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# Extraordinary tourist experiences' influence on the personal development of Switzerland-based tourists.



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction & context**

Modern tourists increasingly seek purposeful activities that enhance their overall well-being and foster personal growth (European Travel Commission, 2016). Thus, this study investigates how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced these emerging trends in tourism, shifting the focus towards wellness and self-improvement. Specifically, it explores the transformative power of unique culinary experiences in Switzerland's French-speaking regions, examining their potential to catalyze personal development in tourists. This has led to the following research question: How do extraordinary culinary tourist experiences influence the personal development of Switzerland-based tourists in the Romandy regions?

### **Literature review**

The literature review integrates themes of gastronomy tourism, extraordinary tourist experiences, personal development, and tourist motivations, aiming to enrich the understanding relevant to the study's research question. Exploring gastronomy's role within Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the review presents food as both a fundamental survival element and a medium for cultural identity and relationship building (McLeod, 2007; Lowenberg, 1970 cited in Guzel & Apaydin, 2016). It discusses how gastronomy acts as a bridge for cultural exchange, enhancing social ties and self-identity, eventually contributing to one's social standing and self-actualization through diverse culinary experiences (Richards, 2002; Karim, 2006, cited in Guzel & Apaydin, 2016).

Moreover, the review contrasts ordinary and extraordinary tourist experiences, emphasizing that extraordinary experiences, although uncomfortable, are rare and transformative, leading to significant personal growth (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014) (Woolley & Fishbach, 2022). Personal development in the context of tourism is explored as a transformative process triggered by experiential learning and engaging with different cultures through gastronomy. This involves expanding self-awareness and enhancing personal skills, thereby fostering an individual's comprehensive development (UNWTO, 2019) (Chen et al., 2013).

Finally, the review delves into tourists' motivations, linking them to the pursuit of unique culinary and cultural experiences that extend beyond simple sustenance to foster personal growth and cultural appreciation (i.e., in the culinary context) (Kotler et al., 2010, cited in Heitmann, 2011.).

### **Methodology**

Employing an exploratory and empirical research methodology, this study utilizes a qualitative approach, primarily through semi-structured interviews conducted in a narrative inquiry style. Data collection targets two groups: Switzerland-based tourists and personal development coaches, aiming to capture diverse perspectives on the motivations and personal growth outcomes associated with

these culinary experiences. Non-probability self-selection sampling is used to ensure the relevance and willingness of participants. For data analysis, a thematic narrative method is applied to interview transcripts to identify and understand key themes influencing personal development regarding gastronomic tourism. This method involves a detailed transcription and thematic analysis to systematically examine the data, supported by AI tools to enhance efficiency and comprehensiveness. (Saunders & al., 2023).

## **Results**

Focusing on three objectives, the study illuminates the influence of extraordinary tourist experiences on personal development. Firstly, it redefines such experiences as not merely rare, but transformative, deeply influencing tourists' self-perception and worldview from the planning stages through to the lasting memories they foster. This conceptualization aligns with theoretical insights suggesting that extraordinary experiences transport individuals beyond the everyday, offering personal transformations and sustained personal growth through continuous and reflective engagement. Secondly, while immediate transformative impacts were not extensively reported, the potential for long-term personal development through repeated and sustained engagement with these experiences was acknowledged by the interviewed tourists. Additionally, personal development professionals emphasize the importance of stepping beyond one's comfort zone as a critical factor in personal growth which aligns with the concept of extraordinary tourist experiences.

## **Recommendation**

To capitalize on the potential of extraordinary culinary experiences, this study recommends creating a detailed rubric on established regional tourism websites like Vaud.ch. This rubric would provide comprehensive information on each experience, including descriptions, availability, pricing, and booking options, aimed at supporting the growing interest in personal development through tourism. Such an initiative would facilitate easier access to transformative experiences, foster greater interaction among tourists, personal development coaches, and local service providers, and enhance the vibrancy of the domestic tourism market by making these experiences more accessible and visible to a broader audience.

## **Conclusion**

This study reveals the potential for promoting extraordinary culinary activities within the tourism context. The recommendation proposed is applicable to various websites. However, the study acknowledges its limitations, including a small, region-specific sample and qualitative focus. To address these limitations, future research should broaden its demographic scope and employ quantitative methods. By prioritizing personal development through a tourism lens, Switzerland can offer purposeful activities for tourists, meeting their desire for meaningful experiences.

## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The genesis of this paper lies deep within my passions: food, novelty, and personal development. As I embarked on the journey of selecting a subject for my bachelor's thesis, these themes merged, guiding me toward an exploration of how extraordinary culinary tourist experiences might shape personal development, specifically among tourists based in Switzerland's Romandy regions.

This study aimed to unravel the nuances of these unique experiences, their appeal, and their impacts on individuals. The objectives were threefold: firstly, to define what constitutes an extraordinary tourist experience in the culinary realm and ascertain its value to the tourism industry; secondly, to explore the interest in extraordinary experience and their psychological effects on Switzerland-based tourists; and thirdly, to investigate the potential correlation between these experiences and personal development outcomes.

Previous research has touched upon aspects of culinary experiences and personal development, yet a gap remained in understanding this intersection within the context of Swiss tourism. This paper attempts to bridge that gap, focusing exclusively on the Romandy regions. The scope of this research was initially daunting, as was the process of gathering relevant sources that did not delve too deeply into psychology, thus maintaining a focus on tourism. Additionally, recruiting interviewees who had participated in such experiences presented its own set of challenges. The methodology employed was an exploratory and empirical approach, centered around semi-structured interviews conducted with tourists and personal development coaches. These interviews, combined with case studies and academic theories, formed the backbone of this analysis, which utilized a thematic narrative approach to extract and understand the core themes emerging from the data.

To ensure the extraordinary culinary experiences in Switzerland's Romandy regions are both visible and accessible, the following recommendation is proposed: Establish a dedicated section on the existing Vaud.ch platform. This new rubric will serve as a comprehensive index, enhancing collaboration among tourists, professional coaches, and service providers, and fostering a richer tourist experience tailored to the demand.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to Beverly Todeschini, who provided support and guidance throughout this project. Special thanks are also due to Nicolas Johnson and Amira Salvi for their insightful advice and meticulous review of my work. My colleagues, Juliana Magalhães, Paola Buccinna, and Laura Reynard have been pillars of support and encouragement, for which I am grateful. Lastly, I would like to express my profound appreciation to all the interviewees whose willingness to share their experiences has been essential to craft this study.

This foreword sets the stage for the following exploration and acknowledges those who made it possible. It is my hope that this paper will contribute meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge and spark further research in this fascinating intersection of culinary tourism and personal development.

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## List of abbreviations

CAPTCHA:	completely automated public turning test to tell computers and humans apart
CBT:	cognitive behavioral therapy
CSAT:	customer satisfaction score
GDP:	gross domestic product
Incl.:	including
IT:	information technology
KPIs:	key performance indicators
SEO:	searching engine optimization
TX:	tourist experience
UI:	user interface
UNWTO:	world tourism organization
USP:	unique selling proposition
UX:	user experience
WHO:	world health organization

*(Abbreviations and Acronyms Dictionary, n.d.)*

## INTRODUCTION

“The real motivation for travel must be intrinsic - the desire to travel for its own sake, to get away from one’s everyday surroundings and become acquainted with other places, cultures and people”.

(Holloway & Humphreys, 2019).

The tourism industry operates within the dynamic interplay of environmental factors and societal trends, shaping its trajectory in response to unfolding events. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a reevaluation of tourism practices due to widespread restrictions, prompting significant adaptations within the industry. Switzerland, for instance, witnessed a substantial decrease in travel activity during this period, indicative of the broader impact felt across global tourism landscapes (Hintermann & al., 2023).

Anticipating the post-pandemic landscape, studies, such as conducted by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), have scrutinized the future of food-related tourism, revealing prospective shifts in tourist behavior and preferences. Forecasts indicate a potential rise in the cost of food tourism, coupled with an increased inclination among tourists towards introspective journeys, characterized by a desire for self-discovery and personal transformation (Mora, & Carvao, 2020).

Moreover, the evolution of global consumer trends underscores the growing prominence of wellness-oriented experiences in tourism. This trend associated to wellness, reflects a paradigm shift towards holistic well-being, wherein physical and mental health intertwine seamlessly. The integration of self-improvement into leisure pursuits reflects a nuanced understanding of leisure as an avenue for personal growth and development, rather than mere relaxation. Furthermore, the surge in global stress levels and the proliferation of personal health technologies have catalyzed a movement towards self-improvement and personal development among tourists. Contrary to conventional notions of leisure, modern tourists seek purposeful activities aimed at enhancing their overall well-being and fostering personal growth (European Travel Commission, 2016).

In light of these trends, this research endeavors to investigate the influence of extraordinary tourist experiences on the personal development of Switzerland-based tourists in the Romandy regions of Switzerland. By delving into the multifaceted dimensions of tourist experiences and their implications for personal growth, this study aims to offer valuable insights to the tourism industry. The research framework comprises several components, including a contextual overview, a comprehensive literature review, methodological insights, empirical findings, and a thorough analysis, culminating in an actionable recommendation for industry stakeholders.

# 1 CONTEXT

This chapter explores the framework of the tourism sector in Switzerland, particularly focusing on the French-speaking cantons which include Jura, Neuchâtel, Vaud, Geneva, Fribourg, and Valais. In establishing the context for this study, it is essential to consider the historical progression of tourism. This context aims to dissect the relationship between tourism and its modern-day implications for gastronomy and personal development through extraordinary experiences, thereby underscoring the evolving significance of travel as both a pursuit of leisure and a means of personal enrichment within the Swiss context.

## 1.1 Tourism industry

The tourism industry, historically linked to well-being, has evolved markedly over the centuries. Originally, travel was carried out for medical purposes. Then, travel became an exclusive privilege of the aristocracy, that was undertaken for leisure and pleasure. As observed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, aristocrats engaged in various worldly activities to seek enjoyment, thereby establishing an early connection between travel and pleasure-seeking (Proulx, 2005).

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a transformative discourse emerged that proposed travel as a remedy to "heal the soul or body" and to "change one's surroundings." This shift from mere pleasure to therapeutic potential marked a philosophical expansion in the role of travel, framing it not just as a pursuit of enjoyment but as a means to enhance personal well-being (Proulx, 2005).

In the more recent historical context, as detailed by Proulx (2005), the perception of travel has further evolved to become a vital component of workers' wellness. This period demonstrates a significant shift in societal attitudes towards travel, recognizing its role in offering rest and rejuvenation for workers. Echoing this sentiment, Holloway and Humphreys (2019) argue that one of the primary purposes of tourism is to provide a sanctuary for working individuals, enabling them to momentarily detach from the mundanity of daily life and recuperate. This historical narrative establishes a framework for examining the current dynamics and evolving paradigms within the tourism sector.

### 1.1.1 *Switzerland*

Switzerland has long been an attractive destination, due in part to its strategic geographic placement. The allure of its mountains was greatly amplified in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by the romantic literature and art of the period, which cultivated substantial interest among British tourists. This trend was further propelled by Thomas Cook, who pioneered the first organized package holidays to the region (Confédération Suisse, 2023).

In contemporary times, the tourism sector remains a pivotal component of the economic framework within the Helvetic Confederation, particularly within the Alpine regions. It accounts for

approximately 4% of the nation's total employment, underscoring its significant role in the labor market. More comprehensively, the tourism industry contributed approximately 3% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), equating to nearly CHF 17 billion in 2021 (Confédération Suisse, 2023). This economic contribution highlights the sector's vital importance to Switzerland's overall economic health and resilience. Finally, the three principal sectors; accommodation, catering, and transportation, constitute the foundational elements of the economic engine driving the tourism industry of the country (Swiss Federation Tourism, 2023). A focus will be conducted on one of these sectors, exploring its position and opportunities within the broader economic landscape of the tourism industry.

## 1.2 Gastronomy tourism in Switzerland

While Switzerland has not been recognized as a gastronomic destination, the burgeoning field of gastronomic tourism finds Switzerland joining the global trend at its own measured pace (Zbinden, 2023). According to Switzerland Tourism, culinary exploration is among the top three motivations for visitors (Zbinden, 2023). An expert in consulting for food tourism articulates “regardless of the purpose of the trip, food is one of the most effective means of communication, helping to break down cultural barriers and foster a better understanding of others” (Zbinden, 2023). This underlines how powerful food can be to the tourism sector.

In 2022, nineteen Swiss organizations declared their ambition to forge an international reputation for Switzerland as a touristic and gastronomic destination, emphasizing the promotion of local artisans and regional delicacies. This initiative highlights Switzerland’s commitment to enhancing its status as a gourmet destination (Collet, 2022). Moreover, Switzerland boasts the highest density of Michelin-starred restaurants per capita in Europe, with a significant increase of 20% over the past five years. Notably, in 2015, the majority of these establishments were situated in the French-speaking regions (Budry Carbó, 2015). In addition, Fribourg, alongside Ticino, is designated as one of the two touristic regions considered as a gastronomic destination which is part of the French-speaking part of the country (Tourobs, 2017).

Figure 1 - Acteurs suisses du goût



Source : author's data

Positioning Switzerland during the recovery period following the pandemic, the Zurich, Central Switzerland, and Ticino regions exhibited resilience and growth in the Swiss tourism sector. In particular, Central Switzerland showed a positive trajectory, with an increase in overnight stays from 5.3 million in 2018 to 5.8 million in 2022, according to the Federal Statistical Office (2019; 2023). Thus, the German-speaking regions demonstrated better recovery after the pandemic as they were best represented in the list of regions with the most overnight stays. However, in contrast, the Romandy regions did not feature prominently in this list. Nevertheless, in the Romandy regions, Jura-Trois-Lacs, Valais, and Fribourg experienced the most significant resurgence in tourist activity, in percentage terms relative to the last normal year of 2019 (Buesser-Waser, 2023). To further explore the impact and potential of this region, which was slower to recover, this research focuses on the French-speaking part of Switzerland with regards to gastronomy.

Figure 2 - French-speaking part of Switzerland's map



Source : Bonjour Genève, 2024

### 1.3 Post-crisis' tourism industry

Following on the context of this delicate situation, the tourism industry has been previously impacted by various crises, such as terrorist incidents, natural catastrophes, health emergencies, and economic downturns. These events have significantly influenced tourist demand at many destinations, affecting both short-term and long-term patterns (Polyzos & al., 2020, cited in Miao & al., 2022). In other words, the tourism industry operates within the dynamic interaction of environmental factors and societal trends, shaping its trajectory in response to unfolding events.

Catastrophic occurrences change people's perspectives on life as they try to make sense of what is going on, look for meaning and purpose, and seek spiritual growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, cited in Miao & al. 2022). Matteucci (2021) proclaimed that "given its severity, the COVID-19 pandemic could be considered as existential hapax, a crucial moment of life and an intense experience that led to significant physical, emotional, and spiritual transformation" (Miao & al. 2022). According to Miao & al. (2022), travel for purpose and morality may become increasingly common in the post-pandemic era as people engage in greater introspective contemplation in quest of purpose and building a new life narrative.

Additionally, Tourobs (2021) asserts that the pandemic exerted a great impact not only on the economic sphere but also on the mental health equilibrium globally. In Switzerland, the prevalence of depressive states increased sixfold from February 2020 to November 2020, with no significant decline observed subsequently (2021). This escalation in mental health issues underscored the imperative to augment mental health systems. Consequently, in 2021, various governments implemented strategies aimed at promoting well-being and addressing the determinants of depression. Nevertheless, the availability of mental health services struggled to meet the escalating demand, and psychotherapists reported being unable to accommodate the surge in patients seeking assistance (Tourobs, 2021).

Moreover, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is spawned and experienced by individuals in the context of their daily environments, places where they learn, work, engage in recreational activities, and form relationships. It arises from self-care and caring for others, from the ability to make decisions, and from having control over one's life circumstances. Furthermore, it is essential that the societal framework supports and fosters conditions conducive to the health and well-being of all its members.

Supporting what has been mentioned previously, in the year 2021, the French Syndicate of editing stated that 32% of the book market were from the well-being, health and personal development, and this situation should be growing (Rambal, 2022). This showcases the will of individuals to better their personal situation. In complement to this, the UNWTO conducted a study in 2020, anticipating the post-pandemic landscape (Mora & Carvao, 2020). It has analyzed the future of food-related tourism, revealing prospective shifts in tourist behavior and preferences. Forecasts indicate a potential rise in the cost of food tourism, coupled with an increased inclination among tourists towards introspective journeys, characterized by a desire for self-discovery and personal transformation (Mora & Carvao, 2020).

In conclusion, this research will focus on the French-speaking cantons of Switzerland, particularly within the gastronomic sphere, in response to significant interest from various stakeholders. This approach is predicated on the dual potential to invigorate the regional economy and facilitate personal development, elements that are particularly pertinent in post-crisis recovery scenarios.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The state-of-the-art review explores the interconnectedness of several themes: gastronomy tourism, extraordinary tourist experiences, personal development, and tourists' motivations. By looking into these subjects, the review aims to construct a comprehensive understanding that will enrich the approach to the research question detailed later in this study.

### 2.1 Gastronomy tourism

Following Maslow's hierarchy of needs, food is part of the most necessities of humans' needs (McLeod, 2007). Positioned within the physiological tier, food is fundamentally an element of survival. However, Lowenberg (1970, cited in Guzel & Apaydin, 2016) posits that when food serves as a medium of relationship and cultural identity, it ascends to the belongingness stage in Maslow's hierarchy. This evolution underscores the important role food plays in fostering connections and affirming social ties, a notion that resonates with Richards's (2002) exploration of how gastronomy acts as a conduit for cultural exchange and identity reinforcement within tourism context. Richard (2002) argues that as food is one of humans' needs "it is not surprising that it is also one of the most widespread markers of identity". Furthermore, he invokes the phrase "we are what we eat," suggesting that this applies not only physiologically but also psychologically and sociologically. He illustrates this concept with the example of childhood "comfort foods," which often become a source of solace for adults seeking refuge in familiar tastes.

Figure 3 - Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Source : Intelligent Data Centres, 2023

Moreover, the fourth stage of Maslow's hierarchy, which focuses on status, reveals that the environment, dining companions, and food choices are reflective of an individual's social standing, echoing Warde's (1997) observations on how consumption practices, including gastronomy, serve as markers of social distinction. The final phase of Maslow's hierarchy, self-actualization, is where food's influence extends to broadening one's understanding through the experience of diverse culinary traditions from various cultures. Karim (2006, cited in Guzel & Apaydin, 2016) suggests that this phase is critical for personal development, as engaging with diverse culinary practices not only satiates physical hunger but also contributes to a richer nuanced sense of self and well-being. Hence, according to these researchers, food can influence the individual's sense of self and foster a deeper engagement with their personal growth and development.

Building on this, the UNWTO (2012) articulates that "the need to eat is the same for all of us, but it also differentiates us". Thus, the emergence of gastronomy tourism can be attributed to a key distinction among travelers. Some travelers eat merely to satisfy their hunger, while others prioritize culinary experiences when selecting a destination, seeking to satisfy both their physiological needs and their desire for hedonistic and cultural enrichment (UNWTO, 2012).

The UNWTO's Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness defines gastronomy tourism as an attempt where travelers engage in food experiences ranging from traditional and innovative culinary adventures, as well as activities like visiting local producers, attending food festivals, and taking cooking classes while traveling.

Tourists drawn to culinary experiences typically exhibit an openness to explore and embrace new environments or tastes, a characteristic that aligns with Mak & al. (2012) profiling of gastronomy tourists as adventurers in pursuit of unique, culturally immersive encounters. This openness is not only indicative of a willingness to experience diversity but also suggests a potential for personal growth and development, as engaging with the foodways of diverse cultures can expand one's perspectives and foster a deeper understanding of oneself and others (Mak & al., 2012) (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024).

In this light, gastronomy emerges as a realm of interdisciplinary knowledge, intricately linked to the physical, mental, and social well-being of individuals (UNWTO, 2012). The pursuit of gastronomic experiences, therefore, transcends mere sustenance, evolving into a catalyst for emotional fulfillment, social interaction, and self-enrichment. As individuals immerse themselves in the culinary practices of diverse cultures, they embark on a journey that not only satisfies physical hunger but also partakes in an array of experiences that enhance their overall sense of identity.

## 2.2 Extraordinary tourist experience

*“The key to growth is acknowledging your fear of the unknown and jumping in anyway”  
(Sincero, n.d.).*

The tourist experience (TX) is a continuous journey that starts with the planning of the trip and extends beyond its conclusion, through the memories and insights gained from the activities undertaken. As an intangible asset, tourism is shaped by these accumulated experiences and the lasting memories associated with travel (Rusu & al., 2023). This definition of the tourist experience sets the stage for an exploration into the specific types of experiences encountered by travelers.

Experiences can be categorized into two distinct types: ordinary and extraordinary. Ordinary experiences are those that are typical, frequently occurring, and fall within the scope of everyday life. In contrast, extraordinary experiences are characterized by their rarity, infrequency, and their ability to transcend typical daily occurrences (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). This framework, informed by Sussman and Alter (2012), organizes experiences on a spectrum from ordinary (frequent and common) to exceptional (rare and unusual), without assigning any inherent value to either category (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). While ordinary experiences shape the routine of happiness, it is the extraordinary experiences, with their inherent discomfort and rarity, that often precipitate the most significant opportunities for personal development and self-improvement (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014).

According to Woolley & Fishbach (2022), individuals often seek self-improvement but encounter discomfort during the process, such as feeling awkward in improvisation classes aimed at building confidence. Their study suggests that instead of avoiding discomfort, embracing it can enhance motivation and perseverance in challenging tasks. This perspective allows individuals to view discomfort as an indicator of progress towards their goals, motivating them to continue despite challenges. This approach underscores the potential positive role of discomfort in personal growth.

Thus, this concept of embracing discomfort in pursuit of growth within extraordinary experiences provides a valuable framework for understanding the impact these experiences have in the specific context of gastronomy tourism. Such experiences, which extend beyond the ordinary, invoke a significant enhancement in the meaningfulness attributed to an experience, through the process of learning. Goolaup and Mossberg (2016) as well as Lindberg and Østergaard (2015), underscore the decisive role of learning in amplifying the depth of these experiences. Moreover, Jefferies and Lepp (2012) delve into the essence of extraordinary experiences, characterizing them as “highly memorable, very special, emotionally charged and potentially life altering” (Kirillova & al., 2017). This multifaced nature of extraordinary experiences underlines their potential to significantly impact tourists’ perceptions and behaviors.

Narrowing the focus to the field of tourism, the concept of extraordinary tourist experience “reflects a transition from the ordinary to a liminal world, where tourists are expected to return transformed and renewed to the ordinary life.” (Turner, 1969). In other words, an extraordinary experience is like stepping into a different world from the mundane, promising not just a change of scenery but a transformation on the self. Tourists are meant to come back changed and rejuvenated after this unique experience. Turner (1969) eloquently describes this journey as one leading to a space where individuals emerge renewed, with their everyday life enriched by their unique experiences. This transformative potential is further evidenced by Tung and Ritchie (2011), who identify these peak experiences as crucial in fostering a deep, emotional connection with the visited locals, ultimately contributing to a more profound personal development.

The connection between extraordinary tourist experiences and gastronomy tourism becomes apparent in this context. Gastronomy tourists by immersing themselves in unfamiliar culinary landscapes, are exposed to new environments and ways of living that they could not “obtain in a classroom” (Jernsand & Goolaup, 2020). These experiences could serve to trigger personal transformation, broadening their horizons and fostering a spirit of openness and adaptability. The quote “experience is the best teacher” (Turner, 1969), captures this idea, underlying how first-hand encounters with diverse gastronomic traditions not only educate but also enrich the lives of these tourists. Therefore, the synergy between extraordinary tourist experiences and gastronomy tourism lies in their ability to spark transformation, making these encounters not only memorable but also leaving a lasting impact on individuals.

## 2.3 Personal development

Grasping the complexity interplay between experiential learning, gastronomy tourism, and personal development is fundamental to gaining insight into the profound influence of touristic encounters on individuals. Experiential learning, as emphasized earlier is acknowledged as one of the most effective means of acquiring knowledge, forms the foundation upon which transformative tourism experiences are built.

The idea of personal development has been discussed across various disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, higher education, management, and sociology. However, there is not a universally agreed-upon definition for this concept (Chen & al., 2013). Nevertheless, the UK College of Personal Development provides a concise definition, describing personal development as the conscious pursuit of personal growth through expanding self-awareness, enhancing knowledge, and improving personal skills. Complementing this, the Whole Health & U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2019) broadens the scope by defining personal development as the ongoing process of self-improvement in various life aspects. This includes the acquisition and refinement of skills and talents, learning new information, and engaging in volunteer activities. It also emphasizes effective management of finances and resources, participation in creative endeavors, setting and achieving personal objectives, and fostering humor and laughter in everyday life. Additionally, it involves cultivating compassion, practicing forgiveness, and enhancing the quality of work, whether in professional settings, volunteer efforts, or domestic responsibilities. This multifaceted approach highlights personal development as a comprehensive journey towards bettering oneself and enhancing one's interactions with the world.

Focusing on the field of gastronomy tourism, which seamlessly aligns with the principle of experiential learning. Tourists eagerly participate in various food experiences, exploring a wide range of flavors and cultural traditions (UNWTO, 2019). Through hands-on experiences, they not only expand their gastronomic horizons but also enhance their self-awareness. This active engagement allows them to delve deeply into different cultures, fostering personal growth in the process. "Gastronomy tourism is therefore based on a concept of knowing and learning, eating, tasting and enjoying the gastronomic culture that is identified with a territory" (UNWTO, 2019).

Reflecting on the potential enriching experiences provided by gastronomy tourism, it becomes evident that the benefits extend beyond culinary delight. These cultural engagements act as steppingstones to broader personal development. Travelers embark on journeys not merely to explore new destinations, but also to actively participate in experiences that nurture essential life skills. These skills, including social aptitude, self-confidence, and adaptability, are honed through immersive encounters. As Hsu and colleagues noted in 2017, tourism serves as a catalyst for personal evolution, enabling individuals to broaden their perspectives, bolster self-esteem, and gain profound insights into the diverse world around them.

Moreover, Chen & Huang's (2017) case study showcases how extraordinary tourist experiences can be useful in personal development. The case study on backpacker personal development highlights that longer and repeated backpacking experiences are particularly beneficial for personal growth across multiple dimensions including capability, emotion, skill, worldview, and self-consciousness. The findings indicate that while short-term backpacking trips offer immediate pleasure and a broadening of perspectives, they are less likely to lead to substantial personal transformation. In contrast, extended and frequent backpacking allows individuals to immerse more deeply in diverse cultures and environments. This prolonged engagement enhances personal efficacy and adaptability, contributing to significant improvements in self-awareness, emotional regulation, and problem-solving capabilities. Furthermore, it fosters a more expansive and reflective worldview, illustrating backpacking's potent role as a catalyst for personal development (Chen & Huang, 2017).

Additionally, Pearce (2011) points out that most tourists set out on their trips with a sense of hope for a better future, others seek enjoyment, and some want to learn about the world, discover themselves, or change their relationships. It shows that people travel for various reasons. Personal development in tourism, is about changes perceived during and after the encountered experiences. These transformative encounters, wherein attitudes and behaviors undergo profound shifts, transpire both consciously and subconsciously throughout the entirety of the tourism journey. The concept of "transformative experience" in tourism refers to significant moments during travel and after returning home when tourists undergo intense internal changes (Soulard, McGehee, & Knollenberg, 2021).

Mair and Sumner (2017) claim that tourism functions as a pedagogical tool. Travel acts as a catalyst, challenging tourists' previously unexamined assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives, thereby stimulating openness and inclusivity in their worldview. Additionally, Chhabra (2021) advances a transformative perspective on tourism, advocating for a shift in the focus of academic research. This shift entails a move away from the traditional investigation of facets such as tourist satisfaction, loyalty, or behavioral intentions. Instead, the scholarly exploration should concentrate on outcomes associated with genuine happiness, self-actualization, and profound self-transformation in the post-trip context.

In this way, experiential learning, gastronomy tourism, and personal development are intricately connected. Extraordinary tourist experiences have the potential to trigger transformative processes, unleashing the personal development journey of tourists. By actively participating in various culinary adventures and recognizing the educational aspects of tourism, individuals undergo a transformative process that goes beyond traditional learning. These experiences expand their horizons, fostering personal growth, self-awareness, and resilience.

### ***2.3.1 Personal development vs. personal growth***

It is essential to distinguish between personal development and personal growth, as they are frequently used interchangeably. Personal development refers to the process of enhancing specific aspects of an individual. It involves setting goals, making plans, and assessing progress. For instance, a person working on their public speaking skills by taking a course, and tracking their improvement is an example of personal development. Personal growth is a more comprehensive process that involves the overall development of an individual, taking into account their values and beliefs. An example of personal growth might be someone who values empathy and actively works on becoming more empathetic, not just in one area of life, but in their relationships, career, and personal interactions, demonstrating a holistic development in line with their values (Irving & Williams, 1999).

Previously, the concept of personal development has been discussed; however, the emphasis here extends to a broader notion of self-improvement. Notably, because tourists engaging in extraordinary experiences typically do not pursue these activities with the explicit aim of improving specific personal traits. Thus, in this study, the terms "development" and "growth" will be used synonymously, reflecting their interchangeability in the context of personal enhancement.

## **2.4 Tourists' motivation**

Understanding the motivations driving tourists and their inclination toward transformative experiences is of greatest importance. Gastronomy tourism has become a significant segment within the tourism sector, characterized by tourists' growing desire to explore destinations through their unique culinary traditions. This interest extends beyond mere food consumption, representing a profound engagement with the cultural, historical, and social aspects of the host community. Tourists are drawn to gastronomy experiences for various reasons, including the search for novelty, cultural immersion, and personal growth.

The decision-making process of tourists, as outlined by Kotler & al. (2010, cited in Heitmann, 2011), consists of five stages: (1) recognizing a need, (2) searching for information, (3) evaluating alternatives, (4) making a purchase decision, and (5) evaluating post-purchase satisfaction. This model begins when tourists perceive a divergence between their current state and their desired experiences, often influenced by internal desires or external factors such as social media and recommendations. The quest for information might involve personal experiences, advertisements, or advice, leading to a careful evaluation of tourism offerings based on personal needs and preferences. Although the final purchase decision can be swayed by others' opinions or unforeseen circumstances, post-purchase satisfaction is determined by the alignment between expectations and actual experiences, influencing future travel choices.

This process is deeply influenced by the tourist's cultural background, social interactions, and personal demographics, which shape their travel decisions and preferences (Heitmann, 2011). Moreover, Iso-Ahola's (1982, cited in Snepenger et al., 2006) theory about escape-seeking dichotomy implies that tourism and recreation are motivated by the interplay of personal and interpersonal factors, encompassing the dual motives of seeking new experiences and escaping everyday environments. Recent research highlights the importance of authenticity, sensory engagement, and cultural immersion as key motivators for gastronomy tourism (Kim, Suh, & Eves, 2010). Such experiences not only satisfy culinary curiosity but also contribute to personal growth by allowing tourists to explore and understand diverse cultures.

Culinary tourism's definition and scope have been subjects of debate, with Smith and Xiao (2008) proposing a demand-sided perspective focused on tourists' activities rather than a set product offering. This contrasts with the International Culinary Tourism Association's broader definition, which views culinary tourism as the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences (Wolf, 2006). Smith and Xiao (2008) advocate for a midpoint definition that recognizes cuisine's role in reflecting the visited locale's culture, without necessitating exotic elements (Agyeiwaah, & al. 2019).

The appeal of culinary arts significantly influences tourist decisions, often ranking as a key attraction in various destinations. This underscores the need for further research into specific aspects of culinary tourism, exploring the complex motivations behind tourists' engagement in culinary activities.

### 3 OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Having established the context and the state-of-the-art, the research question now posed is:

*How do extraordinary culinary tourist experiences influence the personal development of Switzerland-based tourists in the Romandy regions?*

To address this research question, three objectives have been established to develop answers and provide managerial recommendations:

1. **Define what an extraordinary tourist experience is and what it entails as well as to prove its importance and added value to the tourism industry.**
  - This objective establishes a clear definition of what constitutes an extraordinary tourist experience. Furthermore, it addresses the value these experiences add to the tourism industry.
2. **Examine the interest of Switzerland-based tourists in extraordinary experiences and their psychological impacts on personal development.**
  - This objective focuses on understanding the motivations behind why Switzerland-based seek out these types of experiences and their influences.
3. **Investigate the correlation between personal development outcomes among Switzerland-based tourists participating in extraordinary tourist experiences.**
  - The aim is to directly link the participation in extraordinary experiences with personal outcomes, providing empirical evidence to support or refute the notion that these experiences contribute significantly to personal development.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used to address the research question and achieve the study's objectives. It details the research strategy, describes the types of data utilized, and explains the methods employed for data collection and analysis.

### 4.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY

In the scope of this bachelor thesis, the research methodology centers on an exploratory study with an empirical approach. This approach is selected for its capacity to delve into novel phenomena, establish causal connections between variables, and comprehend participant decisions, attitudes, and opinions (Saunders & al., 2023). The primary data collection method is qualitative, primarily relying on semi-structured interviews conducted using a narrative inquiry style.

Narrative Inquiry, as outlined by Saunders & al. (2023), involves a meticulous process of gathering participants' experiences, which are then systematically reconstructed into coherent narratives connecting events and actions over time. The analysis delves into understanding the meanings attributed by the narrators, facilitating the creation of comprehensive insights.

The objective of this approach is to deepen the understanding of the impact of extraordinary culinary experiences on personal development among Switzerland-based tourists within the Swiss-speaking part of Switzerland.

### 4.2 Data used

For this research, primary data is used to gather information directly from the source, through semi-structured interviews, ensuring accuracy and relevance for research and analysis purposes. On the one hand, the desired data are the motivation and interest towards extraordinary culinary tourist experiences. On the other hand, the aim is to understand the personal thought of Switzerland-based tourists on personal development, following with a specification on the personal development occurred during extraordinary tourist experiences (Saunders & al., 2023).

In addition, secondary data is used to detect patterns, direct the design of primary research, and support primary data. It is also employed to evaluate the researched phenomenon, either supporting or denying the researcher's statements based on existing evidence that is consistent with the current goals with the use of scientific articles and case studies on a similar context.

#### ***4.2.1 Primary data collection method***

The primary data for this research is gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders directly involved in extraordinary gastronomic experiences in the French-speaking region of Switzerland. The interviews encompass two distinct groups: Switzerland-based tourists

seeking extraordinary gastronomic experiences, and experienced personal development coaches (Saunders & al., 2023). Below, the different interviewees' type and profile are presented.

*Table 1 - Interviewees' profile*

N°	Interviewees' type	Profile
1	Tourist	<i>Melissa Hugron</i> - Immersive dining experience
2	Tourist	<i>David Aebi</i> - Fondue's world championship
3	Tourist	<i>Julia Pinto</i> - Dining with strangers
4	Tourist	<i>Mélanie Hofmann</i> - Foraging Hike & Wild Plant Cooking Workshop
5	Tourist	<i>Anonymous</i> - Wild Plant Cooking Workshop
6	Tourist	<i>Adeline Babey</i> - Dining in the dark
7	Professional	<i>Catherine Minton</i> - Counselor
8	Professional	<i>Leo Studer</i> - Personal Development Coach
9	Professional	<i>Daniela Buillard</i> - Personal Development Coach and trainer

Source : author's data

Specifically, the interviews with Switzerland-based tourists are conducted with a semi-structured approach and adopt a narrative style. This approach aims to delve deeply into the themes of gastronomy tourism, extraordinary tourist experiences, personal development, and the motivations that drive the interviewed tourists. The choice of utilizing a narrative approach is strategic. It allows participants to freely express their experiences, ensuring that all kind of information can be gathered. Participants are asked a set of general questions, followed by an opportunity to narrate their unique experiences (Saunders & al., 2023). Concerning the personal development coaches, they are asked a set of questions related to their field experience, then by questions specific to extraordinary tourist experiences.

The research objective is to conduct a total of nine interviews, distributed as follows: three experienced personal development coaches, and six tourists residing in Switzerland. This approach is tailored to the study's focus on understanding personal development in the context of tourism, with an interest in extraordinary culinary experiences in the French-speaking regions of Switzerland. Considering time constraints and the availability of willing participants, this number of interviews is identified as a strategic and feasible approach for deep investigation and resonates with Saunders & al.

According to Saunders & al. (2023) using a non-probability sampling with a self-selection sampling approach seems best fitting for this research. This choice allows for an in-depth look at specific cases by inviting participants who are willing to participate and fit the study's criteria.

Non-probability is particularly useful here, as it prioritizes detailed understanding over a small number of cases for a particular purpose. Self-selection sampling effectively draws in participants who are directly relevant to the research question. This is essential for gathering meaningful information from professionals experienced in personal development coaching and tourists who have had extraordinary culinary experiences. By setting up the study to hear more from tourists (two-thirds of the interviews), the research leads into collecting diverse perspectives from those experiencing personal development through tourism (Saunders & al., 2023).

This approach is designed to capture diverse viewpoints, enabling a thorough exploration of the relationship between extraordinary gastronomic experiences, personal development, and tourist motivations within the context of Swiss tourism in the French-speaking region.

#### ***4.2.2 Data analysis method***

In the semi-structured analysis of the collected primary data, which primarily consists of interview transcripts, a comprehensive approach is employed. All interview dialogues are meticulously transcribed, facilitating a thorough immersion into the dataset. This method is crucial for the systematic examination of the information.

To ensure a structured and effective analysis, a thematic narrative approach is adopted. This approach assists in understanding the core themes and elements within the narratives, shedding light on what drives overall personal development in the context of extraordinary tourist experiences. Once the themes are highlighted, they are set in a table to facilitate the comprehension of the information (Saunders & al., 2023). It is essential to acknowledge that this analysis method is inherently time-consuming and subject to potential biases during the interpretation process. Hence, to facilitate this method, the use of AI is recognized as a tool to enhance efficiency. This analysis ensures a comprehensive examination of the collected data, enabling the identification of commonalities and correlations among participants' experiences.

## 5 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Following the methodology, this section presents the empirical findings from the qualitative interviews. The research employs two structured grids (see **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.** & **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**) to organize and analyze the data collected, with participants' responses categorized into several dimensions. To achieve this, a thorough analysis of all the interviews was conducted, followed by a systematic coding of the data with the aid of ChatGPT as a methodological tool to identify the key themes that were both prominent and relevant to addressing the research question.

### 5.1 Themes - tourists' grid

In the table below, three primary themes that emerged from the interviews with tourists are presented. Each of these main themes includes related sub-categories.

*Table 2 - Themes of the tourists' interviews*

Experience and engagement	Psychological and emotional impacts	Personal development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Nature of the experience,</li> <li>✚ Motivations,</li> <li>✚ Adaptation and behavior,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Sensory/emotional influence,</li> <li>✚ Awareness and empathy,</li> <li>✚ Reflections on relationships and well-being,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Development of personal skills,</li> <li>✚ Interest in leisure and personal development,</li> <li>✚ Changes in personal development,</li> <li>✚ Willingness to recommend or repeat the experience.</li> </ul>

Source : author's data

### 5.2 Themes - personal development coaches' grid

The table below highlights the two main themes with sub-categories identified from the interviews with personal development coaches.

*Table 3 - Themes of the personal development coaches' interviews*

Strategies and evaluation	Impact and reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Personal development strategies,</li> <li>✚ Gauge of the success of a session,</li> <li>✚ Recommendation to participate in extraordinary experiences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Influence of extraordinary experiences,</li> <li>✚ Importance of self-reflection.</li> </ul>

Source : author's data

### 5.3 Results of the tourists' interviews

This research utilized a qualitative methodology, engaging in semi-structured interviews with six tourists who had participated in extraordinary tourist activities. The data collection was organized into three distinct thematic categories to ensure a comprehensive analytical framework.

#### 5.3.1 Experience and engagement

The first category, "experience and engagement," includes three sub-categories that are the "nature of the extraordinary experiences", the "motivations driving the tourists", and the "tourists' adaptation and behavior" in response to these experiences.

##### 5.3.1.1 Nature of the extraordinary experiences

This sub-category highlights what makes the experiences unique and memorable. Participants described their experiences as unique due to the immersive and interactive nature of the culinary activities. These experiences included immersive dining experience, culinary contest, dining with strangers, dining in the dark, and participating in a wild plant cooking workshop. In the table below, the nature of each activity that have been experienced by the interviewees are showcased.

Table 4 - List of the analyzed extraordinary tourist experiences

Activity	Criteria
Eatrenalin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Multi-sensory gastronomic experience.</li> <li>✚ Immersion in seven different universes as there are seven dishes.</li> <li>✚ Participants are transported in different rooms with floating chair.</li> <li>✚ Takes place with multiple people.</li> </ul>
Fondue World Championship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Participation to a food world championship.</li> <li>✚ Participant do not need to be professional in the contest's domain.</li> <li>✚ Takes place with multiple people and a jury.</li> </ul>
Timeleft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Eating with strangers in a random restaurant.</li> <li>✚ Use of an app to create a profile.</li> <li>✚ Takes place with multiple people.</li> </ul>
Wild plant cooking workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Gathering of wild plants and preparation of a meal with those.</li> <li>✚ Explanation of the benefits of the wild plants were given.</li> <li>✚ Activity is led by a guide.</li> <li>✚ Takes place with multiple people.</li> </ul>
Dining in the dark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Dining in complete darkness in a specific restaurant.</li> <li>✚ Discovering the foods that are eaten blindly.</li> <li>✚ Takes place with multiple people,</li> <li>✚ Some workers have visual impairments.</li> </ul>

Source : author's data

### ***5.3.1.2 Motivations to participate in extraordinary experiences***

The motivations for the participants to engage in extraordinary culinary experiences are diverse, primarily driven by personal interests, social connections, and unique circumstances. Several participants expressed a distinct willingness to partake in these activities, with motivations ranging from the celebration of significant life events to a deep-seated curiosity and a desire for novel experiences. For instance, one individual's motivation was rooted in a long-standing desire to participate, hindered sometimes by personal reasons or by external constraints such as the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring a delayed but persistent intent to engage in the chosen activity alongside a companion. This particular motivation was further influenced by the proximity of the activity and a personal affinity for cooking and fondue, coupled with the allure of competition inherent in the experience.

Another participant's motivation was characterized by an eagerness to venture into new experiences, aimed at enriching their personal narrative with exciting stories. This desire for novelty was mirrored by another individual who sought to reconnect with nature and explore the culinary and medicinal potential of wild plants, indicating a motivation driven by both a passion for nature and a practical interest in integrating these elements into their diet for enhanced self-sufficiency.

Additionally, social motivations played a significant role, as evidenced by a participant who chose an activity specifically to honor a friend's preferences during a bachelorette party. This choice reflects a motivation that extends beyond personal interest, emphasizing the desire to facilitate a meaningful and enjoyable experience for another, highlighting the diverse nature of motivations behind engaging in extraordinary culinary tourist experiences.

### ***5.3.1.3 Adaptation and behavior***

In the exploration of extraordinary culinary experiences, participants demonstrated a range of behavioral adaptations and enhanced social interactions, navigating through environments markedly distinct from their usual settings. These adaptations were characterized by initial emotional responses such as excitement for novel experiences and a degree of stress associated with engaging in unfamiliar activities.

Participants exhibited diverse reactions to these unique settings, ranging from eagerness at the prospect of a unique culinary adventure to apprehensions about performance and interactions with others. One individual, accustomed to competition from a young age, encountered new forms of stress and aspiration in a culinary contest, a domain where they had not competed before. This situation elicited fears of failure and the potential for embarrassment, underlining the pressure associated with venturing into unfamiliar culinary competitions.

Social dynamics within these experiences were marked by varying degrees of stress and satisfaction. Initial stress was reported by an individual who found themselves amongst older participants, highlighting differences in interests and expectations. However, as the experience unfolded, this initial stress gave way to a more comfortable engagement, suggesting an adaptation to the social environment as the experience progressed.

The setting of some activities in small, intimate groups facilitated a cooperative and immersive learning environment. For example, participants were required to adapt their cooking techniques to the constraints of the available resources, such as the absence of conventional cooking appliances and the necessity to utilize less familiar ingredients. This adaptation was not solely functional but also social, necessitating cooperation and collaboration among participants, guided by an expert who provided insights into the culinary and medicinal properties of the ingredients involved.

In instances where the activities occurred within familiar surroundings of the participants or among known acquaintances, a relaxed and excited atmosphere prevailed. This familiarity likely eased the adaptation process, allowing for a focus on the learning and enjoyment aspects of the experience.

Finally, anxiety related to operating in a darkened environment was also noted, challenging participants to adapt to sensory deprivation, a condition they had not anticipated or experienced before, further emphasizing the range of adaptations required in these extraordinary culinary settings. Noting that the participant is not at ease in the dark.

### ***5.3.2 Psychological and emotional impacts***

The second category, "psychological and emotional impacts," focuses on the sensory and emotional influences associated with the experiences, the enhancement of awareness and empathy among the tourists, and reflections on relationships and well-being.

#### ***5.3.2.1 Sensory and/or emotional influence***

Significant sensory and emotional responses were produced by extraordinary culinary experiences, ranging from surprise and delight to frustration and self-discovery. These reactions spanned a spectrum of sensations and emotions, initiated by the culinary presentations, thematic ambiance, and the dynamics of interaction among participants and facilitators.

The culinary aspects themselves were a source of surprise and delight, with dishes described as elaborate, surprising, and often delicious. A culinary adventure allowed a participant to discover new flavors and presentation styles with the use of floating armchairs, and a thematic focus on Japan. This activity was particularly appreciated for their novelty and ability to meet expectations for a surprising experience. However, this exploration also led to the realization by the participant of a preference for simpler culinary styles, indicating a nuanced impact on personal tastes and preferences.

Emotionally, the experiences elicited a wide range of responses. One participant experienced frustration and annoyance upon discovering that he provided inadvertent assistance to a professional competitor who eventually won the competition, challenging their competitive spirit. Another participant reported feelings of stress and disappointment, particularly when the experience did not fulfill their anticipation of social connections and enjoyment.

Social interaction within these experiences also played a critical role in shaping participants' emotional responses. In the foraging and cooking wild plant workshop, the necessity to cooperate and engage in knowledge sharing created an environment where all participants were actively involved, fostering a pleasant atmosphere where shared interests facilitated positive exchanges. The role of the guide was emphasized as pivotal in facilitating these interactions, suggesting that the facilitation style can significantly influence the overall experience.

Lastly, the sensory deprivation of dining in darkness introduced participants to a unique challenge of not being able to visually identify the food they were consuming. This scenario not only impressed participants due to the uniqueness of the experience but also prompted a reconsideration of the importance of visual cues in the culinary experience, leading to a shared, hands-on dining experience towards the end.

### ***5.3.2.2 Reflection over relationships and well-being***

Post-experience reflections on personal relationships, well-being, and self-improvement varied among participants, with a notable segment acknowledging the potential for growth and learning through such extraordinary culinary experiences. While half of the interviewees (three out of six) did not articulate clear reflections on their relationships and well-being, the other half recognized the value of these experiences in nurturing a deeper understanding of themselves and their interactions with others.

The transmission of knowledge and passion by facilitators or peers was highlighted as a crucial element in these experiences, suggesting that those who share their expertise play a significant role in inspiring others. This process not only aids in discovering new interests but also emphasizes the importance of expanding one's knowledge. The expressed sentiment was that broader distribution of information could lead to enhanced well-being for individuals and communities alike. The dual nature of sharing experiences was noted by a participant, indicating that while the sharing of experiences in groups can be enriching, it also carries the potential for negative impacts. The importance of mental and physical well-being was underscored, with the suggestion that personal contentment is integral to physical health.

On a less positive aspect, the brevity of these experiences was seen as a limitation, potentially limiting the depth of impact on personal development. Despite this, the act of engaging in such activities was recognized as a step outside one's comfort zone, which in itself contributes to personal development.

### **5.3.3 Personal development**

The third and final category, "personal development," addresses the development of personal skills, interest in leisure and personal development, changes observed in personal development post-experience, and the tourists' willingness to recommend or repeat the experience.

#### **5.3.3.1 Development of personal skills**

Participants articulated varied outcomes regarding the development of personal skills. Reports varied from the acquisition or enhancement of specific competencies to no perceptible change in personal skill sets. Several individuals noted a lack of visible change in their personal skills, attributing this to pre-existing competencies such as ease in social situations. Despite the absence of personal skill development, there was an acknowledgment of the potential for such activities to foster interpersonal skills.

One participant, involved in directing an orchestra, highlighted no significant self-perceived growth in personal skills from the culinary experience. Instead, this individual distinguished between the enhancement of specific technical skills related to fondue preparation and the broader category of personal or interpersonal skills, indicating a nuanced view of skill development as domain specific.

Conversely, some participants reported positive developments in areas such as active listening and confidence, with these enhancements attributed directly to the experiences undertaken. The act of engaging deeply with the environment and others during the activities was linked to a heightened sense of observance and a newfound appreciation for natural resources, suggesting that the experiences provided new insights and knowledge that includes environmental awareness.

Additionally, the realization of the availability of food in the wild and the benefits of plants were cited as significant learnings from the activities, pointing to an expanded understanding of nature and sustainability. The reflection by one participant on the potential for personal impact if the experience had been repeated or if there had been a prior intention to focus on personal skill development highlights the role of participant intentionality and the cumulative effect of experiences on personal growth. This diversity in responses underscores the interplay between individual attributes, the nature of the experience, and the perceived value or impact of the activity on personal skill development.

#### **5.3.3.2 Interest for leisure and personal development**

The role of leisure in personal development was affirmed, with activities serving as a medium for self-exploration and growth. This recognition was varied among participants, with some expressing a keen interest in integrating leisure with personal development efforts, while others displayed ambivalence or a naturalistic approach to self-improvement, suggesting that personal development occurs organically without deliberate intervention.

One of the interviewees that suggested that personal development occurred naturally, highlighted the complexity of self-reflection and the unexpected challenges faced during professional evaluations, such as interviews, where personal competencies, rather than technical skills, were assessed. This scenario underlines the importance of self-awareness and the potential role of leisure activities in fostering such awareness, although in an indirect manner.

Furthermore, the notion that leisure can serve as a conduit for personal development was supported by individuals who had actively pursued self-improvement with professional guidance. The idea that engaging in enjoyable activities could facilitate learning and open-mindedness was noted, emphasizing the positive correlation between leisure and the willingness to explore new experiences and perspectives on life and tourism.

The concept of alignment between an individual's activities and their personal identity was underscored, pointing out that leisure activities must resonate with one's sense of self to avoid feeling like an obligation and to genuinely contribute to personal well-being. The enjoyment derived from leisure activities was seen as intrinsically valuable, providing a non-restrictive framework within which personal development could occur. The discussions also touched on the broader implications of leisure on well-being and personal evolution, suggesting that the exploration of new experiences play a crucial role in one's life journey.

#### ***5.3.3.3 Change and personal development***

Changes in personal development were nuanced, with some participants reported no observable change in their personal development following the experiences, highlighting a perception of stability or continuity in their self-awareness, confidence, and social relationships. Conversely, other participants noted nuanced transformations in their personal development, particularly in areas of self-awareness and confidence. Despite the absence of apparent changes for some, the act of participating in new and challenging environments was seen as inherently valuable for self-discovery. It was posited that engaging in diverse activities offers opportunities to learn new aspects about oneself, especially as individuals respond to unfamiliar situations.

For instance, a sense of increased confidence was a recurring theme among those who perceived personal growth. This boost in self-assurance was attributed not only to the experiences themselves but also to the broader implication of being open to and engaging with new experiences. Some participants articulated a belief in the potential of repeated exposure to activities for diminishing fear and enhancing adaptability.

The reflections on personal development were further enriched by individual narratives of feeling happier and more content as a result of the activities, indicating a subjective sense of improvement in well-being. Participants also highlighted the intellectual and sensory engagement provided by the experiences as contributing factors to their overall sense of personal development, even in cases where traditional markers of change were not immediately evident.

#### ***5.3.3.4 Recommendation and intention to repeat the experience***

The willingness to recommend the experiences was high among participants, reflecting the perceived value of these activities in aiding personal development, fostering memorable encounters, and because they were enjoyable. Reasons for recommendation varied among individuals, with some citing the unique and extravagant nature of the activities, which offered more than just food but also a captivating show that made “time fly by”.

Others expressed a desire to participate again in future editions, motivated by the enjoyment of the experience and aspirations of winning. Interest in local cuisine, particularly fondue, and the festive atmosphere of the events were also factors driving recommendations. The well-organized nature of the activities was appreciated. Moreover, a participant mentioned the desire to repeat the experience with peers of similar interests or in different locations was expressed. One interviewee suggested that the appeal of the activities extended to those who valued the nature of the activity. Overall, the enthusiasm for recommending these experiences stemmed from their ability to offer a break from traditional norms and provide opportunities for enjoyment, growth, and connection with others.

## 5.4 Results of the professionals' interviews

The research employed a qualitative approach, conducting semi-directed interviews with three professionals: a counselor (C.M), a personal development coach (L.S), and a personal development coach and trainer and reflexologist therapist (D.M). The interviews were organized in two categories.

### 5.4.1 *Strategies and evaluation*

The first category, "strategies and evaluation", encompasses personal development strategies, assessment of session success and, recommendations for participating in extraordinary experiences for personal development.

#### 5.4.1.1 *Personal development strategies*

All the professionals emphasize the importance of tailoring their approaches to meet the unique needs of each client, acknowledging the individualized nature of personal growth. C.M. utilizes cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for example to target anxiety, focusing on the root causes and facilitating a shift in the client's thinking patterns. This therapeutic strategy is grounded in cognitive restructuring, aimed at helping clients identify, challenge, and change distorted beliefs and negative thought patterns that contribute to anxiety.

Parallely, L.S. employs a diverse toolkit to foster introspection and heightened self-awareness among clients. His methods are personalized, leveraging question-based methodologies alongside experiential exercises to incite clients to explore internal barriers and uncover solutions that lie within. He uses diverse techniques that include the questioning method developed by Byron Katie, the Sedona method, principles of non-violent communication, authentic relating practices, or circling. L.S. sometimes integrates physical movement and environmental changes into his sessions, such as walks near waterfalls, to harness the therapeutic potential of engaging with natural settings, believing that these interactions can catalyze deeper personal insights and shifts in perspective.

D.B., echoing the personalized approaches of C.M. and L.S., focuses on motivational strategies and active engagement in confronting personal barriers. Her methods are individualized, recognizing the unique environmental contexts of each participant. She employs specific themes like "internal theatre" and narrative work, where participants actively engage with and vocalize their inner dialogues and personal narratives in group settings. This collaborative approach aims to unearth hidden personal narratives and cognitive barriers that may be impeding growth.

In these sessions guided by D.B., participants are encouraged to express their thoughts and challenges, while peers contribute by offering hypotheses and advice, creating a supportive environment for personal development. This method leverages the power of communal insight and the therapeutic value of shared experiences to foster deeper understanding and personal evolution. Additionally, D.B. incorporates confrontation strategies, informed by methodologies like those of

Nardone or Farelli, to delicately yet effectively address and resolve issues. This confrontational approach is carefully managed to ensure it is conducted with kindness, emphasizing the therapeutic goal of nurturing rather than overwhelming the participant.

#### ***5.4.1.2 Gauge the success of a session***

The assessment of success in personal development interventions is characterized by its inherently individualized and multifaceted nature, as explicitly acknowledged by the interviewed professionals. Given the personalized approach required in such interventions, a uniform metric for evaluating success is not applicable across different cases. Instead, progress and the effectiveness of strategies are often determined through mechanisms that allow for client self-assessment, reflective practices over time, and observations.

C.M. employs a method of self-assessment that involves asking clients to rate their feelings or disturbances on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating no disturbance and 10 representing the highest level of disturbance. This quantitative measure is utilized at both the beginning and end of sessions to gauge changes in the client's emotional state or perception of a problem. Additionally, C.M. incorporates periodic reviews, typically every 6-8 weeks, to assess clients' progress on specific issues. These reviews may involve questionnaires tailored to the treatment being administered, facilitating a structured approach to tracking changes over time.

L.S. highlights the complexity of measuring progress in personal development. He acknowledges that while some aspects of development can be gauged in a linear fashion, the reality of working with individuals entails navigating a multitude of variables that make the process inherently non-linear. This complexity arises from the diverse experiences, perceptions, and reactions of clients, which do not always follow a predictable or straightforward path.

D.B. also employs specific assessment techniques within her practice. She conducts session reports and assigns small tasks to participants, providing both the clients and the professionals with ongoing feedback on progress. D.B. notes the importance of regulating these assessments, as there can sometimes be exaggerations in self-reported measures. Improvement, according to D.B., is best observed over multiple sessions, allowing professionals to monitor the evolution of the participant effectively.

#### ***5.4.1.3 Recommendation to participate in extraordinary experiences to work on personal development***

The engagement in extraordinary experiences is mutually recognized by C.M., L.S., and D.B. as a significant element in the facilitation of personal development, particularly when these experiences are guided and supported by professionals. These activities are advocated as a means to confront personal fears, diverge from habitual routines, and subsequently, stimulate personal growth.

C.M. emphasizes the importance of preparing and encouraging individuals, especially those with mental health issues, to participate in experiences that challenge their comfort zones. This approach involves a preliminary discussion about potential fears or worries associated with such activities, suggesting a tailored preparation process. C.M. specifically notes the utility of these experiences for individuals with phobias, framing the engagement in challenging activities as a form of exposure or emotion therapy. This method allows individuals to directly confront their fears in a controlled and supportive environment, potentially leading to therapeutic outcomes.

L.S. advocates for the guidance of young individuals and/or professionals by mentors or specialists who can assist them in stepping beyond their familiar boundaries. He underscores the value of having a support system during transitions, such as entering the professional world, to facilitate reflection on one's functioning and openness to new possibilities. According to L.S., personal development involves not just the acquisition of knowledge, such as learning mathematics, but also entails a transformative process requiring adaptability and openness to change. The act of venturing beyond the ordinary, especially when done under the guidance of professionals or alongside others, is posited as a noteworthy step towards personal development.

D.B. also stresses the importance of stepping out of one's comfort zone as a universal recommendation for personal growth. While she acknowledges the difficulty in giving advice based on experiences she has not personally lived, she supports the notion that everyone should embrace challenges as opportunities for development. D.B. believes that engaging in such experiences can catalyze significant personal and professional evolution, encouraging individuals to confront and overcome personal barriers in a supportive environment.

### ***5.4.2 Impact and reflection***

The second one, "impact and reflection", which involves the influence of extraordinary experiences and, the importance of self-reflection.

#### ***5.4.2.1 Influence of extraordinary experiences***

The concept of engaging in extraordinary experiences, defined as activities or situations that deviate from individuals' routine or ordinary experiences, was identified as a catalyst in facilitating personal development. This deviation from the familiar is posited to challenge individuals, pushing them beyond their comfort zones, which, in turn, contributes to personal empowerment and development.

From the perspective of C.M., engaging in novel experiences depends greatly on the individual's readiness and the specific context of their personal challenges. She particularly highlights the potential benefits for individuals experiencing anxiety. Confronting and overcoming unfamiliar or challenging situations can instill a sense of accomplishment and empowerment. This process is seen as particularly beneficial for those working on personal development, as it not only challenges their

preconceived notions and limits but also has the potential to uplift their spirits through the achievement of overcoming perceived barriers.

L.S. articulates a broad endorsement of the impact of non-ordinary experiences on personal development. He emphasizes the transformative potential of breaking from routine and engaging with new environments. According to L.S., such engagements facilitate a shift in perspective, enabling individuals to perceive and interact with their world in ways distinct from their everyday experiences. This shift is deemed essential for personal development, as it allows individuals to explore different facets of their identity and capabilities in varied contexts. Moreover, L.S. observes that the act of removing oneself from routine settings and behaviors can inherently make individuals feel better, suggesting that the novelty itself serves as a stimulus for positive change.

D.B. focuses on the specific example of dining in the dark to illustrate how sensory deprivation can influence personal development. In environments where sight is eliminated, other senses are heightened, challenging usual perceptions and encouraging individuals to interact with their surroundings in new ways. This sensory shift enhances attentiveness, listening skills, and fosters introspection. D.B. notes that such experiences can uncover fears, alter perceptions, and offer unique opportunities for personal growth by pushing individuals to navigate and adapt to unfamiliar situations.

#### ***5.4.2.2 Importance of self-reflection***

The role of self-reflection in the process of personal development was emphasized by the interviewed professionals, highlighting its significance as a mechanism for learning and growth.

C.M. asserts that self-reflection is crucial across various aspects of life, including personal well-being and dynamics of relationships with friends, children, and spouses. She emphasizes that through self-reflection, individuals can uncover and learn from aspects of their character and behavior that may otherwise remain unexamined. This process, although it may surface unwelcome truths about oneself, is framed as a valuable opportunity for learning and personal evolution.

L.S. accentuates the necessity of introspection in personal development, suggesting that it is a fundamental exercise for facilitating deeper understanding and growth. Recognizing the challenges that can accompany solitary introspection, L.S. actively engages in this process alongside clients, guiding them through reflective practices aimed at fostering self-awareness. Furthermore, L.S. advocates for the enrichment of personal experiences through diversity, positing that a broad spectrum of experiences can significantly expand an individual's perspectives. The diversity in experiences is portrayed as a key factor in opening individuals to new ways of thinking and understanding, thereby enhancing the introspective journey.

Similarly, D.B. places a strong emphasis on the importance of self-reflection. She notes that experiences are pivotal moments for people to reflect on their actions and thoughts. Echoing the thoughts of philosophers like Descartes and Jung, D.B. highlights that “unexamined aspects of our lives are likely to resurface, affecting our behaviors and decisions”. This perspective underlines the value of reflective practice not only as a method for personal growth but also as a preventive strategy against repeating past mistakes or overlooked tendencies.

## 6 ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the empirical research findings and the insights drawn from the literature review, aiming to address the three objectives and respond comprehensively to the research question:

*How do extraordinary culinary tourist experiences influence the personal development of Switzerland-based tourists in the Romandy regions?*

By carefully examining the motivations, impacts, and personal development outcomes associated with these experiences, this analysis seeks to demonstrate that extraordinary experiences exert an influence on the personal development of Switzerland-based tourists, thereby furthering the scientific understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

### 6.1 Objective 1: Define Extraordinary Tourist Experiences and Prove their Importance and added value to the tourism industry

The integration of diverse theoretical perspectives has enabled a detailed definition of what constitutes an extraordinary tourist experience. According to Turner (1969), an extraordinary experience transports individuals to a realm distinct from everyday life, offering not merely a change in surroundings but also a profound personal transformation. It is expected that tourists will return both changed and revitalized. Moreover, Rusu and colleagues (2023) describe a tourist experience as a seamless journey beginning with trip planning and continuing even after its end, enriched by the memories and insights gained from engaging activities. As an intangible asset, the value of tourism is crafted by these cumulative experiences and the enduring memories linked to them. Additionally, Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014) highlight that "the extraordinary" is distinguished by its rarity, infrequency, and its capability to rise above everyday events.

Thus, in this context, an extraordinary tourist experience is defined as a rare, infrequent and transformative travel experience that deeply affects a tourist's sense of self and worldview, starting from the planning stage and extending through lasting memories and insights gained, profoundly impacting beyond the journey's end.

Descriptions from tourists vividly illustrate the principle of these extraordinary experiences. Activities such as dining with strangers or eating in complete darkness stand out from standard dining encounters, emphasizing immersive and interactive aspects that are designed to challenge standard sensory and social interactions. These real-world examples substantiate scholarly claims by Jefferies & Lepp (2012), who argue that extraordinary experiences should offer unique, memorable encounters with transformative potential.

Most participants encountered these extraordinary activities for the first time or experienced familiar activities in novel ways (i.e. culinary context), reporting emotions ranging from mild stress to excitement. All activities, immersive dining, world championship contest, wild plant gathering, dining in the dark, and eating with strangers, required participants to be particularly active or rely more heavily on certain senses-factors that align with the theoretical principles of experiential learning supported by Goolaup and Mossberg (2016) and Lindberg and Østergaard (2015). The significance of active participation in these contexts mirrors the scholarly insights that real understanding and personal growth derive from engaging directly and fully in new experiences. This direct exposure to diverse environments and practices deepens the understanding and appreciation of the tourists, fostering a broader personal development (Jernsand & Goolaup, 2020).

The perspectives of personal development professionals further deepen the understanding of the importance of these experiences. These experts note that extraordinary experiences challenge individuals to step beyond their comfort zones, thereby engaging deeper emotional and cognitive processes essential for personal development.

Although participants in the study reported that their encounters with extraordinary experiences did not transform them, there is recognition of the latent potential for such activities to catalyze significant personal development over time. The case study by Chen and Huang (2017) explains this by claiming that while short-term experiences often provide initial enjoyment and broadened perspectives, they typically fall short of inducing substantial personal transformation. Conversely, prolonged or repeated engagement in these experiences has been shown to foster deeper personal development. This impact is apparent as participants repeatedly exposed to challenging and new situations experience a gradual transformation in their emotional and mental processes. In the example of Chen and Huang's (2017) case study it has been stated that such sustained interactions enhance personal development across multiple dimensions, including capabilities, emotions, skills, worldview, and self-consciousness. Hence, this suggests that the true potential of extraordinary tourist experiences is most effectively realized through extended and repeated encounters.

Linking these insights underlines the significance of extraordinary tourist experiences for the tourism industry. From an economic perspective, high-value tourism significantly boosts local economies by attracting tourists who spend more on dining, and unique experiences. This spending is crucial for sustaining local businesses, as tourists often pay a premium for distinctive experiences and may recommend the activity and/or return if their expectations are met, for instance, if a tourist comes with a specific goal that requires repeating the experience. Environmentally, targeting specific tourist groups, such as those seeking personal growth or specific knowledge, helps manage visitor numbers. This approach prevents overcrowding and minimizes environmental impact, ensuring that tourism respects the local ecosystem. The reduced environmental footprint, in turn, sustains the attractiveness of the destination, which further supports economic growth through continued tourist interest. Socially, extraordinary tourist experiences create meaningful connections between visitors and local cultures. This is especially true in gastronomy, where experiencing local food can help

preserve cultural heritage. By fostering deeper cultural exchange, these experiences not only enrich the visitor's experience but also strengthen the community ties of the destination, contributing to social cohesion and economic stability. Together, these benefits demonstrate that extraordinary tourist experiences are key to advancing sustainable development in the tourism industry. They not only spur economic growth but also promote a balanced and responsible approach to tourism, where economic benefits are achieved in harmony with environmental preservation and social enrichment.

## **6.2 Objective 2: Interest of Switzerland-based Tourists in Extraordinary Experiences and Their Psychological Impacts on Personal Development**

Switzerland-based tourists exhibit a pronounced interest in extraordinary experiences, as revealed through some participant responses. Participants indicated diverse motivations for seeking extraordinary experiences, ranging from the desire to celebrate special occasions in unique environments to personal challenges aimed at self-emancipation. All participants mentioned appreciating discovering new experiences. This variety highlights a significant psychological engagement with these activities. The literature supports this finding, with Mak & al. (2012) suggesting that engagement in culinary experiences encourages tourists to explore and embrace new cultures, subsequently enhancing personal development.

The psychological impacts reported by tourists include enhanced awareness and interpersonal skills, apparent following immersive experiences such as dining in complete darkness, eating with strangers, or engaging in wild plant gathering and cooking. While some experiences were less explicit in their psychological effects on personal development, all involved some level of collaboration, for instance, underlining the development of adaptational skills. Karim (2006, cited in Guzel & Apaydin, 2016) supports these observations, noting that such experiences contribute to personal development by extending one's understanding through diverse culinary tradition, or in this context, culinary environment. Additionally, this corresponds with Mair and Sumner's view (2017) that tourism serves as an educational tool, encouraging tourists to evaluate their beliefs, values, and perspectives, promoting a more inclusive and comprehensive worldview. Moreover, interviews with professionals in the field affirm the importance of moving beyond one's comfort zone, although they advise that such steps should be taken under professional guidance to maximize learning and reflection. This approach not only enhances individual development but also ensures safety and more profound personal reflection.

Concerning accessibility, an interviewed professional highlighted financial accessibility challenges, noting that individuals in professional reintegration often lack resources for engaging in beneficial extraordinary activities that could enhance their personal development. Also, a participant expressed a desire to engage more extensively in these activities but noted that financial constraints and work commitments significantly limit their ability to do so. These challenges underscore the need for adaptations in tourism, for instance, by making those offerings more visible and provide more information, to better suit the circumstances of individuals who face difficulties in participating in

these enriching experiences, thereby making transformative experiences accessible to a wider audience.

The interest of Switzerland-based tourists in extraordinary experiences is not only a reflection of their desire for personal and social development but also highlights the need for the tourism industry to adapt to the diverse needs of potential tourists. By addressing these needs, tourism can truly fulfill its role as a catalyst for personal growth and social integration.

### **6.3 Objective 3: Correlation Between Personal Development Outcomes and Extraordinary Experiences**

Following what has been mentioned in the previous objective's discussion, developing oneself personally is possible through extraordinary tourist experiences. The empirical data collected from Switzerland-based tourists who participated in extraordinary culinary experiences highlight personal development outcomes, which can be analyzed through the lens of experiential learning and transformative educational theories. For example, the wild plant cooking workshop not only imparted practical skills such as identifying and utilizing edible wild plants but also fostered a deeper appreciation for sustainability and environmental stewardship. This aligns with environmental psychology, suggesting that direct engagement with nature can catalyze a heightened ecological consciousness and foster behaviors geared toward sustainability. Such outcomes are reflective of transformative learning processes, where experiential interactions with the environment lead to new ways of thinking and behaving (Mair, Sumner, 2017). Hence, experiential learning, gastronomy tourism, and personal development are intricately connected. Extraordinary tourist experiences have the potential to trigger transformative processes, unleashing the personal development journey of tourists. By actively participating in infrequent culinary adventures and recognizing the educational aspects of tourism, individuals could possibly undergo a transformative process that goes beyond traditional learning. These experiences expand their horizons, fostering personal development, self-awareness, and resilience.

Personal development professionals corroborate these findings, emphasizing the role of extraordinary experiences in facilitating significant personal development. They noted that such experiences challenge individuals to step out of their comfort zones, engaging them in novel situations that require adaptability and reflection. This process is akin to the theoretical frameworks described by Turner (1969) and Tung & Ritchie (2011), which highlight the transformative potential of new and challenging experiences as they can foster a deep emotional connection with the visited locals, ultimately contributing to a more profound personal development. While their research focused on the visited locals, it would be interesting to consider that this might be applicable to other participants that take part in the same activities. The professionals' insights underscore the importance of these experiences in disrupting routine cognitive and emotional patterns, thereby fostering new skills and perspectives that are essential for personal development. It also has been mentioned that changing the environment can have an impact and stimulate a change.

Tourists' responses further illustrate the psychological impact of these experiences. For instance, participants in the "Dining in the Dark" activity reported enhanced sensory awareness and a newfound empathy for those with visual impairments, reflecting a profound emotional and cognitive shift. Such changes are indicative of the sensory and emotional influences discussed in the literature review, where Karim (2006, cited in Guzel & Apaydin, 2016) notes that engaging with diverse culinary traditions can extend one's understanding and contribute to personal development. These experiences make parallel with the higher-order needs in Maslow's hierarchy, particularly the needs for self-actualization and esteem, as they provide opportunities for mastery, recognition, and the realization of personal potential.

## 7 MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATION

The analysis of the results of the diverse objectives showcases the importance of extraordinary tourist experiences within the tourism industry. It also, covers the interest in personal development for Switzerland-based tourists and the link between personal development and extraordinary experiences. As the potential for these types of experiences may be interesting to invest in, it is important to highlight them. A key challenge that has been uncovered in the result analysis is the financial accessibility of these experiences, particularly for individuals seeking specific goals or outcomes from their travel. To address this challenge and capitalize on the potential demand for transformative tourism, it is essential to put into light the existence of these extraordinary tourist experiences and to detail their characteristics and availability to help individuals seeking those to choose them accordingly to their resources.

Therefore, the proposed recommendation is to create a way to make the information of extraordinary tourist more accessible and visible. To do so, it is advised to implement a new rubric to an existing platform that already is renown. This rubric would serve as a comprehensive index, enabling professional coaches, tourists, and service providers to collaborate and get access to all the available information on those experiences provided in the market. This can be useful as there are currently no official list provided on the web.

This can be proposed through regional tourism websites, for instance, by Vaud.ch as an addition of what is already proposed on their website, and it could benefit from the awareness of the already existing platform. Vaud.ch is the official website of the Canton of Vaud, offering information about the region, its government, and services (Vaud, 2023). Extending through a regional tourism website can provide localized content, tailored to the unique characteristics of the region, which may attract tourists looking for specific experiences. This approach also allows for closer community engagement with local businesses and service providers, enhancing the authenticity and diversity of offerings. Marketing efforts can be more focused, leveraging the regional identity. However, it is important to acknowledge that this approach may have limited reach, appealing primarily to tourists interested in that region and require separate management for each region, increasing complexity and costs.

The creation of a rubric to an existing platform rather than a standalone platform has been reflected, as generating awareness in a new platform could be significantly challenging, as it would consume time and money, nonetheless being part of a name that is recognized would help tackle the challenge. Thus, for this recommendation the example of Vaud.ch is utilized to demonstrate how this platform's rubric would be developed. This choice has been made because the canton of Vaud is the biggest canton of the Romandy regions. Nonetheless, the principle of the approach can be replicated to different cantons. Given the time constraints inherent in this thesis, the suggestions presented are primarily derived from the researcher's existing academic knowledge and understanding of the subject, reflecting a synthesis of the educational content absorbed throughout the academic program.

## 7.1 Vision, mission, and value

Starting by setting a clear vision, mission, and values is essential as it provides guidance, ensures consistency, engages stakeholders, aids in decision-making, and facilitates the development of the rubric.

*Table 5 - Rubric's vision, mission and values*

<b>Vision</b>	Empowering a journey of discovery and personal development through Switzerland's extraordinary experiences, connecting tourists with the spirit of adventure and the pursuit of self-fulfillment.
<b>Mission</b>	<p>Develop a dynamic online platform designed to revolutionize the tourist experience by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Empowering personal development with a presentation of extraordinary tourist experiences to enhance the regions' offering,</li> <li>✚ Enabling tourists to effortlessly discover and engage with unique, life-enriching activities tailored to their interests and aspirations,</li> <li>✚ Providing service providers with a strong marketplace to showcase their products and gain insights into market trends and demands.</li> </ul>
<b>Values</b>	Innovation, customer centricity, collaboration, and empowerment.

Source : author's data

These values are selected because this new rubric fosters an environment where innovation thrives, customer needs are principal, collaboration is encouraged, and empowerment is essential.

Innovation drives continual improvement and adaptation, embracing new technologies and creative solutions that enhance user experiences and expand the range of extraordinary tourist offerings. Customer centricity places the needs and satisfaction of users: tourists, personal development coaches, and service providers, at the core of every decision, ensuring a responsive and user-friendly platform. Collaboration among users, staff, and partners fosters a cooperative environment that leverages shared knowledge and skills to achieve common goals and create richer experiences. Lastly, empowerment is key, enabling individuals to explore and engage deeply with transformative experiences, providing them with the tools and opportunities to pursue personal growth and meaningful adventures. Through these values, the platform serves its users and contributes to a more connected and insightful world.

### 7.1.1 Rubric's objectives

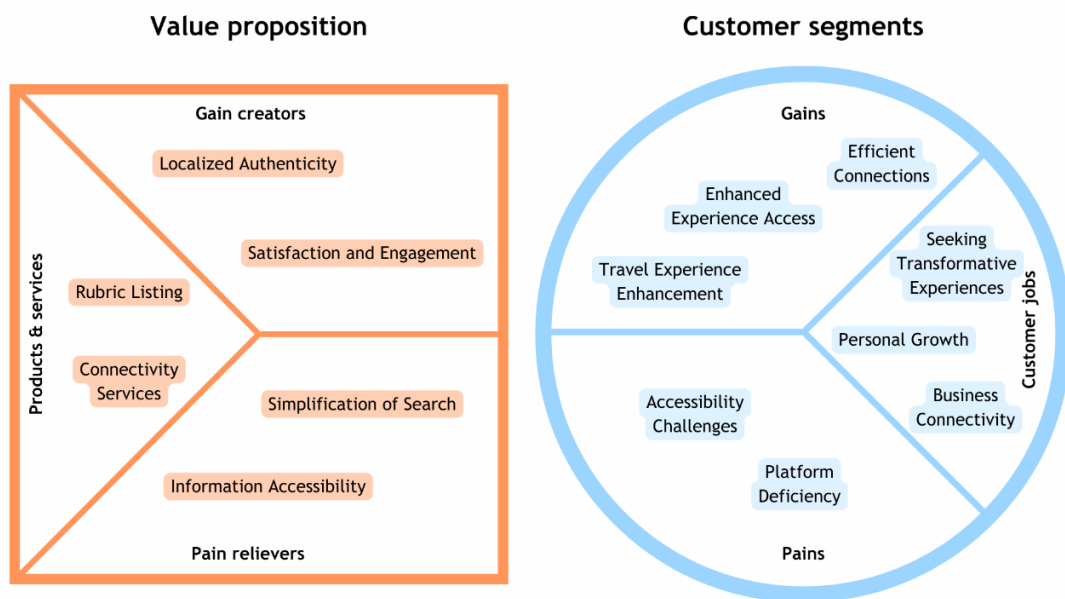
To continue with the development of the rubric, below are presented its objectives.

1. The first objective is to present a comprehensive index, that will make it easier to navigate and get access to all extraordinary tourist experiences available in a specific region. Each experience would be described in detail, along with its availability, pricing, and contact information.
2. The second objective aims to support the growing interest in personal development through tourism by highlighting experiences that contribute to personal growth, skills development, or wellness.
3. The last objective will facilitate better engagement between tourists, local businesses, service providers, and professional coaches.

### 7.1.2 Added value

Now that the objectives are settled, the use of a value proposition canvas is ideal as it can delineate the advantages for both tourists and service providers. The value proposition canvas is a strategic tool that aids in aligning business offerings with customer needs, ensuring that products and services effectively address specific customer pains and gains, thereby enhancing market relevance and customer satisfaction.

Figure 4 - Value Proposition Canvas



Source : author's data

According to the outcome of Figure 4 - Value Proposition Canvas, the customer segment analysis reveals three primary customer jobs: seeking transformative experiences, pursuing personal growth, and enhancing business connectivity. Tourists are driven by the desire for unique and transformative experiences and personal development opportunities through tourism. Simultaneously, service providers aim to connect with potential customers effectively.

The pains identified include accessibility challenges, where tourists may find it difficult to locate extraordinary and transformative experiences, and platform deficiency, where the new rubric, despite being annexed to a regional website, may lack a comprehensive layout to connect tourists with local experiences effectively. In contrast, the gains anticipated from this setup are considerable. Tourists will gain enhanced access to a list of extraordinary experiences, thereby simplifying their search and enhancing their travel experience through opportunities for personal development. Furthermore, efficient connections between users and service providers will be facilitated.

In terms of the value proposition, the rubric listing serves as an important product and service offering. It not only showcases the extraordinary activities available within the region but also facilitates connections between tourists, professional coaches, and local businesses as tourists and personal coaches will have direct access to the local businesses. This rubric will simplify the search for unique tourist experiences and personal development activities. Moreover, it will enhance information accessibility, providing detailed descriptions and booking options directly through the regional website. The gain creators include localized authenticity, which emphasizes the unique aspects of the selected region, and potentially increases tourist satisfaction and engagement by making it straightforward to discover and engage with unique activities.

## **7.2 Phase 0: Market analysis**

Before the implementation of the proposed rubric, it is imperative to conduct a thorough investigation into the market potential for extraordinary tourist experiences, particularly those that integrate aspects of personal development. Recent trends suggest a growing appreciation among individuals for such transformative experiences. Furthermore, there is an increasing emphasis on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills within the professional sector, as highlighted by an interviewee whose employer placed significant value on soft skills and personal insights which can lead to think that tourists might be willing to participate in those kinds of activities.

To establish a strong foundation for this initiative, a comprehensive quantitative research study is necessary. This research should extend beyond the preliminary findings of the initial study to encompass a broader demographic, thereby ensuring a well-rounded understanding of the market dynamics and consumer preferences. The objective is to determine whether these enhanced tourism experiences resonate with the target audience and to explore the potential for developing tourism in ways that emphasize personal growth and skill development.

In the table below, diverse steps are described to assess the phase 0 in the form of an action plan.

Table 6 - Market analysis' action plan

Action plan	
<b>Step 1</b>	<p>Assessing the interest of Switzerland-based tourists in extraordinary tourist experiences that promote personal development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ What is the level of interest in transformative tourist experiences?</li> <li>✚ How important are personal development aspects to these tourists?</li> <li>✚ What specific interpersonal and intrapersonal skills are tourists looking to develop through these experiences?</li> </ul>
<b>Step 2</b>	<p>Creating a structured questionnaire that includes both quantitative and qualitative questions to capture comprehensive data on preferences and expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Sampling Strategy: Identify and segment the target population based on demographics, travel habits, and previous experiences with personal development activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 3</b>	<p>Execute Data Collection &amp; Analyze Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Timeline: Set a precise timeline for data collection, allowing adequate time for sufficient sample size acquisition.</li> <li>✚ Execution: Deploy the survey through selected channels, ensuring to monitor response rates and participant engagement regularly.</li> </ul> <p>Analyze Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Data Processing: Compile and cleanse the data for analysis.</li> <li>✚ Statistical Analysis: Employ statistical tools to analyze the data, focusing on correlation and regression analyses to understand the relationships and impacts of different variables.</li> </ul>

Source : author's data

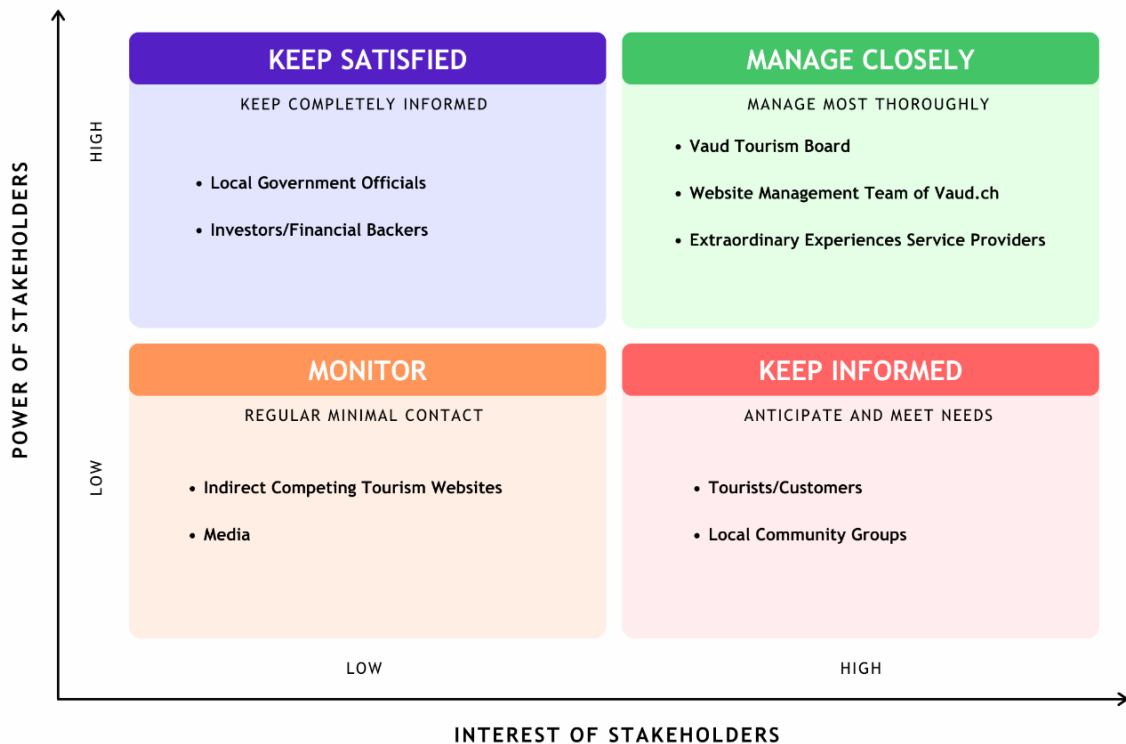
### 7.3 Phase 1: Analysis and system specification

After thorough market analysis confirming interest in this area, it is essential to highlight the market's potential and clearly understand the stakeholders' specific needs and expectations. This understanding will help secure their commitment to invest time and resources in the project. According to the concept of sensemaking and sensegiving by Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991), effective strategy implementation involves first presenting a clear and compelling strategy to stakeholders. Following this, the strategy should be collaboratively reviewed and adjusted with the stakeholders to ensure their buy-in and acceptance.

To successfully implement the new strategy and gain stakeholder support, it is crucial to first identify and understand the stakeholders. Creating a stakeholders' map is a practical step in this process. This map helps in strategically engaging and effectively communicating with stakeholders by visually categorizing them according to their levels of influence and interest. The stakeholders' map is organized into four key dimensions: (1) Manage Most Thoroughly, (2) Keep Satisfied, (3) Keep

Informed, and (4) Monitor. This structure aids in prioritizing stakeholder management efforts efficiently.

Figure 5 - Stakeholders' map



Source : author's data

Below, the role of each stakeholder of the rubric is detailed, outlining their involvement and significance within each dimension.

1. Manage Most Thoroughly (High Power, High Interest):

- Vaud Tourism Board: Their role is crucial because they are the main source of information about tourism in Vaud. They are responsible for providing financing, promoting the effort, and making sure the rubric is widely visible through a variety of marketing platforms.
- Website Developers and Content Managers at Vaud.ch: The technical and visual integration of the rubric into the current website depends on these parties. Their knowledge will guarantee that the rubric is easy to use and presents the attractions in an appealing way, increasing user engagement.
- Extraordinary Service Providers: The rubric's material is provided by these service providers. Their partnership is crucial to providing the captivating experiences that form the foundation of the rubric.

2. Keep Satisfied (High Power, Low Interest):

- Local Government Officials: In order to negotiate regulatory frameworks that may have an impact on the operation and promotion of tourism activities specified in the rubric, their cooperation is required. Sustaining a positive rapport with these authorities guarantees adherence and seamless functioning.
- Investors and Financial Backers: Investors are intrigued by the potential economic benefits and increased awareness that the rubric may offer the area. This group can be satisfied with regular updates and reports on the effectiveness of the rubric and its influence on local tourism.

3. Keep Informed (Low Power, High Interest):

- Tourists and Customers: As the end-users of the rubric, their feedback is crucial in measuring the success of the rubric. Implementing feedback mechanisms and engagement strategies will help in refining the offerings.
- Local Communities Groups: These stakeholders have a vested interest in how their culture and local spots are represented. Engaging with them through community meetings and information sessions ensures their support and enhances the authenticity of the rubric.

4. Monitor (Low Power, Low Interest):

- Media: While their direct influence on the project's success is limited, their role in broader publicity is not negligible. Monitoring their coverage can provide insights into public perception and promotional effectiveness.
- Other Regional Tourism Websites: Keeping an eye on similar platforms can provide competitive insights and help in benchmarking and improving the rubric.

### 7.3.1 Functional and non-functional requirements

Once the stakeholders agree, a comprehensive requirements document must be prepared, detailing both functional requirements such as booking and searching capabilities, and non-functional requirements, which include usability, accessibility, security, and performance that will be included in the rubric.

This table outlines the functional and non-functional requirements for the proposed addition to the Vaud.ch website. Currently, the website features a booking system for accommodations. The new section will introduce listings for unique tourist experiences, seamlessly integrating with the existing booking infrastructure eliminating the need for a separate system and the creation of a new one. The descriptions in the table detail the requirements, considering the capabilities that might already be supported by the current system.

Table 7 - Rubric's functional and non-functional requirements

Functional	Non-functional
<p><b>Booking System:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Users should be able to browse and book extraordinary tourist activities offered by service providers.</li> <li>✚ The booking process should be intuitive, allowing users to select dates, times, and activity options seamlessly.</li> <li>✚ Confirmation emails should be sent to users upon successful booking, containing relevant details and instructions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Search Functionality:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Users should have the ability to search for activities based on various criteria such as location, activity type, duration, and price range.</li> <li>✚ The search results should be displayed in a clear and organized manner, allowing users to easily compare options and find relevant activities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Usability:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ The rubric should have a clean and intuitive user interface, with easy navigation and clear labeling of features.</li> <li>✚ All interactions should be responsive, providing feedback to users in a timely manner and guiding them through the booking process.</li> </ul> <p><b>Security:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ User data should be securely stored and transmitted using encryption protocols to protect against unauthorized access.</li> <li>✚ The booking system should implement measures to prevent fraud and ensure the integrity of transactions, such as CAPTCHA verification and secure payment gateways.</li> </ul> <p><b>Performance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Scalability measures should be in place to accommodate spikes in traffic during peak periods, ensuring consistent performance under varying levels of demand.</li> </ul>

Source : author's data

### 7.3.2 Features of the rubric

This sub-category serves to present how the new section could be integrated into the current Vaud.ch website (see - Vaud.ch, after (Adapted by the author from Vaud, 2023)).

Currently, the Vaud.ch website includes several sections such as "LIVING," "TERROIR," "TOURISM," "ECONOMY," and "I AM...," each providing content specific to its category. The "I AM..." section dynamically directs users to content tailored to their interests. It is recommended to add the new section, for instance, called "VAUD'S HIDDEN TREASURES" under the "TOURISM" tab, as it fits the category. Additionally, using a link from the "I AM..." section to point users to this new section would maintain the site's ease of navigation.

Figure 6 - Vaud.ch, before (Vaud, 2023)

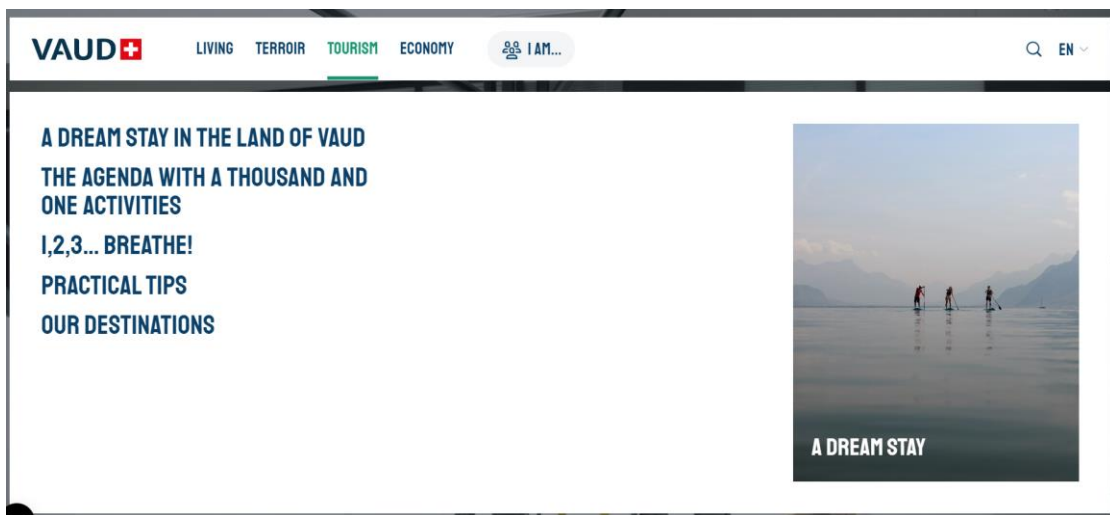
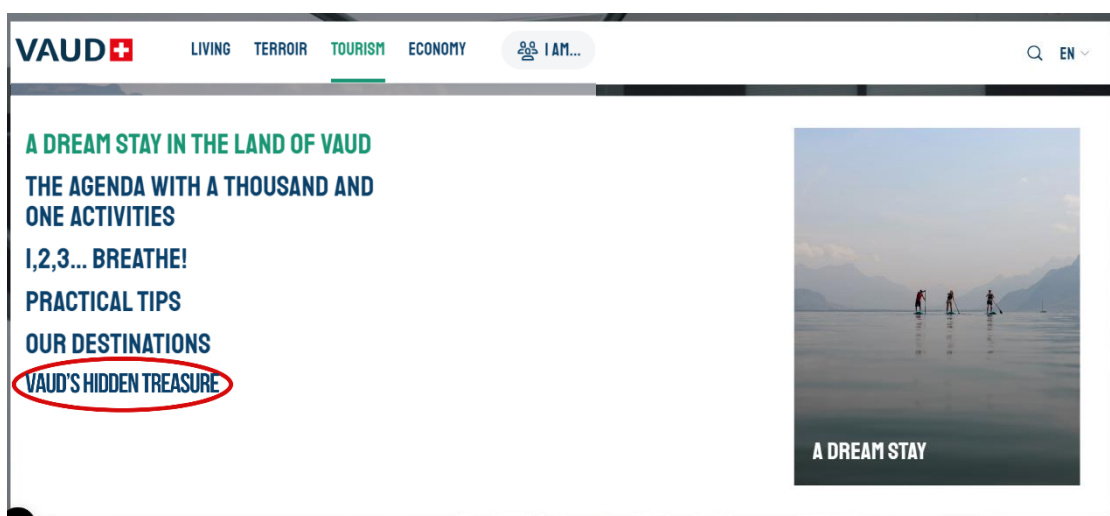


Figure 7 - Vaud.ch, after (Adapted by the author from Vaud, 2023)



Source : author's data

## 7.4 Phase 2: Implementation plan

To illustrate the implementation process, a table has been created to outline all the necessary steps and considerations demonstrating how the new section can be integrated into the Vaud.ch platform.

*Table 8 - Implementation plan*

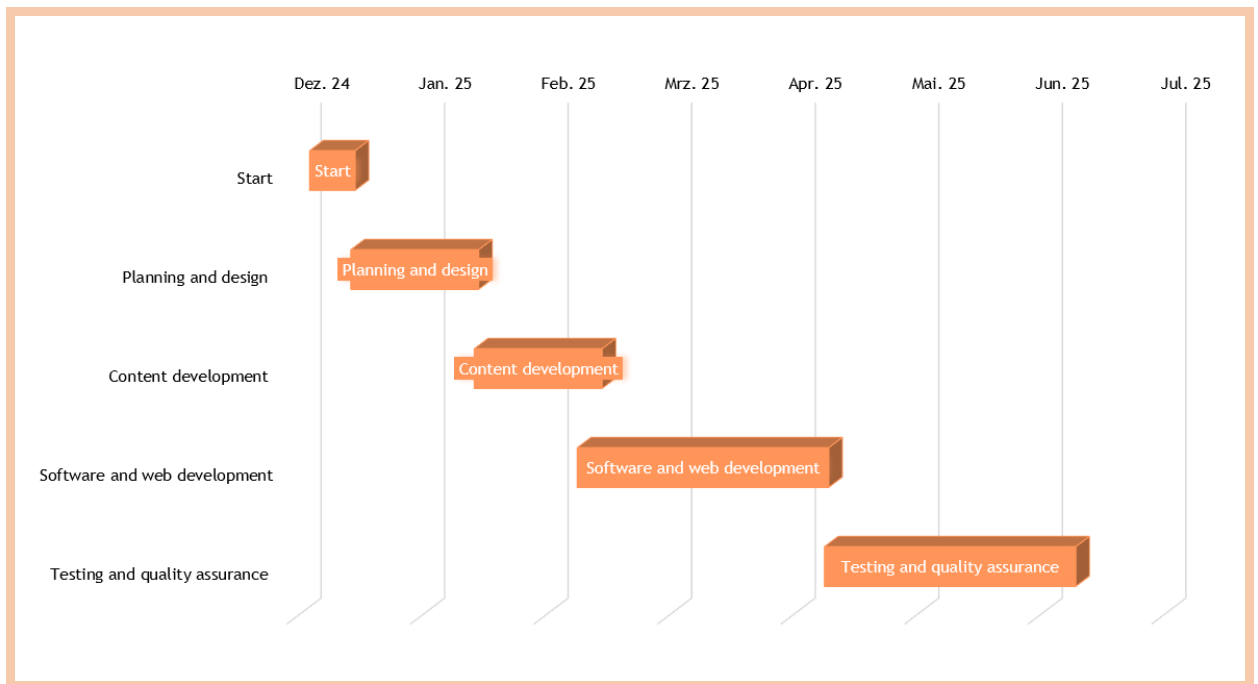
Stage	Roles Involved	Note
<b>(1) Planning and design</b> Define the rubric's purpose, criteria, and outcomes.	Project Managers, UI/UX Designers	Start the plan by setting the scope and tools.
<b>(2) Content development</b> Create content aligning with the website and objectives	Designers	Content feeds into the software development process.
<b>(3) Software and web development</b> Develop and code the website or platform. Integrate databases.	Web Developers, Database Engineers	Direct continuation from planning; develops the physical platform.
<b>(4) Testing and quality assurance</b> Test for usability, compatibility, and functionality.	Quality Assurance Specialists	Test the combined efforts of content and software development.
<b>(5) Implementation and deployment</b> Launch the rubric, train users.	IT Specialists, Trainers	Deploy the tested system to users; merges into maintenance.
<b>(6) Maintenance and support</b> Provide ongoing support, updates, and issue resolution.	Support Staff, Web Developers	Continue parallel to the platform's life, ensuring functionality.
<b>(7) Evaluation and feedback</b> Regularly assess and refine the rubric based on user feedback.	Analysts, Project Managers	Close the loop on the digital supply chain by feeding back into planning.

Source : author's data

### 7.4.1 Gantt chart

To visualize how long the implementation process would take a Gantt chart has been established. This chart allows to plan all the steps and amount of time the implementation necessitates. It is important to note that the time attributed to each phase has been hypothetically given. The implementation plan would begin in January 2025 and would end in June 2025.

Figure 8 - Gantt Chart - Rubric's implementation plan



Source : author's data

### 7.4.2 Risk assessment matrix and strategies mitigations

It is primordial to assess the risks linked to the rubric's creation, thus the table below presents potential risks, categorizing each by their likelihood, impact, and priority, on a scale from high to low. Here, 'high' indicates a significant concern, while 'low' suggests a less urgent issue. The final column of the table outlines strategies to mitigate these risks.

Table 9 - Risk assessment matrix and strategies mitigations

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Priority	Mitigation Strategies
Technical Issues in Integration	High	High	High	Developing a testing and quality assurance phase. Ensuring backup systems and rollback plans are in place.
Stakeholder Disengagement	Medium	High	High	Doing regular updates and meetings to keep all parties engaged. Implementing feedback mechanisms.
Data Security Breaches	Low	High	High	Implementing advanced security protocols, regular security audits, and agreement checks.
Over Budget and Time Overruns	Medium	High	Medium	Using project management tools to track progress and budget. Having emergency funds available.
Inaccurate Content	Medium	Medium	Medium	Establishing a content review and validation process. Involving subject matter experts.
Inadequate System Performance	Medium	High	High	Ensuring scalability and performance testing during development. Optimizing based on findings.
Regulatory Compliance Issues	Low	High	Medium	Staying updated with local regulations. Engaging legal advisors to ensure all aspects of the platform are compliant.

Source : author's data

## 7.5 Phase 3: Monitoring and evaluation

Metrics, regular assessments, and the collection of feedback are vital for understanding how well the rubric is performing. First, tracking the number of registrations during booking can help assess the initial attractiveness and efficiency of the onboarding process for users booking extraordinary tourist experiences. Second, using tools like Google Analytics to measure session duration provides insight into how long users stay on the page, which helps gauge user engagement and content relevance. Third, conversion rates, which measure the percentage of visitors who complete a booking, indicate the platform's effectiveness in converting visitors into active users and serve as a direct measure of economic efficiency.

Customer-centric metrics are equally important. The customer satisfaction score (CSAT), gathered through post-booking surveys, can aid predict customer loyalty and future behaviors, crucial for service improvement.

Moreover, regular assessments are important for maintaining alignment with KPIs. Bi-monthly reviews help track ongoing performance, a quarterly review ensures alignment with the strategic goals, and an annual review compares performance against market standards and competitors.

Lastly, feedback collection through diverse channels, like CSAT surveys, allows incorporation of user opinions into development plans. Regular meetings among analysts to discuss feedback promote continual refinement and adaptation of the rubric.

## 7.6 Phase 4: Marketing strategy's outline

In this final phase, a brief marketing strategy is outlined. Implementing the rubric requires a well-structured marketing strategy for successful introduction and adoption, as it allows effective targeting of the audience and efficient allocation of resources. However, due to the limitations of this study, only an outline of the marketing strategy is provided. Below, the various components of the strategy are presented, along with a description of each

*Table 10 - Marketing strategy*

Component	Description
Target Audience Analysis	Identifying and understanding groups like personal development coaches, students, and tourists seeking unique activities are essential to tailor marketing messages.
Unique Selling Proposition (USP)	The rubric's unique benefits and problems it solves, such as enhancing learning outcomes must be articulated in the strategy.
Marketing Objectives	Setting SMART goals to create objectives for the project that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound, will allow the strategy to be efficient and well-thought.
Promotional Channels	<b>Digital Marketing:</b> For instance, use social media and the website to promote the new rubric. <b>Email Marketing:</b> Send an email to the already registered users of the newsletter of Vaud.ch to announce the implementation of the new rubric.
Content Strategy	The content should show attractive images or videos of the extraordinary tourist activities. Also, giving explanations about their benefits could engage the audience better.
Budget	A planning and an allocation of the resources for the promotions and the content creation should be made taking into consideration marketing managers, content creators, SEO specialists, advertising budget and content creation budget.
Evaluation Metrics	To measure the success of the marketing campaign, tracking the following metrics could be interesting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🚩 Website traffic, as it indicates the number of people visiting the website.</li> <li>🚩 Social media engagement, as it reflects user interactions like likes, comments, and shares.</li> <li>🚩 Feedback because it provides direct insights from users about their experiences which can indicate the satisfaction of the users.</li> </ul>
Timeline	Finally, it is essential to craft a timeline for the marketing strategy to be sure to have taken every step into consideration. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre-launch phase (incl. market research and strategy development)</li> <li>2. Launch preparation phase (incl. content and campaign development)</li> <li>3. Launch phase. This phase marks the official release of the rubric, accompanied by key promotional activities.</li> <li>4. Post-launch phase (incl. ongoing promotion and optimization based on performance metrics)</li> <li>5. Evaluation phase (incl. reviewing and adjusting the marketing strategy based on the KPIs.)</li> </ol>

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the influence of extraordinary culinary tourist experiences on personal development among Switzerland-based tourists in the Romandy regions. The findings have provided insightful revelations into how gastronomic tourism intertwines with individual growth and well-being.

### Summary of Results

The study revealed that culinary experiences, particularly those categorized as extraordinary, significantly contribute to personal development. These experiences, often immersive and involving unique sensory engagements such as dining in the dark or participating in culinary contests, allow individuals to transcend their daily routines and engage deeply with diverse culinary and cultural landscapes. Participants reported enhanced self-awareness, increased confidence, and a broader understanding of different cultures and lifestyles. These outcomes align with the theoretical framework of experiential learning, where hands-on, immersive experiences are crucial in fostering personal growth.

### Recommendation

In response to the findings, the study proposes the creation of a rubric to make extraordinary tourist experiences more accessible to both tourists and professionals within the industry. The rubric would be integrated into an existing regional tourism website, such as Vaud.ch, leveraging its established platform and audience. This rubric would provide detailed descriptions, availability, pricing, and booking options for each listed experience, ensuring comprehensive and accessible information. Secondly, it would increase the awareness and visibility of extraordinary tourist experiences, promoting them to a wider audience potentially interested in personal development through tourism. Lastly, it would foster greater interaction between tourists, personal development coaches, and service providers, making it easier to match demand with the appropriate offerings.

### Limitations and Future Research

While the findings are compelling, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The sample size and demographic were restricted to tourists based in the Romandy regions, which may not provide a complete picture of the tourism dynamics in Switzerland. Furthermore, the qualitative approach, while depth-oriented, limits the generalizability of the results.

Future research could expand by incorporating a larger and more diverse demographic to validate these findings across different cultural and socioeconomic groups. Quantitative methods could be employed to measure the specific impacts of various types of tourist experiences on personal development. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore the long-term effects of these

experiences, providing deeper insights into how personal development evolves over time after such experiences.

In conclusion, this thesis not only illuminates the significant role of extraordinary culinary experiences in personal development but also encourages a more thoughtful integration of these experiences within the tourism industry to foster an environment conducive to personal and cultural enrichment.

“The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience”.

(Roosevelt, n.d.)

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I have carried out this final research project on my own without any help other than the references listed in the list of references and that I have only used the sources mentioned. I will not provide a copy of this paper to a third party without the permission of the department head and of my advisor, with the exception of those who provided me with information needed to write this paper and whose names follow: MH, DA, JP, MH, Anonymous, AB, CM, LS, and DB.

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