is said to be an outstanding place to try the San Pedro, a hallucinating cactus, or for going horseback riding. Backpacking in Ecuador seems different compared to other domiciles.

The ideology of exploring and understanding new parts of the world remained. Backpackers in South America are convinced that they have a close contact to the locals. That is the picture that the protagonists had of themselves. However, this opinion has a wider meaning than originally thought of. The contact with locals

means both the literal action but also their way of experiencing a place. Even if the backpacker is not participatory in the way of talking and living among the local population, he is still observing the country from a different angle than, for example, a charter tourist. A backpacker is able to see even deeper than the surface, which is not given to the tourist. Because of the longer travel duration, a backpacker is able to look behind the scenes and see maybe even the ugly parts of a city.

It is rather impossible to become part of the culture as a Western person. First of all, it is difficult to blend in due to the traveller's different appearance in comparison to the locals; and the backpacker spends almost all his time with travel companions. Meeting co-travellers in hostels creates a bubble. Contact with the world outside of the circle seems impossible. English is the lingua franca among backpackers, but outside of the bubble Spanish is used. Furthermore low-budget travellers stay only a couple of days at a particular place. After enjoying the activities of a particular place, the backpacker has no reason to stay further. He moves on exploring the next town.

Independent travellers came to Ecuador unprepared. At the beginning, this action was totally incomprehensible to me. However, I learned it is part of the backpacking culture. Arriving unprepared seems to be an unconscious tactic to get closer to the Ecuadorian culture and to experience the culture of the otherness more intensively. It opens up new chances for the traveller. By not knowing anything about the destination, the backpacker is forced to get in contact with like minders or with locals. Accidentally arriving at a place is similar to the way of drifting, the predecessor of backpacking.

One problem with an unprepared arrival could be missing the sites, which have not been spread through word-of-mouth recommendation. However, none of the protagonists mentioned this as an unpleasant condition. It seems that backpackers are rather interested in what happens behind the scenes on the streets. Attractions and activities are mainly the pull factors to move on and explore a new area. It is important for travellers to discover the sights and the country on their own terms and time.

The literature I consulted, discussed backpackers searching for authenticity and the explorer's mind. None of the conversations I had with other backpackers touched this topic. Most people coming to Ecuador were rather curious or interested in how the

country feels and looks. A lot of the protagonists went to the Galapagos Islands before they would be less preserved and overrun by more tourists. Backpackers told me that they were interested seeing the things in real life they heard about or have seen in brochures or calendars. Today it is almost impossible to be pioneer or drifter, as Cohen (1974) describes the first backpackers, in a global world where everything has been seen at least once.

6.2. Backpacking facilities, how and why they travel

All protagonists answered that they are backpackers. The main characteristic of a backpacker is their rucksack. However, the attitude to this particular style of travelling is a main feature. A lot of the protagonists had earlier experiences of travelling as a rucksack tourist and enjoyed it. By repeating the way of wayfaring underlines their conviction to the travel style. They explained to me that backpacking is a lifestyle, which is worth participating in.

Ecuador is not overrun by mass tourism and therefore gives rucksack tourists a chance of their original ideology of drifting and exploring new parts of the world. In most towns the backpacker will see more locals than foreign faces. This is particularly true when travelling aside the Gringo trail.

However, facilities specialised for foreign tourism have grown over the past years. Along the Gringo trail, towns are filled with backpacker hostels and cheap restaurants. They established and survive thanks to the rising number of individual travellers. Hostels stay in business while serving accommodation and offering work to rucksack tourists.

Travel agencies sell tours to the Galapagos Islands or to the jungle. This type of business is mainly located in tourist areas and the staff is trained to cater for the needs of the foreign visitor. Speaking English is a main requirement to maintain appropriate service. When Freya and I were searching for a last minute tour to the Galapagos Islands we went to the closest agency. Freya started her conversation in Spanish, but the staff responded in English. They tried to be polite and obliging.

Other agencies are specialized for a certain activity, such as rafting stores. They target visitors confirming their thoughts of a backpacker to enter and book the next

rafting tour with their company. Once again, staff is able to speak English, in order to communicate with their guests. However, sole traders, usually do not know English. These companies serve the needs for national and foreign tourists. Nevertheless, a lot of them are still in business because of the steady visits of travellers.

According to Table 1 on page 19 the main push factors mentioned by the protagonists were earlier travel experience, which triggers the choice of destination. Only the respondents interested in learning languages; stated that education, or better improving their Spanish, was essential for choosing Ecuador as destination. Pull factors for going abroad and choosing the South American travel route were especially learning and self development, but also curiosity and the slightly calmer backpacking situation in Ecuador. When already in the country, backpackers decide spontaneously activities or things which are worth seeing, which simply entertain or the backpacker receives knowledge from an interaction with the sight. The result is a rising personal development of the traveller, which once again determines the reasons and motivation for travelling, activated by push- and pull factors.

A clear reason why the protagonists chose Ecuador was not found. They were quite unsure themselves. Most of them came to the republic by accident, for example because the flight to the capital happens to be the cheapest option or because Ecuador is the neighbour of two popular backpacking countries. Nevertheless, everyone enjoyed the republic once being there and hearing about the biggest Artesania market, hikes to high volcanoes and the jungle with its shamanists.

In order to serve the need of the backpacking industry, it is not essential to create a marketing strategy distributing in foreign countries. Because a backpacker is not planning the itinerary in advance, information about the country are almost worthless to the traveller when reading at home. Only a general overview triggers the desire for a visit for a budget traveller. The marketing strategy should rather concentrate on targeting the backpackers when they are already in the country. An idea could be a closer cooperation with the hostels. The backpacker wants to experience the area and receive information when he has already arrived. Preplanning of itineraries is not in the nature of the backpacker.

The overarching reason for wayfaring is that travelling has an impact on every human participating in a journey. For the backpacker, travelling is about an inner

journey or a development of the own personality. Observing the visited scenery gives new insights and comprehension on the home and tourist environment. The result is a learning process for travellers standing between two new stages in life. The collected experiences are taken home, which implemented the wayfarer's personality to a next stage of maturity.

6.3. Ecuador as a destination - From the viewpoint of the backpackers

During the field study, I noticed the strengths and weaknesses of Ecuador seen through the eyes of a backpacker. There are arguably more aspects to consider, but the following named advantages and disadvantages are attributes mentioned by the protagonists I met along the journey. I especially discussed these characteristics with Freya, who patiently answered all my questions.

6.3.1. Strengths

A summarized illustration about the strengths of Ecuador as a tourist destination:

- Dollarization
- Infrastructure: Bus, Airlines, Accommodation, Internet approach
- Security: Police is found in tourist areas.
- Climate: The country can be visited all year long. This is due to its geographical position and climate.
- Flora and Fauna: This is especially unique on the Galapagos Islands with its endemic wildlife.
- Reasonable prices: Handicrafts, food and accommodation
- Culture: Handicrafts and Andean culture
- Small size, but containing every geographical characteristic from the South American continent; The Oriente, the Andes and the Coast. The result are short travel distances
- Heritage: The colonial past is still visible in the architecture and the lifestyle. The lifestyle of the Andean population has not changed much in the past years.
- Not overdeveloped

- Language: Learning Spanish is preferred in Quito and in Ecuador. Quito has a lot of recommended Spanish school and the Ecuadorian Spanish is said to be very clear and slow.
- Eco- and adventure tourism

(My illustration²⁴, Compare: International Trade Centre: Papers: National Brand Ecuador)

Its particular strengths are the variety and number of accommodation possibilities, the value of money, transportation and telecommunication infrastructure.

When scanning a guidebook or the internet the range of low budget hostels is immense and reasonably priced (See an example in the Lonely Planet 2006: 172-173. The accommodation index for the small town Baños lists 11 choices of budget sleeping and even more in all categories.) Backpackers never mentioned problems with receiving a bed for the night. Karen told me so specifically. In Vilcabamba she and her friends almost could not check in into the hostel, because no space was available. They arrived at night and did not book in advanced. Freya and I, who happened to arrive at the same night with the same taxi, booked earlier that day to secure our stay over, because of a planned late arrival. When I asked the protagonists how satisfied they were about the accommodation situation in Ecuador, everyone mentioned positive statements and that they enjoy the feeling of the backpacking situation at the lounges in the hostels. The backpacking culture is mostly created at the hostels. They have the function of a centre where everyone meets to exchange experiences and to find new friends to travel or to interact with for a short while. It is essential to the backpacker finding like minders to create memories together. Travelling alone is not always desirable. The contact to other people from other continents is maybe the most important criteria for travelling abroad. It broadens the horizon and creates intercultural understandings.

Ecuador is a relatively cheap country and the dollarization made it easy for international tourists to exchange money. The dollar is a currency which is easy to calculate with in order to exchange the values of the home valuta. In chapter 5.5. the investments of the protagonists show how much money is spent during the day. It illustrates that it is possible to live on a small budget without watching the

²⁴ See footnote 24.

expenditures decrease drastically by the end of the month. Pleasant travelling is when money does not prejudice the complete attention. Freya told me during her stay in Australia that she was significantly worse off. Everything was valued to money. She stated that she never bought for example ice cream just through an impulse. Every small detail had to be reconsidered. However, in Ecuador she was not counting every penny. In contrast, she decided to spend her money wisely but not tight-fistedly. Bargaining is common in the South American countries and; according to the Lonely Planet, even expected (Lonely Planet 2006: 394). International travellers are obsessed with prices, especially for food and accommodation. The low budget tourist has to handle his finances to make sure that money lasts as long as possible, in order to continue the journey (Sörensson 2008:95). Sörensson (ibid.) indicates that the backpacker uses its chance for bargaining in every position. I have to agree with her opinion because I obtained the advice of bargaining on my first day in Ecuador. Juliane, who I met at an internet café after the landing, explained to me the importance of bargaining in Ecuador. Because of my skin colour the price for me is over all higher compared to a price for the local population and they expect me to bargain. The result is an agreeable price.

The choices for transportation are satisfying. For long distance fares it is advisable to use air transportation. The air travel company Tame covers the flight transportation in Ecuador. Especially air-fare to the Galapagos Islands or connection flights from Quito to Peru and Colombia are used by travellers. Julian took the bus from Quito to Guayaquil to continue his journey by plane to the archipelago. From the Guayaquil he flew to Lima. Taking the bus in Ecuador is the smartest choice of transportation. They are on time and take you to almost all places. They are the primary means of transportation for Ecuadorians and travellers. The latest Lonely Planet describes the buses as followed:

They can be exciting, cramped, comfy, smelly, fun, scary, sociable and grueling [...] (Lonely Planet 2006: 406)

As mentioned in previous chapters, travellers choose a bus journey over air-fare because of the price.

The protagonists are satisfied with the range of mobility possibilities. Mostly appreciated is the frequency of buses day and night. They even reach small places

with an agreeable abundance. The style of driving, completely different from the Western way, makes travelling by bus an excitement (see also page 53).

Another advantage for Ecuador is a reduced mass tourism and therefore a paradise for backpacking tourists. Rotem told me on a bus ride, that he enjoys travelling around Ecuador, because there is a small amount of tourists and other backpackers visiting the country.

It's cool meeting other backpackers, but it's also cool that there are not so many other tourists. Most backpackers go to Peru or Bolivia because these countries are cheaper than Ecuador. I like to get in contact with the locals. It's interesting. But you have to know Spanish. I know a bit. I learned Spanish before going on the trip. On the Galapagos Islands it's only English though, because there are so many tourists. That's sad. (Rotem)

Rotem underlines that he seeks for the contact of the Ecuadorian inhabitants. He is looking for cultural understanding and a form of authenticity. The traveller is concerned with experiencing "authentic encounters" (Obenour 2004: 2). People from the Western world do not just travel for cultural exchange, but also to meet a traditional life untouched by modernity. This can be experienced in Ecuador. The population of the Andes still dress in their typical outfits with coloured skirts and white embroidered blouses with felt hats. The colour and shape of their traditional clothing varies from region to region. However, the basic appearance is alike. Next to the traditional look the Andean population kept the origin of their religion. Ecuadorians are catholic and additionally they believe the old rituals and traditions of their ancestors. Today this is primarily seen among the indigenous people of the Andes and the Amazon.

A frequently stated opinion for low budget travellers was interaction with the local population. By meeting the traditional life the visitor encounters the country's history and culture. The encounter is mainly based on interaction in daily life such as shopping, dining and using transport and telecommunication infrastructure (Obenour 2004: 4). However, if a direct contact with local people is enjoyed the contact ranges from a simple one moment encounter or a layover for a longer time at a "host" family. The meaning for this encounter is the search for human values and the host community (ibid.).

Ecuador gives the low budget traveller the chance to experience authenticity by experiencing old traditions not staged for tourist but real. Furthermore, the small amount of tourists gives the backpacker a unique feeling of following in the footsteps of the drifters. Learning Spanish while travelling is very favourable. Spanish has become a very popular language and is desired to learn by a lot of backpackers. Ecuadorian Spanish is seen as pure and easily compensable.

6.3.2. Weaknesses

Furthermore, a summarized illustration about the weaknesses of Ecuador as a tourist destination:

- **Mobile Communication:** Some European Countries do not have reception or Ecuadorian Sim Cards work in phones. However, with American operator no problem was stated.
- **No sufficient Marketing:** The name and Ecuador as a fantastic holiday destination is not known outside their borders. They are not present in the media.
- **Declared dangerous at Foreign Offices** in for example parts of Europe.
- **Security:** Places are unsafe, especially after sundown.
- **Machismo**
- **Stubbornness of the staff**
- **Begging and especially targeting tourists.**
- **Unstable political system**
- **Bad road conditions**
- **Backpacking accommodation is poorly equipped:** For example bad working showers, not heating system in the Andes, not daily cleaning.

(My illustration²⁵, Compare: International Trade Centre: Papers: National Brand Ecuador)

²⁵ The illustration of the strengths and weaknesses is authored together with the protagonists I met during my field study. In various conversations the backpackers told me their opinions about Ecuador as a travel destination.

The security level in Ecuador is overall good. According to the Lonely Planet (2006: 387) "Ecuador is a safe and wonderful country for travel." However, especially the big cities are not free from robbery. Armed robbery is uncommon, although it is increasing in tourist centres like Quito and Guayaquil or in some parts of the coast. The Mariscal Sucre neighbourhood in Quito, also called Gringolandia, records a lot of mugging. Personally, I heard every day about a person who has been robbed on the streets in Quito. Usually it was in dark corners in the late afternoon. However, robberies happen spontaneously and even happen during midday. The newspapers wrote about a terrible shooting between a tourist and a resident. Juliane told me every day we saw each other that someone else in her hostel was the subject of a robbery. They came home with marks from an attempted strangulation and were psychologically damaged for a while. On my way home from Ecuador, a girl from Switzerland described her robbery. She only possessed ten dollars, which was not enough for the thieves. They claimed even her worthless plastic rings. The result of this encounter is that she disliked Quito and never felt safe walking through the capital again.

Begging is common and seen everywhere in Ecuador. However, it is usually seen that people sell small things in return of a couple of coins. Small children go from tourist to tourist to offer their work as a shoeshine boy. The low amount they earn they have to hand to their parents. Old women or mothers sell sweets to receive a penny to nourish their families. They target especially tourists in the hope to earn kindness and money.

Machismo can be annoying for unused women. Machismo is a culture and a sport in the South American countries. Men whistle or make flirtatious comments at the passing women, to both foreign and Ecuadorian women.

When I asked the protagonists about the means of transportation, everyone was satisfied. However the bad road conditions and long travel hours are a disadvantage for Ecuador. Buses stop whenever they please. Loading and leaving passengers every couple minutes is truly unusual to the Western tourist. An improvement of this fact reduces the negative opinion by backpackers.

7. Conclusion

Every year thousands of backpackers take their rucksacks and travel to explore the world. They travel for months then return to work or to the studies after a gap year or more. Places that are visited should feature only little modernity, but therefore should be marked with primitivism and otherness. Everything today becomes “global” and fitting into this process is especially good in the business and work market. Work traits like flexible, mobile, team adapting and gaining of an intercultural competence rise in importance for requirements in the work searching process.

Backpackers are independent travellers in the sense seen by the industry. However, they seek for the company of their own kind and try to distinguish from other tourist types. Travellers going on a trip pursue authenticity, which seems to be long gone in the “modern” world. They want to escape from a tourist bubble and try to enter in to the real world.

Backpackers intrude deeper into the countryside, use public transportation and eat at local restaurants. In an ideal situation, backpackers spend more money in the long run. Because of the fact that backpackers want to see more than the usual tourist, they spend more money on a geographical wide scale. The backpacker’s money reaches even non-institutionalised tourist grounds and especially the local population.

Additionally, the backpacker has a greater interest in meeting the unknown, meaning locals and their culture and traditions. This leads to more respect in the content of intercultural exchange. If some regions do not have the chance to profit from mass tourism, backpackers are very welcome. Sometimes, those areas get dependent on the backpacker tourism, because travellers “dare” to explore region off the beaten track. Therefore backpackers have played an important role for the economy.

Ecuador as a backpacker’s destination serves all needs of the rucksack tourist. Accommodation, means of transportation, activities and the overall backpacking situation fulfils the expectations of the traveller. So far, mainly backpackers noticed that the country is relatively safe compared to other countries in the region. The republic offers good possibilities for activities such as mountain trekking, rafting and other adventure tourism. Tour operators promote the country and its regions for

ecotourism. The goal is to shift from exploitation to a sustainable treatment of the nature and an establishment of sustainable transport and accommodation especially in natural parks.

The work explored the nature of backpackers in Ecuador. The driving question for the thesis was to find out if backpacking still follows the original ideas of discovering and engaging, maybe even living with the local population.

Backpacking in Ecuador is somewhat calmer compared to, for example, its neighbour countries. This is due to lack of mass charter tourism on the main land. However, the Galapagos Islands are overrun by all tourist types. Furthermore, Ecuador does not offer unique activities, because those who are possible could be also performed in other countries. Nevertheless, that gives Ecuador its charm and makes backpacking adequate. Life in the republic remained similar to the lifestyle from about hundred years ago. Here, Ecuador is authentic in the true sense and that is one reason why it attracts backpackers.

Enclaves provide various facilities to satisfy the backpacker's needs. If the range of tourist supplies and opportunities become more frequent, backpacking could emerge into a mass movement. This means that the original idea of the backpacking cultures might disappear and it could adapt traits of conventional tourism. That, however, is what the future will show.

To complement the study further a comparison about the differences between the backpacking culture in South America and other areas, such as Australia and South East Asia, could be of interest.

Appendix

Interview questions:

Name:
Nationality:
Age:
Occupation:
Background: Tell me about whom you are/where are you from?

Journey Details:

Length: Overall: in Ecuador:
Backpacking experiences:
Travel Route:

Preparation: tell me, describe how you prepared.

Sources.
Guidebooks
Internet
Friends

Style of Travelling: describe your way, style of travelling,
Travel alone with company
Accommodation
Coming around in Ecuador

Investments: tell me: pay for what, why?

How much
For what
Extras?

Reasons and Opinions: → tell me: experience, journey, attractions, important. Other

Backpacking interactions
Locals
Culture,
Food
Traditions
Support of local business
Meeting other backpackers

Preference: Backpacking Scène

Backpacker set-up
What do you miss?



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Juliane, German, volunteer and backpacker: interviewed in Canoa, 01-11-08

Freya, German, backpacker: interviewed in Canoa, 01-11-08

Rotem, Israeli, backpacker: interviewed in Loja, 29-11-08

Karen, Irish, backpacker: interviewed in Vilcabamba, 25-11-08

Renate, Dutsch, backpacker: interviewed in Vilcabamba, 27-11-08

Kelly, Dutch, backpacker: interviewed in Quito, 17-11-08

Shira, Israeli, backpacker: interviewed in Baños, 20-11-08

Juliane, German, backpacker: interviewed in Puerto Ayora, 11-11-08

Mariam, Canadian, volunteer: interviewed in Quito, 28-10-08

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