

Bachelor Thesis 2024
HES-SO Valais/Wallis, Filière Tourisme



**Language Diversity and Customer Experiences: Beyond Borders in
the Val d'Anniviers**

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Module : 795 Bachelor Thesis
Submission date : 13 May 2024

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Zufferey, V. (2023). *Glacier de Zinal depuis le Lac d'Arpitettaz* [Photograph].

Executive summary

Introduction

The tourism industry is characterized by its global nature, attracting millions of international travellers annually to destinations such as the Valais region (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2024). These visitors from diverse origins speak an array of different languages. In order for their needs and expectations to be met, effective communication with tourism service providers is essential. The Val d'Anniviers, one of the lateral valleys of the Valais region, is a popular tourist destination facing the challenge of serving a linguistically diverse clientele, which raises the question : How do Val d'Anniviers' service providers adapt to effectively cater to these visitors ? This study aims to identify gaps in the destination's offerings and provide recommendations to enhance the customer experience for its multilingual visitors. Analysis of existing research and firsthand data obtained through interviews will provide insights into this topic.

Context and Literature

The influx of visitors to Val d'Anniviers has increased significantly since the end of the pandemic period, reaching record numbers in the last two years. In 2023, international visitors accounted for approximately 30% of the total visits to the destination. This notable number of foreign visitors poses a challenge, as it requires catering to a linguistically diverse clientele ranging from German and Dutch to English (Anniviers Tourisme SA, 2024). To ensure the satisfaction of this foreign market, the literature underscores the role of multilingualism in tourism, highlighting its ability to enhance service quality by overcoming language barriers. Effective communication tailored to diverse linguistic preferences optimizes the customer experience and fosters positive interactions (Žerajić, 2020).

Methodology

To assess the current situation and formulate relevant recommendations, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted based on an interview guide. Participants were selected to represent diverse profiles operating within the tourism sectors in Val d'Anniviers, ranging

from front-line employees to company directors. They encompassed various tourism industry segments, including hospitality, the ski industry, tourist offices and real estate, providing a comprehensive overview of the destination.

Data analysis and interpretation

After analysing the interviews, the results were interpreted to identify the current situation, existing success factors, areas for improvement and expectations towards the destination's development organizations. Firstly, there is a need for improvements in German proficiency throughout the destination by increasing the presence of qualified German-speaking staff. Additionally, shortcomings were noted in the translation of essential documentation and in providing all tourism products in the three main languages : French, German and English. Successful initiatives have been implemented in specific enterprises but are not spread across the destination. There is a need for improved collaboration and sharing of best practices to benefit all tourism stakeholders and standardize service quality. Common expectations towards Anniviers Tourisme include assistance in translating documentation, through financial or human resources support.

Recommendations

Three key recommendations address the identified shortcomings. Firstly, organizing destination-wide German language courses for all tourism employees could reduce costs and facilitate a collaborative approach to improving service quality by sharing resources. Secondly, creating a network of polyglot individuals familiar with the destination to provide translation services would ensure consistency and quality in documentation translation. Lastly, to enhance the customer experience, service providers could clearly indicate the availability of staff proficient in English or German within their companies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis offers destination-specific recommendations, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among all tourism stakeholders. These efforts could enhance the overall experience of multilingual visitors in Val d'Anniviers without compromising its authentic identity.

Foreword and acknowledgements

Growing up, I developed a deep attachment to Val d'Anniviers by spending most weekends and vacations at my family's secondary residences there. Moreover, being raised in a multilingual environment enhanced my appreciation for the diversity of languages and cultures. These experiences inspired me to explore these topics further in my thesis. While working and spending time in Val d'Anniviers, I noticed that its visitors came from diverse backgrounds, speaking languages beyond French. This observation led me to question the destination's ability to accommodate such linguistic diversity and sparked my interest in finding solutions and recommendations for improvements.

This paper aims to provide practical recommendations to stakeholders in the tourism industry, enabling them to enhance their services and ultimately improve the overall visitor experience in Val d'Anniviers. The goal is to contribute to the development of the destination and foster loyalty among visitors, by enhancing the quality of services provided.

Despite the lack of prior research on the language dynamics in Val d'Anniviers, I aimed to address this gap. While I acknowledge that languages may not be the primary concern compared to issues like housing shortage and accessibility difficulties, I believe that every enhancement in customer satisfaction contributes to the destination's overall growth.

While this study primarily focuses on Val d'Anniviers, the recommendations presented in the paper can be adapted for similar destinations beyond mountain regions. Despite encountering minor challenges during the research process, especially in finding relevant literature, the insights gained from semi-structured interviews with tourism stakeholders across the destination proved invaluable.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who dedicated their time and expertise to the development of this thesis :

Ms. Camille Kaufmann, for her invaluable guidance and my family for their support.

Ms. Beverley Todeschini, my student advisor, for her mentorship and advice that significantly aided my research.

Nina Zufferey

All interview participants and tourism stakeholders whose contributions were essential in making this thesis possible.

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List of abbreviations

CRM : Customer Relationship Management

Ltd. : limited company

UNWTO : United Nations World Tourism Organization

USP : unique selling proposition

Introduction

This thesis examines the significance of providing tourism services in multiple languages, with a focus on the mountain destination of Val d'Anniviers. The globalization of tourism and the continuous expansion of international travel have heightened the demand for services offered in multiple languages. In Val d'Anniviers, one of the prominent tourist regions in the lateral valleys of the Valais region, international tourists constitute a substantial portion of its visitors. To remain attractive in this competitive industry, the destination must be prepared to offer a high-quality customer experience. Consequently, this thesis aims to identify shortcomings in the destination's offerings to enhance the customer experience for this specific market and formulate destination-specific managerial recommendations. The thesis will introduce and analyse these different aspects to address the following question : "How does the Val d'Anniviers adapt to its multilingual clientele, and what recommendations can be formulated to optimize the tourists' experience?".

To find appropriate answers to this question, this thesis compares existing data and scientific research with primary data collected through interviews. The collected data provides insights into the current situation and needs, enabling the formulation of recommendations for tourism stakeholders in Val d'Anniviers to improve the overall quality of their services.

The first part of the thesis describes the context of the research topic, including the significance of international tourism in the Valais region and Val d'Anniviers and the demographics of these visitors. Subsequently, an analysis of the scientific research on the importance of languages in tourism and their impact on customer experience serves to define the research context and form the foundation of the study. This is followed by the analysis and interpretation of the primary data collected, leading to recommendations specifically tailored for the destination and its various tourism sectors. Finally, the conclusion provides an answer to the research question, summarizing the main findings and recommendations that could enhance the quality of services and experiences in Val d'Anniviers.

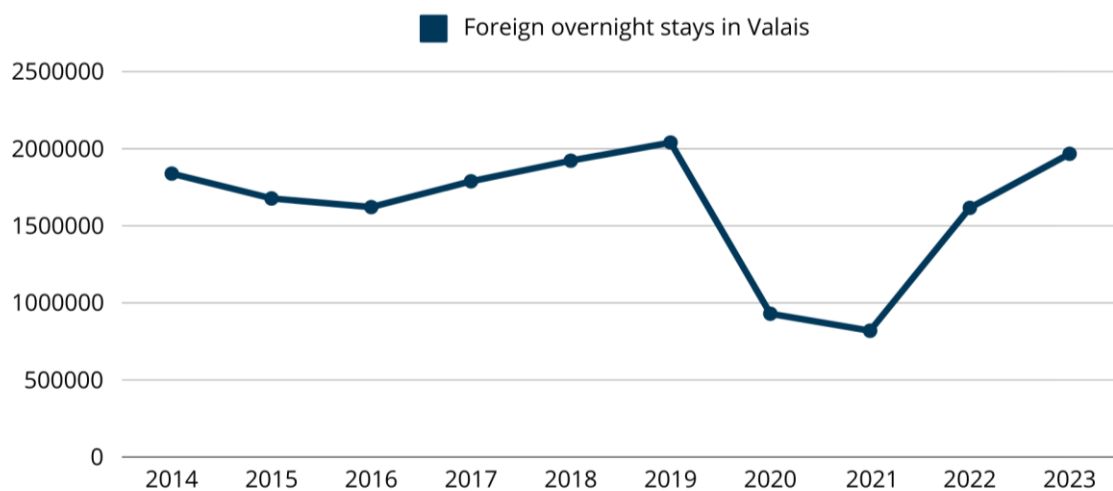
1. Context

1.1 International tourism in Valais

The canton of Valais is a renowned tourist destination in Switzerland, ranked as one of the 13 tourist regions in the country and holding the position of the 4th most popular tourist destination after Zurich Region, Bern Region and Graubünden (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2024b). In 2023, it recorded 2'039'607 arrivals and 4'479'096 overnight stays (Canton du Valais, 2024). The tourism industry in Valais is a significant contributor to employment, providing jobs for 24'100 individuals and constituting 15% of the cantonal value added (Valais/Wallis Promotion, 2024).

Out of the total overnight stays in 2023, 43.91% were by international visitors (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2024c).

Figure 1 : Overnight stays of foreign clients in Valais in the past decade



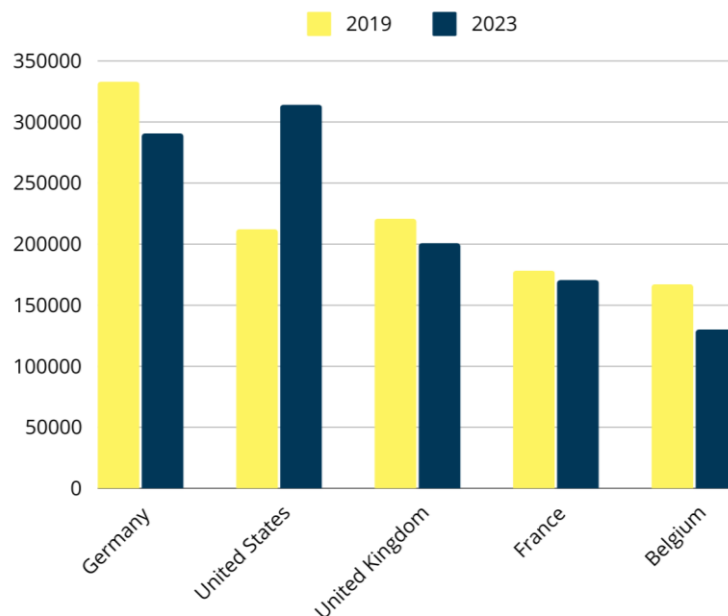
Source : Adapted from Office fédéral de la statistique (2024)

Overnight stays by foreign visitors are significant in the Valais region, indicating its popularity among international tourists. The overnight stays of international clients peaked in 2019 with 2'039'691 international visitors out of a total of 4'259'950 overnight stays in Valais. However, there was a significant drop in the following year to 929'625 foreign overnight stays

and further in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, which complicated or even hindered travel possibilities. Nevertheless, the local tourism industry recovered swiftly; only two years later, the numbers nearly reached the 2019 peak, with 1'996'851 foreign overnight stays in 2023 (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2024c). Given the current growth trajectory, there is a possibility that the number of international stays will continue to increase in the following years, potentially reaching new records. This presents an opportunity for the canton to further develop its tourism industry and cater to a broader and more diverse clientele. To capitalize on this opportunity, the canton needs to be prepared to accommodate the increasing demand.

The origin of the foreign visitors was primarily from neighbouring countries, with Germany being the main source. However, in 2023, there was a notable shift in the origin of foreign overnight stays. Arrivals from the United States surpassed those from Germany to become the leading foreign clientele in Valais, followed by Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Belgium (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2024c).

Figure 2 : Comparison of the origin of the foreign clients in the two peak years, 2019 and 2023



Source : Adapted from Office fédéral de la statistique (2024)

This sudden influx of American visitors can be attributed to Switzerland's favourable position after the pandemic, characterized as a destination with a robust infrastructure that inspires safety, coupled with the favourable economic situation in the United States and the extensive promotional efforts by Switzerland Tourism (Ramsauer, 2023).

The regions that are particularly attractive are the side valleys, which account for an important part of the total stays in the canton. The Val d'Anniviers, with its annual total and new record of 504'284 overnight stays in 2023 (Anniviers Tourisme SA, 2024), ranks as the 5th most popular side valley (Banque Cantonale du Valais, 2023). This French-speaking destination is situated in the heart of the Valais.

Figure 3 : Plan du Val d'Anniviers



Source: valdanniviers.ch (2023)

1.2 The destination Val d'Anniviers

The Val d'Anniviers comprises numerous villages, including larger ones like Chandolin, Grimentz, St-Jean, St-Luc, Zinal and Vissoie. Despite having separate identities, these villages form a single commune since the merger of the municipality of Anniviers in 2009 (Commune d'Anniviers, 2024a). It is crucial to distinguish between the municipality, which is Anniviers,

and the tourism destination Val d'Anniviers, as the destination brand also includes Vercorin, which is not part of the same municipality.

The destination is home to three ski resorts - Saint-Luc/Chandolin, Grimentz-Zinal and Vercorin - collectively forming a unified tourist destination. While primarily known for its ski resorts, the area is also characterized by its rural nature, preserved landscape and rich culture. A significant portion of the area is designated as old village zones, where most houses are considered part of the protected built heritage. The region is adorned with numerous typical chalets. These structures adhere to laws stipulating that houses in the old parts of villages must comply with protected architectural directives. Typically, they are constructed using wood to preserve the traditional chalet aesthetic (Commune d'Anniviers, 2022).

Cultural heritage is integral to the destination's identity, with long-standing events such as the *désalpe*, *combats de reines* and *fêtes patronales* remaining popular among local inhabitants. Local culture is actively promoted and marketed as a tourism product for visitors. This includes attractions such as the *Maison de Grand-Maman* in Grimentz, a traditional home preserved for visitors to experience and the *four banal* in St-Luc, where visitors can participate in traditional rye bread making (Val d'Anniviers, 2024a).

While Anniviers Tourisme does not explicitly mention Val d'Anniviers' unique selling proposition, its authenticity sets it apart from neighbouring lateral touristic valleys. In comparison to destinations like Crans-Montana on the opposite side of the valley, Val d'Anniviers showcases an authentic and well-preserved cultural landscape. Not only does the landscape contribute to its authenticity, but also the traditional local products and producers. On the other hand, Sierre-Anniviers Marketing, the destination marketing agency, capitalizes on the destination's favourable climate in its promotion efforts. They emphasize the abundance of sun exposure and the relatively minor occurrences of bad weather as selling points to attract visitors (Val d'Anniviers, 2023).

The natural landscape plays a significant role in shaping the destination, offering numerous opportunities for sports enthusiasts to appreciate it. Snow sports including skiing, backcountry skiing and sledging, are popular activities in the destination. In the warmer season, hiking is an appreciated pastime, with numerous mountain huts accessible on foot. Additionally, the destination's bike industry is thriving, with the bike park in St-Luc and a variety of activities

offered around biking. More extreme sports, such as bungee jumping at the *Pont de Niouc* and paragliding with departures from Chandolin, Zinal and Vercorin, are also available. The destination hosts several internationally renowned sports events, including the “Grand Raid BCVs” and the “Sierra-Zinal” run (Val d'Anniviers, 2024d).

The local population consists of 2'707 inhabitants. Out of the 5'886 accommodations in the destination, primary residences represent only 24.1% (Commune d'Anniviers, 2024b). The majority of accommodations, 75.9%, are secondary residences, amounting to a total of 4'470 residences (Résidences secondaires Anniviers, 2024). Secondary residences play a key role in the local tourism landscape and economy and are well integrated into the destination. In recognition of this integration, the destination has been awarded the label “Top Destination R2”, which acknowledges destinations that value secondary residence owners and integrate them effectively into the touristic development (Commune d'Anniviers, 2024c).

1.2.1 The ski resorts

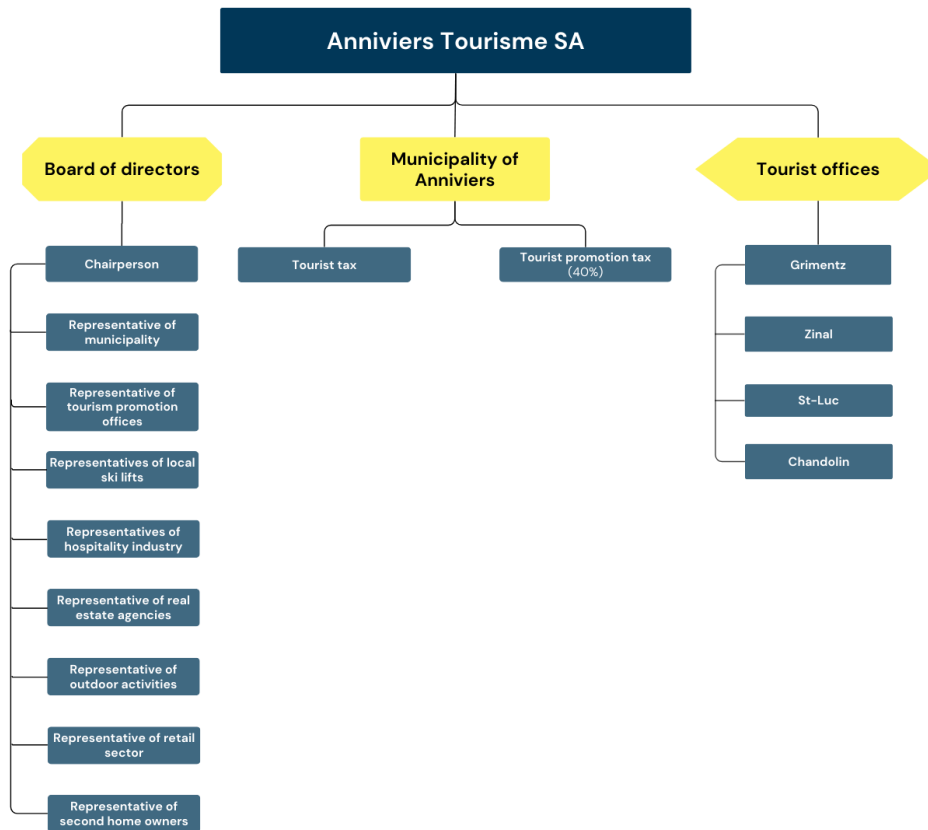
Winter is the season when this destination truly excels, contributing significantly to the local economy and providing numerous job opportunities. The ski resorts are unified under one brand - Val d'Anniviers - even though they are not all located in the same municipality. In fact, the resort of Vercorin is situated in the municipality of Chalais, while the others are part of the Anniviers municipality. Currently, Vercorin remains part of the Val d'Anniviers brand, but it markets itself separately and is recognized as a distinct destination. For instance, Vercorin offers its own guest card, which is separate from the *Pass Anniviers Liberté*. With “Destination Vercorin”, encompassing the cable car company “Remontées mécaniques de Vercorin”, the cable car that connects to the plain “Téléphérique Chalais-Vercorin SA” and the tourist office “Vercorin Tourisme”, Vercorin is moving towards independence from Val d'Anniviers. However, being part of the brand provides visibility, which is crucial for this smaller destination that may not have the funds to finance a large marketing campaign alone. The campaigns done by the marketing agency Sierra-Anniviers Marketing include Vercorin in the promotion. Additionally, collaboration exists between the cable car companies in the areas of Anniviers and Vercorin. When purchasing a ski pass for Val d'Anniviers, access to the Vercorin resort is included in the pass (Val d'Anniviers, 2024c). This is advantageous for Vercorin, as its ski domain is significantly smaller than the other resorts. Through this offer, it

can provide a broader ski experience for its clientele and potentially attract visitors from Anniviers. Ultimately, this arrangement allows for financial distribution and collaboration that benefits all the ski resorts.

1.2.2 Tourism stakeholders and Governance

The tourism governance in Anniviers involves numerous stakeholders. The entities responsible for destination tourism management are Anniviers Tourisme SA, which collaborates with Sierre-Anniviers Marketing, responsible for communication and destination promotion. Anniviers Tourisme is structured as a limited company (Ltd.), with its board of directors comprising a chairperson and representatives from various tourism sectors, including cable car companies, tourism promotion offices, the municipality of Anniviers, hospitality and catering, real estate agencies, outdoor activities, retail sectors and second home owners. Additionally, Anniviers Tourisme oversees the four tourist offices in the villages of St-Luc, Chandolin, Grimentz and Zinal. Public stakeholders, such as the municipality, also play a role in the local tourism landscape. Economic collaboration with the commune operates through two principal methods. Firstly, the tourist promotion tax allocates 40% of its revenue to the limited company. Secondly, the municipality collects the tourist tax, a significant portion of which is then transferred to Anniviers Tourisme SA for destination operations and development (see Figure 4). Moreover, the tourism promotion offices in Ayer, Chandolin, St-Luc, Grimentz/St-Jean, Vissoie and Zinal receive partial financing from the municipality and Anniviers Tourisme SA. Surrounding the main actor, Anniviers Tourisme SA, are smaller tourism partners, including hotels, restaurants, cable car companies, shops and sport and leisure providers (Laurenti, 2022).

Figure 4 : Governance Anniviers Tourisme SA



Source : Adapted from Laurenti (2022)

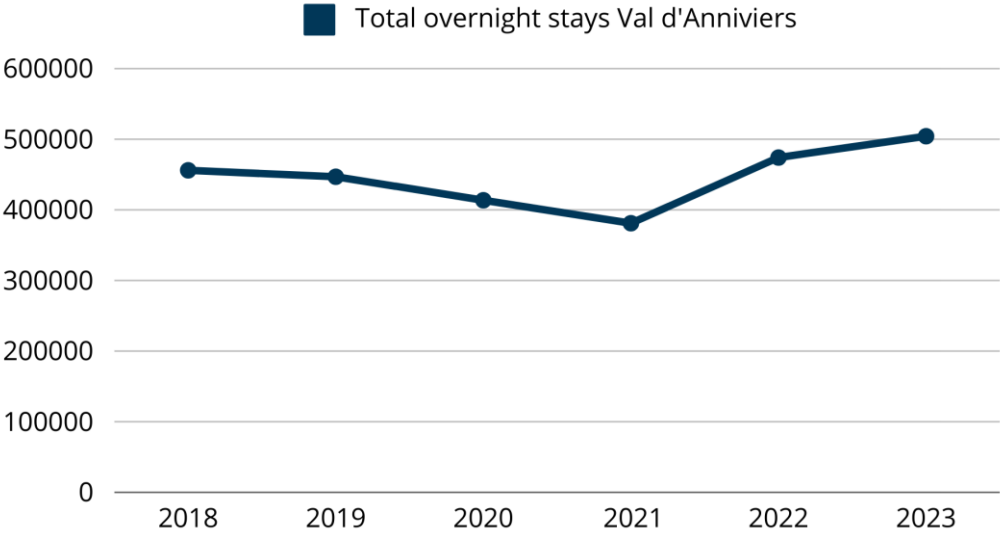
1.3 International tourism in Val d’Anniviers

1.3.1 Total overnight stays

In 2023, the destination recorded a total of 504’284 overnight stays across all establishments, setting a new record. Furthermore, there was a notable increase in overnight stays during the summer season - May to October - reaching 188’156 stays. Over the past six years, there has been a continuous growth in overnight stays, with the exception of 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions (see Figure 5). However, the impact was relatively mild, likely due to the significant number of second-home tourists who still had access to their properties. Despite experiencing decreases in 2020 and 2021, the local tourism industry quickly rebounded and achieved record-breaking numbers in the following two years (Anniviers Tourisme SA, 2023). Regarding visitors, the target markets in Val d’Anniviers vary by resort. St-Luc/Chandolin and Grimentz cater more to families who enjoy outdoor activities,

Zinal is preferred by sports enthusiasts and Vercorin is popular among families with young children or adults aged fifty and above (G. Rochet, personal communication, January 23, 2024) ; (A. Clivaz, personal communication, February 02, 2024).

Figure 5 : Total overnight stays in Val d'Anniviers

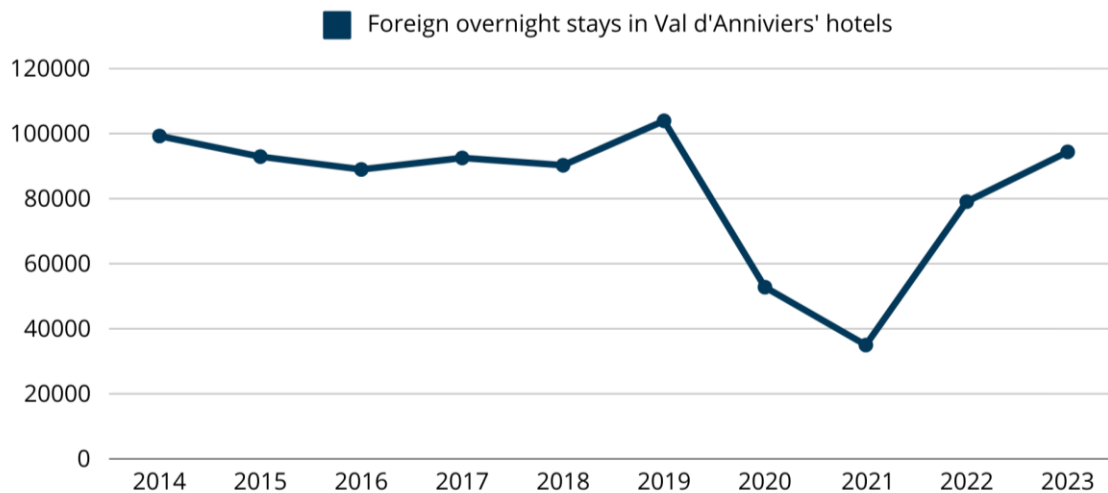


Source : Adapted from valdanniviers.ch (2024)

1.3.2 Foreign overnight stays

A significant portion of overnight stays in the destination are held by foreign tourists, originating from outside the borders of Switzerland.

Figure 6 : Foreign overnight stays in Val d'Anniviers' hotels



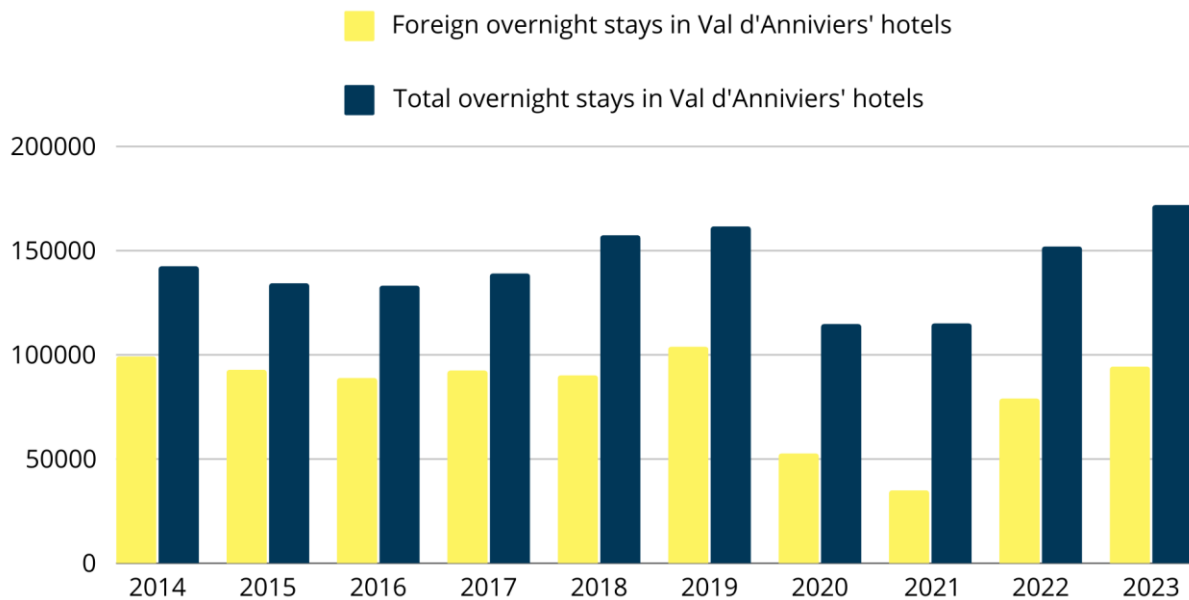
Source : Adapted from Office fédéral de la statistique (2024)

Foreign overnight stays in Val d'Anniviers' hotels have steadily increased over the past decade, reaching a record of 103'943 in 2019. However, a sudden decline occurred in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions. Despite this setback, the destination has rebounded quickly, with foreign tourist stays returning to pre-pandemic levels, aligning with the situation for the entire Valais region (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2024a).

Comparing the numbers of total and foreign overnight stays in Val d'Anniviers' hotels highlights the significance of foreign tourists for the destination (see Figure 7). Naturally, the number of total overnight stays also dropped during the pandemic; however, it was less impacted as domestic tourism was popular at that time. Many Swiss residents travelled across the country, particularly to less crowded places in the valleys, closer to nature than urban areas, which were particularly affected by restrictions (Anniviers Tourisme SA, 2021). Now that borders have reopened, the Swiss population is travelling abroad again and the destination relies on foreign tourists to boost their visits and overnight stays. Except for the two years affected by travel restrictions, the foreign clientele in Anniviers account for more than 50% of overnight stays in local hotels (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2024a). This clientele represents a significant portion of the tourist market in Val d'Anniviers, emphasizing

the importance of catering to and attracting this demographic as it plays a relevant role in Anniviers' tourism.

Figure 7 : Comparison of total and foreign overnight stays in Val d'Anniviers' hotels



Source : Adapted from Office fédéral de la statistique (2024)

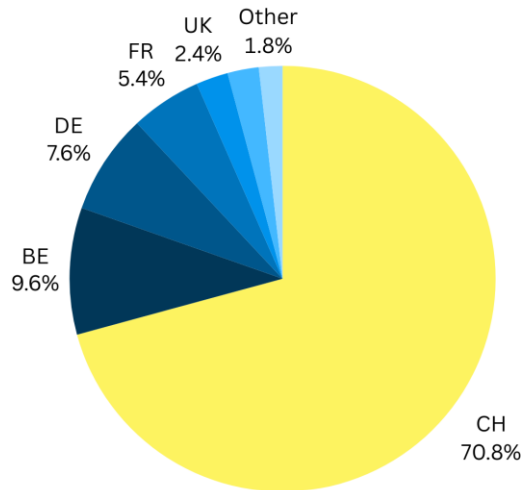
1.4 Market segmentation by origin

In 2021, Anniviers Tourisme SA began collaborating with the Observatoire Valaisan du Tourisme to leverage a new data source, providing more precise insights into market segments, including demographics. The Swisscom Mobility Insights tool, which accesses data through the clients' SIM cards, enables the collection and interpretation of data. This allows the local tourism industry to better understand its client market (Anniviers Tourisme SA, 2023).

In 2023, precisely 70.77% of visitors to the region were domestic, with two-thirds of them originating from French-speaking Switzerland. International visitors, accounting for 29.23% of the total, hailed from various countries. Among them, 9.62% came from Belgium, 7.64% from Germany, 5.37% from France, 2.44% from the United Kingdom, 2.37% from the Netherlands and 1.79% from other origins such as the United States, Italy, Spain and Luxembourg (see

Figure 8). These foreign tourists tended to stay longer in the destination, with an average of 5.95 days for Swiss visitors and between 6.37 to 7.99 days for international tourists (Anniviers Tourisme SA, 2024).

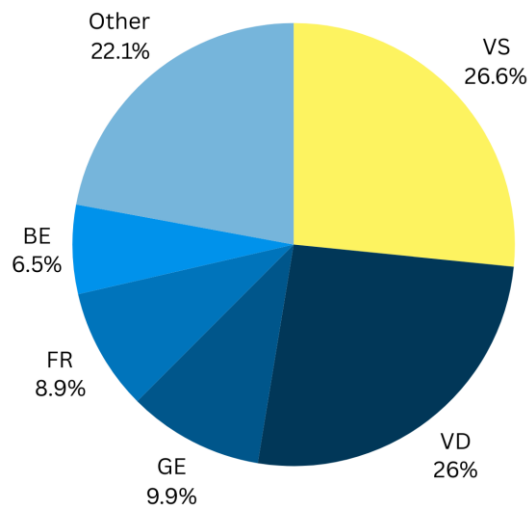
Figure 8 : Origins of visitors



Source : Adapted from Anniviers Tourisme SA (2024)

The cantons of origin within the Swiss clientele were identified in 2022 (see Figure 9). Of the total 84.5% domestic visitors, 26.6% originated from Valais, 26% from Vaud, 9.9% from Geneva, 8.9% from Fribourg and 6.5% from Bern (Anniviers Tourisme SA, 2023).

Figure 9 : Cantons of origin of Swiss clientele



Source : Adapted from Anniviers Tourisme SA (2023)

It is worth noting the significant presence of foreign visitors from various origins, representing a diversity of languages. Besides French, which is the predominant language in the valley, tourists speak other languages such as German, Dutch and English, as well as dialects such as Swiss German. As a result, tourism stakeholders in the destination should be ready to accommodate a multilingual clientele.

1.4.1 Multilingual marketing strategies

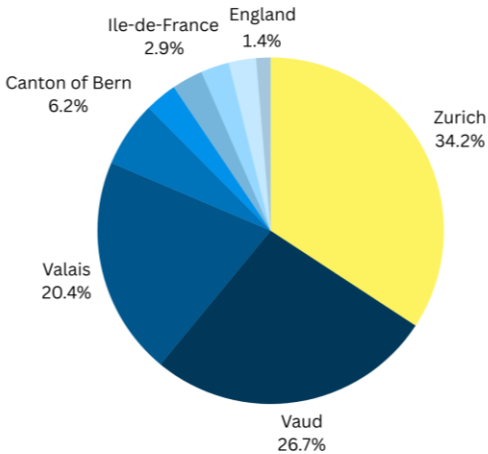
The marketing agency, Sierre-Anniviers Marketing, supports not only Sierre and Vercorin but also Anniviers Tourisme. To cater to the foreign market, they create promotional materials in multiple languages and provide the tourist offices with translated documentation and website content. In addition to managing the destination's social media, they gather information on the demographic statistics of the website and social media audience.

To target the primary audience, the website is translated into three languages: French, German and English. Additionally, they establish contact with the international press, engaging with foreign clientele in various languages. Moreover, promotional podcasts and videos featuring contributors from Great Britain, the Swiss-German part of Switzerland, Italy, Germany and Sweden are produced. The newsletter is distributed in all three languages, reaching approximately 70% French-speaking followers, 20% English speakers and 10% German speakers. Furthermore, the promotional campaign "Chance avec le temps" is adapted into multiple clips to promote the different seasons, with one clip translated into Swiss German. This further personalizes the campaign for their clientele, as they go beyond just using standard German. Additionally, the destination of Vercorin is advertised through a campaign in Lausanne and Bern, including Bern's train station, demonstrating the accessibility of Vercorin via public transport during both winter and summer seasons (Sierre-Anniviers Marketing, 2023).

1.4.2 Website demographics

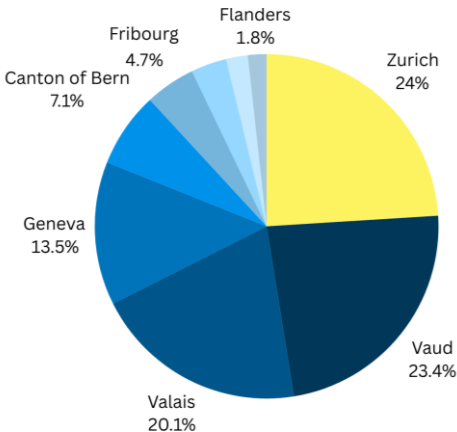
The information collected from the website "valdanniviers.ch" through Google Analytics by Sierre-Anniviers Marketing provides an overview of the regional origins of the top ten visitor segments to the website. The busiest months, July during the summer season and February during the winter season, have been analysed (see Figures 10 and 11).

Figure 10 : Website traffic - July 2022



Source : Adapted from Sierre-Anniviers Marketing (2023)

Figure 11 : Website traffic - February 2022



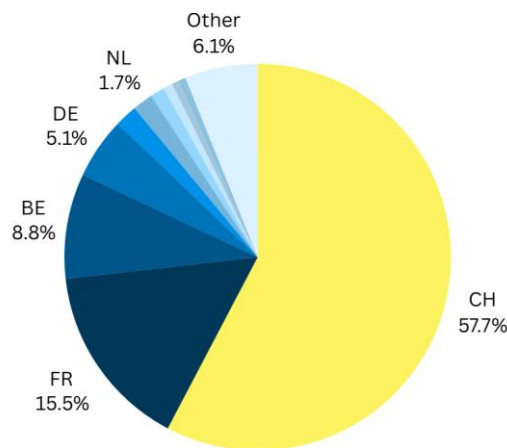
Source : Adapted from Sierre-Anniviers Marketing (2023)

The statistics indicate a predominantly Swiss clientele, with the largest segment originating from the German-speaking region of Switzerland with Zurich being prominent and also a significant but smaller portion from Bern. Among foreign visitors, those from the Île-de-France and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes regions of France, represent a notable portion, along with visitors from Flanders, a Dutch-speaking region in Belgium and the Belgian regions of Wallonia and Brussels. Additionally, visitors from various regions of the United Kingdom, primarily England, were identified.

1.4.3 Social media demographics

Similarly to the website, the marketing agency also gathers statistics about their audience on Facebook and Instagram, including information about their location by country and major cities (see Figure 12).

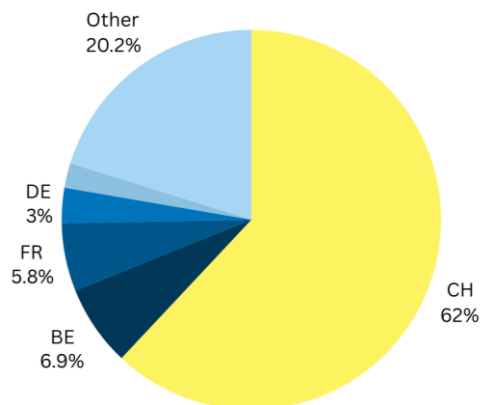
Figure 12 : Country of origin of Facebook followers



Source : Adapted from Sierre-Anniviers Marketing (2023)

Out of the 67'802 Facebook followers the Val d'Anniviers account had at that time, slightly more than half of the audience is from Switzerland. Following Switzerland, there are followers from France, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. The Swiss clientele is also segmented according to their main cities, with most cities being from French-speaking Switzerland, with the exception of Zurich.

Figure 13 : Country of origin of Instagram followers



Source : Adapted from Sierre-Anniviers Marketing (2023)

Out of the 17'296 followers the “@valdanniviers” Instagram account had at that time, more than half of them are from Switzerland, followed by Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The main cities in Switzerland represented by the followers are mostly from French-speaking Switzerland, with the exception of Basel (see Figure 13).

The statistics on the followers align with the visitors in Val d'Anniviers, as the same countries are actually visiting the destination. To effectively cater to the clientele that does not come from French-speaking countries and regions, promotions need to adapt to their language needs. This ensures that all promotional messages reach every segment of the clientele.

1.5 Languages in tourism

Language proficiency is a fundamental aspect of the tourism industry (Tziora et al., 2016). Given the diverse backgrounds of travellers from foreign countries, which encompasses differences in language and culture, tourism service providers must be equipped to effectively communicate with this diverse market.

In plurilingual Switzerland, where four national languages are spoken, the situation is even more crucial. For instance, the French-speaking part of Switzerland must be prepared to cater to a domestic market that may speak German, Swiss-German, Italian or Romansh. Travellers within their home country may expect to be understood in their native language regardless of their location within the country.

The plurilingualism in Switzerland is sometimes viewed as a unique selling proposition and is exploited to enhance tourism experiences. For instance, this is evident in the destination Murten in Fribourg, where local bilingualism is showcased through various bilingual activities and events for both locals and tourists (Schedel, 2018).

1.5.1 Languages in Val d'Anniviers

However, in Val d'Anniviers, there is no bilingualism that could potentially be marketed as a tourism product. While the native language is French, there is also a minority language known as the local *patois anniviard*, which is gradually becoming extinct but is still spoken by the older population. This language is preserved through events such as the monthly "Cafés Patois", where locals gather to converse in this language and pass it down to younger generations (Unipop Anniviers, 2024).

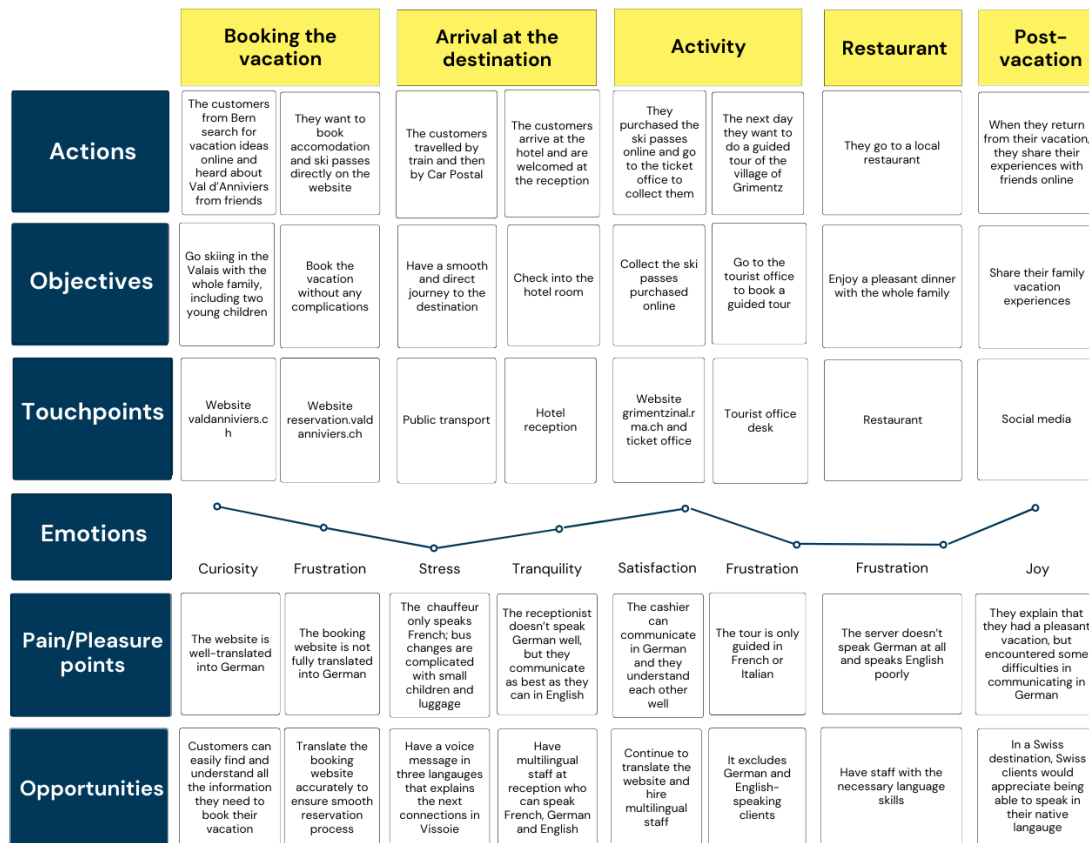
As demonstrated in the previous chapters, foreign tourists constitute a significant portion of Val d'Anniviers' guests. In 2023, foreign visitors accounted for approximately 30% of the

total, hailing from diverse origins such as Belgium, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Anniviers Tourisme SA, 2024). This diversity is reflected in the languages spoken, which include German, Dutch, English and even Swiss German dialects. Consequently, Val d’Anniviers’ service providers require a certain level of language proficiency to effectively cater to these visitors.

1.5.2 Current customer experience

Based on the author’s observations, an initial assessment of the local language situation for foreign tourists can be made through a hypothetical customer journey.

Figure 14 : Hypothetical customer journey



Source : Author’s data

To enhance the overall customer journey for guests who do not speak the local language, namely French, it is essential to address these pain points and transform them into pleasurable experiences. All tourism stakeholders, especially service providers, play a crucial

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role in improving these shortcomings to deliver the high-quality experience that customers expect. This effort can potentially turn them into loyal customers of the destination and positively impact the image of Val d'Anniviers.

2. Research question and objectives

2.1 General research goal

The destination of Val d'Anniviers is experiencing growth, with the continual increase in the annual tourism influx (Anniviers Tourisme SA, 2024). This growth aligns with the expansion of the international tourism market, attracting visitors to Val d'Anniviers who speak various languages. This phenomenon has been gradually observed by the destination's tourism stakeholders and may bring new challenges. These challenges could involve the necessity to adapt services for this diverse clientele, including effective communication and the provision of services in languages other than French.

The research goal is to formulate destination-specific recommendations on how the Val d'Anniviers can enhance the customer experience for international and domestic tourists who do not speak French as a first language. These recommendations are intended to assist the destination and its service providers in optimizing their multilingual communication and activities. The ultimate goal is to ensure a hassle-free stay for this clientele, contributing to the promotion of a positive image of the destination.

2.2 Research questions and specific objectives

The research question stands as : "How does the Val d'Anniviers adapt to its multilingual clientele, and what recommendations can be formulated to optimize the tourists' experience?".

To effectively address this question, the work has been structured into two distinct objectives:

- **Objective 1** : Assess the current situation by examining existing practices related to multilingual communication in the destination and engaging with tourism stakeholders from various sectors to gain an overview of the situation.
- **Objective 2** : Formulate recommendations that are specifically tailored to the destination based on the information gathered from observation and interviews.

3. Literature review

For this literature review, the research focused on the topics addressed in the research question: “How does the Val d'Anniviers adapt to its multilingual clientele, and what recommendations can be formulated to optimize the tourists' experience?”. This question covers various topics including mountain destinations, multilingualism, language barriers, staff competencies and customer experience.

The Val d'Anniviers is a prime example of a mountain destination. To optimize the tourist experience for its international clientele, effective and tailored communication is essential. This literature review explores the significance of multilingualism in mountain tourism, focusing on its importance in improving the quality of service, reducing language barriers and miscommunication and promoting the destination.

3.1 Tourism in the mountains

Mountain resorts have gained significant popularity as tourist destinations worldwide. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), mountains are the second most sought-after tourism destination, after coasts and islands (Ng, 2022). They contribute 15 to 20% to global tourism and generate a significant annual revenue of 70 to 90 billion dollars (Río-Rama et al., 2019). UNWTO defines mountain tourism as activities that occur in a geographically distinct area characterized by unique features such as landscape, climate, biodiversity, and a local community, offering various outdoor leisure and sports activities (World Tourism Organization, 2019). When effectively managed and attractive all year round, these destinations can bring significant economic benefits and social development to the local communities (Zeng et al., 2022), generating income through the creation of employment opportunities (Cao et al., 2022). With the annual arrival of millions of tourists into mountain regions such as the Alps (Ng, 2022), there is a need to adapt to the rapid market evolution, social conditions, and the diverse languages spoken by international tourists.

Second-home owners constitute a significant portion of Val d'Anniviers' visitors and play a key role in shaping the destination's clientele. This form of tourism is closely associated with mountain tourism, as these homes are typically situated in rural or mountain areas and are

often chosen based on the owner's personal attachment to the destination (Seraphin & Dosquet, 2020). Second-home tourism is experiencing a surge in popularity worldwide, particularly in Western Europe, including the Valais region (Kebir et al., 2023). Second homes already make up over 50% of residences in the Swiss Alps, with concentrations in tourism hotspots such as Valais, Grisons and Bernese Oberland (Gerber & Tanner, 2018). In Anniviers specifically, 75% of the housing consists of second homes owned by both locals and visiting tourists (Résidences secondaires Anniviers, 2024). These tourists may come from regions where French is not the primary language, such as the German-speaking part of Switzerland or other countries.

3.2 Multilingualism and tourism

Multilingualism, defined as “the ability of a speaker to express himself or herself in several languages with equal and native-like proficiency” (Pek et al., 2019), is crucial in the tourism industry. Effective communication is a fundamental pillar of quality service in the tourism sector. It is therefore preferable for employees in the tourism sector to possess the necessary skills. Learning additional languages not only enhances communication but also fosters an understanding of different cultures, which is essential when dealing with international guests (Blažević, 2001).

In alignment with Blažević's (2001) perspective, Žerajić (2020) also believes that linguistically skilled employees provide a better quality of service. Thitthongkam & Walsh (2010) emphasizes that possessing language skills equips employees with crucial abilities, including the capacity to enhance customer satisfaction, attract international tourists, comprehend market demands, appreciate diverse cultures and facilitate effective internal and external communication.

By Heller et al. (2014), language is viewed as a commodity that can be traded by those working in the industry. Underlining the necessity of possessing adequate language skills when communicating with foreign tourists, making language proficiency a potential employment criterion in the tourism industry (Heller et al., 2014).

In line with Misnadin's (2023) research, Widiastuti et al. (2021) recommended that local tourism stakeholders organize language training lessons to improve the employee's language

competencies. Thitthongkam & Walsh (2010) further stress the significance of language in tourism management, particularly in internal communication within enterprises with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds among employees. While employing foreign workers with different linguistic skills contributes to multilingualism and in turn boosts international tourism flows (Okafor et al., 2022), it is important that internal communication can still happen in the company's language.

Language also plays a vital role in marketing, as reaching the target audience effectively requires using their native language (Žerajić, 2020). Therefore, multilingual resources and linguistic factors are assets in marketing efforts. Communication and transparency are key success factors for earning the trust of customers and developing businesses. To meet the diverse needs of clients, tourism providers often collaborate with professional translators to ensure content is available in multiple languages (Žerajić, 2020). However, when translating tourism texts, disparities may emerge between the translated version and the original. These differences can lead to simplifications or alterations that might weaken the original text's appeal or persuasiveness. This highlights the importance of implementing robust translation management and evaluation processes to ensure the quality of the translated tourism content (Gandin, 2013).

While English is often considered the global lingua franca, defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as “a language used for communication between groups of people who speak different languages”, it is imperative to recognize the importance of other languages. Not all tourists are proficient in English, and relying solely on it could limit interactions (Žerajić, 2020).

3.2.1 Language's impact on customer service

Furthermore, languages have major importance in delivering quality service, emphasizing that making customers feel at home results in increased loyalty and generosity (Tziora et al., 2016). Salim et al. (2012) also highlight the reciprocal benefits, noting that tourists can bring an enriching value to the local community economically and socially, through interactions with visitors of diverse languages and cultures.

Linguistic and cultural proximity are key drivers of tourism demand, as they facilitate interactions and ultimately elevate satisfaction with the tourism experience. Language can

also affect the destination choice, travel preparation, interactions with locals and the overall quality of the customer experience. Tourists tend to visit destinations where they can expect satisfaction with minimal effort, making languages a crucial factor in travel decisions (Okafor et al., 2022).

Acep (2015) noted a growing trend among customers who seek to actively participate in the places they visit, especially in cultural heritage activities, such as language immersion. On the other hand, understanding customers' cultural backgrounds fosters better connections and ultimately enhances satisfaction and loyalty. Sociolinguistic competencies that encompass language, culture, accents, dialects and interaction skills are essential for tourism employees to successfully engage with foreign tourists (Božinović & Sindik, 2013). Awareness of cultural differences reduces stereotypes and intercultural misunderstandings, while strategically implementing cultural knowledge can serve as a promotional tool to attract foreign customers.

Similarly, Misnadin (2023) argues that providing linguistic services can be valuable to attract new customers but also keep already established ones. By ensuring that tourists feel comfortable during their stay and providing them with a positive experience, destinations can foster a positive image (Misnadin, 2023). This accentuates the importance for a destination such as the Val d'Anniviers to ensure well-established multilingual services.

3.2.2 Linguistic paradox in Tourism

However, a paradox exists: while welcoming tourists in their language makes them feel valued and at home, tourists are increasingly seeking authentic experiences (Žerajić, 2020). In this context, local languages can be used to showcase the authenticity of the destination and serve as a unique selling proposition (USP).

Encounters with native speakers and their culture are perceived as authentic by tourists (Lonardi, 2022), highlighting the importance of preserving local language while catering to tourist needs. Building on Heller et al. (2014), Lonardi (2022), discusses the commodification of languages in tourism. Languages are primarily a means of communication and a marker of identity, but they also are marketable commodities in this industry. In certain regions of

Switzerland, local bilingualism is integrated into the tourism experience and used in marketing campaigns to highlight distinctiveness (Schedel, 2018).

Žerajić (2020) also states that language is seen as a neutral means of communication and should be as accessible as possible to tourists, tailored to their specific needs. Nevertheless, there are some issues related to communication, which will be discussed in the next chapter, that hinder this accessibility.

3.3 Language barriers and miscommunication

Suhaimi and Abdullah (2017) highlight the challenges related to communication in the tourism industry. These challenges encompass issues such as language barriers, characterized by the Collins Dictionary as “the absence of communication between people speaking different languages”, and miscommunication. These obstacles can disrupt the customer experience and must be minimized to improve the quality of the services. Consequently, engaging multilingual and multicultural employees becomes imperative for tourism stakeholders, as they play a crucial role in addressing the needs of international guests. Effective communication not only helps understand customers' needs but also reduces language barriers, thereby impacting the success of businesses. It's important to acknowledge that language proficiency is indispensable for businesses striving to maintain competitiveness on an international scale (Suhaimi & Abdullah, 2017).

Moreover, Holmqvist et al. (2014) found that tourists who receive services in their own language are more likely to leave tips and recommend the service to others. The reason behind this behaviour was discovered to be the fear of their needs not being correctly understood. Customers want to feel some control over the service and wish to avoid unnecessary tensions (Holmqvist et al., 2014). Miscommunication within the tourism industry can lead to lost customers. Hosts seek hassle-free experiences, so clear and understandable communication is crucial in the tourist encounter (Tuktamyshowa & Kirillova, 2023). This is an important point to keep in mind for Val d'Anniviers, as many tourists stay in tourist accommodations and dine in restaurants, where direct contact and interactions with service providers are unavoidable.

3.4 Staff competencies

The development of the industry's professional standards requires qualified personnel and improved professional training (Zaitseva et al., 2017). Professionalism plays a crucial role in meeting this demand by adding value to the service provided. When tourism providers demonstrate professionalism, customers feel reassured, knowing that the provider has received proper training and has their best interest at heart (Cousquer & Beames, 2013). Additionally, Khushnazarova (2021) emphasizes that employees are the most important asset of tourism enterprises, directly influencing the end product and customer experience.

Service quality depends on the skills and awareness of employees and customer satisfaction is closely linked to the staff's sensitivity (Yurchyshyna et al., 2021). Historically, the lack of professionalism was due to underestimating specialization and inadequate training. An important number of employees lack the necessary professional training for the field, as highlighted by UNWTO's report in 2019, revealing that 42,7% of full-time tourism employees have higher education (Yurchyshyna et al., 2021).

Chapman & Lovell (2006) attribute the lack of key skills to the industry's complexity and high turnover rates. They argue that the diversity of services catered to a diverse clientele increases shortcomings in the competencies. They highlight the importance of front-line employees being prepared for quality service and that managers need to identify inefficiencies to enhance the company's effectiveness. Yurynets et al. (2021) stress the industry's need to adapt to market changes, such as the growth in international tourists and having the tailored skills and knowledge to meet the evolving demands, for example, proposing services in multiple languages.

Yurynets et al. (2021) found that increasing revenue had a positive impact on enhancing skills and motivation, contributing to the overall efficiency of the enterprise. Engaged and motivated employees are crucial for organizational success. Managers play a key role in training employees for the right skills tailored to their enterprise, directly impacting service quality and customer satisfaction. Selecting the right staff and investing in their continuous development are key strategies to increase competitiveness (Vaitiekunaite, 2022).

Some employers organise inter-enterprise training to address skill gaps, such as language training courses internal to the organization. However, Chapman & Lovell (2006), argue against its effectiveness, they warn that it could create an even bigger cleavage among tourism organizations. Training efforts should be harmonized across all service sectors to effectively develop tourism in a destination. Yurchyshyna et al. (2021) similarly emphasize the importance of aligning different service sectors for the effective training and development of tourism professionals to ensure industry-wide standards.

3.5 Customer experience

The concept of customer experience is growing in importance (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). However, the ground parameters for defining quality customer experience remained undefined. The author notes that 85% of business management considers customer experience as a main competitive advantage, surpassing even price, product and quality.

As the concept gains in popularity, the efforts to define it more precisely and explore its various stages - pre-visit, on-site and post-visit - intensify. People, objects, environments and processes also significantly impact the experience. There are different ways of creating the customer experience, through the senses, feelings, cognitive experiences, acting and by going beyond the customers' feelings (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020).

Employees play an important role in shaping customer experiences through their knowledge, skills and attitudes, such as providing services in the client's language or a language of mutual understanding. Moreover, elements such as local culture and authentic exploration are crucial components of creating a meaningful experience (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Achieving the right balance between preserving local authenticity and catering to clients' needs is primordial.

To enhance the customer experience, it is important to know the characteristics of the customer markets and some sociodemographics such as the origin and culture (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). While some clients might prefer interaction in their native language, others might appreciate the authenticity of staff speaking the local language and appreciate that they will have to engage themselves and make some efforts to communicate in the local language. The

personal differences and expectations of consumers need to be considered to create a positive outcome for them.

Most emotions and sensations arise from actions, such as speaking the customer's language, which can positively influence emotions and enhance the customer experience. Interactions before and after the vacation also significantly impact the overall customer experience. Gathering feedback during or after trips helps in designing a better tourism experience. Furthermore, understanding customer market characteristics, including sociodemographic factors such as origin and culture, is essential in tailoring experiences to meet diverse needs and expectations (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020).

Suhartanto et al. (2020) studied the impact of quality experiences, perceived value, satisfaction and motivation on tourist loyalty. The study revealed that experience quality had the most significant impact on customer loyalty, emphasizing the importance for tourism organizations to prioritize enhancing experience quality. Loyalty is defined as the frequency of visits, devotion to a destination or intention to recommend it despite price increases (Suhartanto et al., 2020). It is essential for retaining existing customers and attracting new ones, especially for destinations in Switzerland, where prices are higher than those in neighbouring countries.

Perceived value, described as the balance between customer input and provider outcomes, also significantly impacts experience quality. To satisfy customers' needs, experiences should be hassle-free, providing a safe and attractive environment (Suhartanto et al., 2020). This supports the idea that serving customers in their adapted language can positively influence their experience and loyalty towards the destination or service provider. By better understanding the customer, they will feel more comfortable and assured about the information received.

This review showed that languages can have a positive influence on the tourism experience. They can even evoke emotional responses when service providers share the customers' native language, fostering a sense of belonging to a community and feeling at home away from home (Tziora et al., 2016).

In conclusion, multilingual adaptation is of great significance in mountain destinations such as the Val d'Anniviers. The ability to provide services in multiple languages not only enhances the quality of service but also reduces language barriers and fosters positive experiences for customers, making them feel welcome. Multilingualism serves as an asset in marketing and plays a fundamental role in attracting and retaining international tourists. To cater effectively to its diverse clientele, the tourism stakeholders of the Val d'Anniviers should consider implementing multilingual practices, improving the language skills of employees, and prioritizing effective communication. This approach can lead to enhanced customer satisfaction, economic growth, and a positive image for the destination.

4. Research strategy

4.1 Methodological approach

To address the research question and the defined objectives, the study involved the collection and analysis of both primary and secondary data.

Starting with gathering secondary data, the focus was initially on acquiring information through literature and scientific research. This involved writing a literature review to gain a comprehensive scientific understanding of the topic and establish a foundation for the thesis. The review enabled the development of theories and the drawing of conclusions supported by a scientific background, emphasizing the validity and importance of the thesis.

Secondary data directly linked to the destination's statistics was also collected. This involved reaching out to Anniviers Tourisme to obtain data on the volume of international tourists, the languages spoken and the initiatives taken to enhance multilingual communication. Additionally, contact was made with Sierre-Anniviers Marketing, the organization responsible for overseeing the promotion of the destination. The data of interest included website traffic information, the geographical origins of website visitors, their language preferences and other relevant statistics from the destination's social media platforms. This information provided an initial overview of the situation.

The next step involved collecting primary data to gain deeper insights into the supply side. This data collection aimed to understand the measures taken by various tourism actors to accommodate international tourists who do not speak French as their primary language. This included exploring the services and tools implemented to enhance the customer experience, identifying any challenges faced by the businesses in delivering a seamless experience and understanding employee's perspectives on catering to this clientele.

The insights gathered from different tourism actors provided a comprehensive overview of the current situation, highlighted existing challenges and offered initial ideas for potential improvements.

4.2 Primary data collection

For the primary data collection phase, a qualitative method was employed, which is commonly used in exploratory and descriptive research (Leavy, 2022). The initial step in the research involved exploring the current situation and a qualitative method seemed best suited for developing a comprehensive overview. The research question is formulated to align with a qualitative methodology, characterized by its open-ended nature (Leavy, 2022).

As for the research strategy, interviews were determined as the most suitable method. This decision was based on the fact that interviews, as outlined by Leavy (2017), have the advantage of providing data rich in descriptions and examples, precisely what was needed for this research. Saunders (2009) also acknowledges that interviews are well-suited for comprehending the decisions, opinions and attitudes of respondents. In this case, it was essential to understand the motivations behind the multilingual strategies implemented by local tourism actors and how they perceive their role in catering to multilingual visitors.

4.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing questions within the selected topic while giving the interviewees the flexibility to navigate between themes and respond freely (Leavy, 2022). This approach enabled participants to be asked for further information or delve into new discussions which ultimately contributed to answering the research question (Saunders, 2009). In preparation for the interviews, an interview guide was created (Leavy, 2022). This guide covered the following key topics : professional context, multilingual clientele, linguistic adaptation and communication, culture, staff competencies and recommendations. These topics were addressed through 14 open questions (see Appendix I). Additionally, complementary questions were asked during the discussions to provide clarification and deepen understanding as needed. The following section outlines the topics covered in the interviews.

Topic 1 - professional context : Questions were posed regarding the interviewee's enterprise domain and their role within it. This aimed to gain deeper insight into the interviewee's background and their contribution to the destination.

Topic 2 - multilingual clientele : Questions were asked regarding the availability of statistics and collection of data on foreign clientele in the interviewee's enterprises and the outcomes of this data collection. These inquiries aimed to gather additional secondary data on the foreign clientele and enhance understanding of the current situation in Val d'Anniviers.

Topic 3 - linguistics adaptation and communication : These questions concerned the current adaptation of the enterprises to cater to their multilingual clientele. These included inquiries about the measures taken to address this clientele, the use of specific methods or tools and the identification of challenges or successes in this area. These questions aimed to comprehend the current situation in the enterprises across different sectors and understand challenges and underlying reasons for them.

Topic 4 - culture : Questions within this topic focused on the adaptations enterprises make to accommodate the cultural differences among their multilingual clientele. Since a client's language is intertwined with their culture, clients speaking other languages often come from diverse backgrounds and have varying expectations. These inquiries aimed to determine whether enterprises engage in adaptations beyond language to serve this clientele and to determine their expectations.

Topic 5 - staff competencies : Questions were asked regarding the linguistic competencies of staff and whether languages are considered a hiring criterion. Additionally, inquiries were made to determine if enterprises face challenges when hiring linguistically underqualified staff due to a shortage of qualified candidates and if they offer language courses or other solutions. These inquiries aimed to clarify the challenges identified in the third topic and understand if there is a lack of knowledge resulting from underqualified staff, as well as what measures are taken to address these issues.

Topic 6 - recommendations : The final questions aimed to understand the needs and expectations of the actors from development organizations, as well as the improvements they would suggest. These inquiries allowed for gathering recommendations on how to enhance the situation in the destination for all the concerned tourism actors.

Regarding the selection of the participants, purposeful sampling was employed (Leavy, 2022). This involved pre-determining the profiles of the tourism actors intended for

interviews. Specifically, 10 individuals from various management levels, including higher-level managers, as well as employees with direct client contact, were targeted for interviews. Additionally, tourism actors from the three different resorts within the destination were selected. Since the target market varies from one resort to another, this approach provided a comprehensive overview of the destination.

Whenever possible, face-to-face interviews were conducted to capture visual cues. In situations where this was not feasible, given the busy nature of the tourism industry, video calls on Microsoft Teams served as an alternative. Availability was also a consideration, as tourism actors are often occupied, interviews were scheduled during low-season periods.

4.3 Presentation of interview participants

The interview participants represent tourism enterprises located in the three ski resorts within the destination (Grimentz-Zinal, St-Luc/Chandolin, Vercorin). Employees from various levels were interviewed, chosen based on their roles in the tourism enterprise and their relevance to the study. The interviewees ranged from front-line employees to directors, providing a thorough perspective across all hierarchical levels.

Listed below are the interviewed actors along with their roles in the destination and their relevance to this study :

- **Camille Kaufmann** : Ms. Kaufmann serves as the reception and communication manager for the Grand Hôtel du Cervin in St-Luc. The hotel's classification as a youth hostel, catering particularly to a Swiss German clientele, makes it a pertinent subject for this study. Ms. Kaufmann's direct client interaction at the reception, along with her involvement in creating promotional material in multiple languages, positions her as a relevant interviewee.
- **Marc Chabloz** : Mr. Chabloz holds the position of director and main shareholder of the Swiss Ski School in St-Luc. Additionally, he owns the local sports store "Intersport Chabloz Sport" and the local accommodation group "Auberge Les Choucas". With over 20 years of experience actively participating in tourism activities within the ski resort of St-Luc/Chandolin, Mr. Chabloz offers valuable insights for this study.

- **Valérie Solioz** : Ms. Solioz serves as the resort manager of the Swisspeak Resort in Zinal. This provider of group accommodation, previously marketed by Interhome, caters primarily to a Swiss German clientele. Ms. Solioz's role offers insights into the dynamics of group accommodation.
- **Caroline Adler** : Ms. Adler holds the position of director at the Chandolin Boutique Hôtel. It is one of only two 4-star hotels in Anniviers and the sole hotel located in the Chandolin resort. Given its 4-star experience and membership in the Marriott's Design Hotel chain, the hotel has the potential to attract an international clientele, making Ms. Adler's perspective valuable.
- **Florian Monnet** : Mr. Monnet is an employee of the real estate agency "Anniviers Immobilier" situated in the resort of Grimentz. The relevance of this interview subject lies in the agency's provision of holiday apartment rentals for tourists, with Mr. Monnet being directly involved in client interactions.
- **Michael Moret** : Mr. Moret holds the position of director at Anniviers Tourisme SA. As the director of the organization responsible for destination development and management of the four tourist offices (Grimentz, Zinal, St-Luc and Chandolin), his insights are essential for this study.
- **Guillaume Salamin** : Mr. Salamin serves as the director of the Swiss Ski School Grimentz-Zinal. With his extensive experience as director of a ski school covering two resorts within Anniviers, Mr. Salamin provides a broad perspective on the topic under study.
- **Laurence Stolf-Massy** : Ms. Stolf-Massy is the human resources manager of the group "Remontées Mécaniques de Grimentz-Zinal SA" which includes the cable car company, five hotels and 12 restaurants. As one of the major tourism actors in the destination, particularly due to the cable car company's importance for Anniviers' development, Ms. Stolf-Massy's role is significant.
- **Guillaume Rochet** : Mr. Rochet serves as the director of the company "Funiculaire St-Luc/Chandolin SA", encompassing the cable car company, restaurants and

accommodation. As the largest tourism actor in the ski resort of St-Luc/Chandolin, Mr. Rochet's insights provide valuable information, especially considering his extensive experience in ski resort management.

- **Arthur Clivaz** : Mr. Clivaz holds the position of director at "Destination Vercorin", comprising three societies: "Vercorin Tourisme", "Société de la Télécabine de Vercorin" and "Société du Téléphérique Chalais-Vercorin". As the largest tourism actor in the destination, Mr. Clivaz offers essential insights into Vercorin's dynamics.

4.4 Data analysis method

After collecting the data, the next step entailed transcribing the interviews. Once transcribed, the data was analysed using one of the methods proposed by Leavy (2022), which is coding. Coding allowed the classification of the data collected by assigning specific words or phrases that effectively summarized the content. Through coding, similar codes were grouped, connections were facilitated and the data was finally interpreted. Saunders (2009) similarly recommends summarising, categorizing and structuring the transcribed data. This process allowed for the alignment of the different transcripts, identification of key themes and patterns and development of theories based on those patterns. Ultimately, this approach allowed for the drawing and validation of conclusions (Saunders, 2009).

The collected data was finally visually represented in analysis grids (see Appendices II to XI). These grids were divided into columns that categorized the main topics that emerged during the interviews, based on the topics outlined in the interview guide (see Appendix I). This division allowed for visual organization and synthesis of the collected data. By dividing them into common topics, comparisons between interviewees were facilitated, patterns were identified, and recommendations were formulated.

5. Discussion of results

The data collected through the interviews address the research question “How does the Val d'Anniviers adapt to its multilingual clientele, and what recommendations can be formulated to optimize the tourists' experience?” along with its two objectives : analysing the current situation and engaging with tourism stakeholders from various sectors to formulate tailored recommendations for the destination.

Regarding the current situation, most actors acknowledge that progress has been made, but there remains room for improvement. As will be discussed in the following chapters, various challenges are faced by actors, which hinder their efforts to improve independently. However, they have successfully implemented some actions that have positively affected the situation. Furthermore, stakeholders are interested in developing strategies to enhance the entire destination. They have certain expectations toward the destination development organizations to assist them in this effort.

5.1 The current linguistic situation in Val d'Anniviers

Based on the initial hypothesis established through a customer journey map (see Figure 14), the actual language situation was then evaluated using data collected from the interviews. This section of the results will focus on evaluating the present situation to fulfil the first objective of the research study.

Interviewees expressed varying perspectives on the current situation. The majority of the interviewees, eight individuals, confirmed that the destination's communication is well-provided in three languages – French, German and English – and is tailored to the main clientele, as most visitors are proficient in one of these languages. However, six interviewees expressed the belief that the destination lacks engagement and could improve the quality of services provided in multiple languages.

5.1.1 Identified successes

Several positive actions have been identified within the destination as contributing to the successful improvement of adaptation for multilingual customers. Anniviers Tourisme

perceives a strong language offering within the destination. They claim that the customer lifecycle is simplified in Anniviers, as visitors can find all necessary information online in three languages – French, German and English – before their arrival. Upon arrival, the organization is confident that customers will have no trouble communicating with various tourism actors, either in their language or at least in English, a language that is widely understood internationally. Anniviers Tourisme has not received any direct complaints regarding language issues, leading them to believe that Val d'Anniviers provides effective multilingual communication. However, they acknowledge the possibility of improvement (see Appendix VII).

The promotion of Val d'Anniviers by Sierre-Anniviers Marketing on a Swiss scale and beyond, including television spots translated into German, is viewed as highly positive. However, some actors believe that there is unexploited potential in targeting and advertising to the Swiss German market in German.

Another positive aspect identified is the friendship pact signed between the municipalities of Anniviers and Naters. This partnership facilitates school and inter-company exchanges, which contribute to the further development of language competencies within the destination. Moreover, it is seen as advantageous for the tourism industry, as future graduates with German proficiency may join local tourism companies.

Furthermore, one stakeholder believes that language proficiency has significantly improved compared to the past. They attribute this improvement to the presence of a diverse range of foreign employees who bring with them a variety of languages.

5.1.2 Areas for improvement

Alongside the successful actions, various shortcomings have been identified during the interviews that can be addressed for improvement.

One of the issues, raised by six interviewees, is the lack of proficiency in the German language throughout the destination and the difficulty in finding German-qualified staff. This is viewed as disappointing, as German is the second most spoken language by the destination's clients (see Chapter 1.4), and is also one of Switzerland's national languages. The

interviewees believe that Swiss German clientele expect to be able to communicate at least in German at a Swiss destination. Not being able to do so might impact their experience.

Moreover, one interviewee was particularly critical of the situation, believing that the destination's language offerings are weak and little is being done to improve them. The hospitality industry is believed to face the most difficulty with language proficiency, according to interviewees who attribute this issue to challenges in finding qualified staff. The interviewee also suggests that all restaurant menus should be translated into at least three languages, a deficiency identified in the website analysis (see Appendix XII).

Another issue highlighted is that some visits and guided activities are not offered in all three languages. While information about these guided tours is available online in French, German and English, not all tours are available in all three languages. For example, the guided tour of the old village of Grimentz is only conducted in French or Italian, while the village of Zinal is only available in French or German and the village of Chandolin is offered only in French (Val d'Anniviers, 2024b). Failing to provide services in the three main languages excludes a portion of potential visitors. These typical products, such as historical guided tours of villages, may be of particular interest to foreign clientele who are not accustomed to such villages in their home countries. Excluding them from these products limits their customer experience in the destination and may also impact tourism actors, such as hospitality providers. They expect activities to cater to all their clients.

5.2 Linguistic offerings in diverse tourism sectors

After analysing the interviewees' perceptions of the language offerings in Val d'Anniviers, it is interesting to delve more precisely into the different companies represented by the interviewees. Examining their enterprises helps understand the challenges and successes concerning language offerings within the diverse tourism industries. These companies represent various sectors including the ski industry, hospitality, tourism offices, real estate agencies and sports shops.

5.2.1 Observed difficulties

Several internal challenges have been identified within each company, reflecting the diverse sectors of the tourism industry.

One common challenge in the hospitality sector is the scarcity of language skills. Finding staff with the right language abilities for the destination is increasingly difficult (see Appendices II, IV and V). The lack of qualified staff mentioned earlier also leads to the hiring of non-local employees. These individuals may not speak French fluently, causing communication issues within the team and potentially impacting customer experiences. The complex housing situation in the Val d'Anniviers also contributes to the difficulties in recruiting qualified staff. Employers often prioritize hiring candidates who already have accommodation in the destination, even if they may not fully meet the job requirements. This difficulty is due to the scarcity of affordable accommodation in the area. Furthermore, low salaries are cited by Anniviers Tourisme as another factor contributing to the shortage of qualified staff.

The most significant challenge for this industry is the lack of German proficiency, which poses a problem given the considerable German-speaking clientele in Anniviers. This shortage is intensified by the scarcity of Swiss hospitality employees, who could potentially have acquired German language skills in school. In the ski industry, challenges arise during peak periods, when a majority of clients speak German. Ski instructors who do not have the necessary language skills may not work during these times, creating staffing disparities and potential conflicts within the company (see Appendix VIII).

The real estate sector faces complications due to the lack of translated documents from the municipality. These documents often contain technical terms that are complicated to translate, which requires employees to invest significant time and effort (see Appendix VI). Anniviers Tourisme has also noticed the municipality's absence of translations. Certain administrative information, such as road traffic updates, is important for tourists.

Moreover, Anniviers Tourisme believes that new challenges may arise in the future. With the upscale development of the ski resort Grimentz, a new clientele, such as from Russia or the Middle East may visit. This would pose a challenge due to a lack of language and cultural knowledge about this demographic. The cable car company has already noticed the arrival of

unfamiliar clientele, with some of them now coming from Hungary (see Appendix IX). Similarly, three actors mentioned that if there were a sudden growth in Italian or Hispanic clientele who do not speak English, the destination would struggle to manage them.

A common challenge across all tourism sectors discussed in the interviews includes difficulties in organizing and offering language courses. The primary issue arises from the large portion of seasonal staff in the Val d'Anniviers, who have little interest in courses due to their brief employment periods. Moreover, employers find it financially unprofitable to invest in training for staff who leave after a few months. Varying working hours, especially in hospitality, further complicate scheduling the courses. Motivation also poses a challenge, without perceived benefits like salary increases or career development, employers are hesitant to participate, as noted by five interviewees. Although language courses are already offered through "Université Populaire (Unipop) Anniviers", they fail to meet employer criteria, being neither private nor tailored to tourism industry schedules. While bilingual locals were considered to organize courses, it was discovered that these individuals lacked the necessary training and weren't ready for such responsibilities.

Furthermore, six interviewees noted the time and resource constraints associated with translating documents. Even with the help of online translators, there is a risk of imperfect translations, especially if employees aren't proficient in the language. Additionally, maintaining up-to-date website translations proves challenging due to frequent information updates. The difficulty of working with translation agencies was also emphasized by three actors. They noted that these agencies are not only very expensive, but they also don't provide the level of excellence expected, especially when the translation is specific to a particular field. The issue raised in the ski industry is that the translator needs to have specific knowledge about the subject, as technical terms must be translated accurately. Additionally, it is advantageous if the translator is familiar with the destination to accurately convey the content from the French version.

Another issue faced by all sectors is the lack of knowledge about their clients. Two interviewed companies don't conduct internal statistics on customers, while three others only collect general data. This makes it difficult to adjust services and anticipate clients' linguistic and cultural expectations, which can pose a challenge for future development.

5.2.2 Success factors

Tourism stakeholders across different sectors are facing various challenges affecting language offerings and customer experiences and they are taking measures to address them. These measures that contribute to successful language offerings could offer valuable insights for other stakeholders aiming to enhance their services.

Language courses organized by the Ritzy training institute, a centre of expertise for continuing education in the hospitality industry, offer valuable assistance to employees aiming to improve their language skills. Two out of four interviewed hospitality actors in the Val d'Anniviers encourage their employees to take German courses through Ritzy. Similarly, the Swisspeak Resort in Zinal benefited from language courses organized by "Ecole Club Migros" in the past. This was due to its former ownership by Interhome, which is part of the Migros group. The Chandolin Boutique Hôtel also benefits from external language courses organised by HotellerieSuisse, the competence centre of the Swiss hospitality industry.

To address qualified staff shortages, "Remontées Mécaniques de Grimentz-Zinal" implemented internal language courses offered through the Ritzy institute. These courses, ranging from A1 to A2 levels in German (with plans for English courses), offer the possibility of obtaining a certificate. They are conducted alternately in Grimentz and Zinal. The company fully covers the costs for employees who return for the next season. All employees can attend the sessions from 5:00 pm to 6:30 pm and the timing is adapted to accommodate the working hours of each sector. This initiative not only contributes to staff development but also improves customer interactions and cultivates a positive team environment. It positively impacted staff recruitment and retention, demonstrating the employer's commitment to staff development and enhancing the company's image. The company faced no challenges in motivating staff to participate, receiving positive feedback for providing organized and local courses (see Appendix IX).

Furthermore, in the ski industry, language barriers can heighten the stress in situations involving injured individuals. To reduce this, slope patrollers in Grimentz-Zinal carry a lexicon (German and English) containing useful terms to facilitate interactions with the injured and reduce their stress.

As previously mentioned, organizing language courses can be challenging if employees do not perceive the benefit. To address this, the ski school in St-Luc implemented a model to incentivize employees and motivate them to enhance their language skills. Instructors must communicate with customers during lessons, making language proficiency necessary. Additionally, it is crucial to have instructors who speak the children's native language since they often don't know a second language. Therefore, in St-Luc's model, ski instructors' salaries are increased based on the number of languages spoken. An additional 1.- CHF per hour is added for every language spoken, and 2.- CHF per hour for fluency. Swiss German is also counted, at 1.- CHF per hour regardless of fluency, as it is appreciated by Swiss German clients. This policy encourages instructors to develop their language proficiencies and language skills are briefly tested before the season to ensure competency (see Appendix III).

All of the tourism actors mentioned the use of online translators as another helpful factor. However, newer artificial intelligence tools are less commonly used for translation purposes. Only three interviewees admitted using these tools.

Three actors collaborate with local polyglots to translate documents into required languages (German, English and sometimes Dutch) for payments or counteroffers. Additionally, real estate agencies collaborate with employees from partner agencies. These employees, equipped with the necessary language skills, assist by proofreading translations done with online tools to ensure accuracy.

Five enterprises provide lexicons with useful translations (German and English) for front-line staff, reception and service, facilitating communication in less familiar languages. The central office of the Swiss Ski School also released a lexicon (German and English) for all Swiss Ski Schools, which instructors can use to improve ski-related language skills.

Moreover, staff must be ready to handle phone calls in multiple languages. One actor implemented a chatbot on their phone line, allowing clients to select their preferred languages (French, German or English) for the call.

Finally, cultural differences among clientele are acknowledged by all interviewed hospitality actors in the destination. They rely on *HotellerieSuisse*, which provides relevant information to help them meet the needs of clients from diverse backgrounds.

5.3 Stakeholders' expectations towards destination development organizations

The tourism stakeholders in the destination are supported by Anniviers Tourisme, the destination's development organization and the marketing agency Sierre-Anniviers Marketing. The stakeholders have specific expectations for them to assist in effectively managing their multilingual clientele and delivering high-quality services.

One common expectation is assistance in translating documentation into the two languages (German and English). Particularly within the hospitality industry where more information may require translation. This support could involve internal translation work at Anniviers Tourisme or Sierre-Anniviers Marketing, contributing to translation costs, or providing bilingual contact persons to help companies with translations. Four interviewees expressed the desire for all brochures provided by development organizations to be available in three languages (French, German and English) and preferably integrated into a single brochure to avoid overwhelming displays and receptions.

While not considered a necessity, three interviewees mentioned an interest in translating certain information into Dutch. They believe this would better cater to the longstanding clientele in the destination.

Three actors emphasized the need for development organizations to focus more on promoting abroad and not solely rely on Swiss clients. They believe it is crucial to reach and attract foreign clientele by effectively marketing the destination's offering to them before improving their language skills. Another actor suggested that increased language presence in the destination's documentation could attract clients from neighbouring countries like Italy. To attract foreign clients, improvements in language skills are necessary to ensure that they feel welcome in the Val d'Anniviers and to reduce the language barrier, as highlighted in the literature review.

Two actors emphasized the importance of understanding clientele through data collection. They suggested that Anniviers Tourisme and the marketing agency could collect, analyse and process data for each company involved as well as for the entire destination. This would offer

a comprehensive view of the situation for all stakeholders. This data could help actors segment their clients effectively and attract potential customers through effective strategies in the right languages. Additionally, having customer data would enable personalized newsletters to propose the same products in the next season that customers were previously interested in, fostering customer loyalty.

Two interviewees proposed implementing a satisfaction survey tailored to each field of the destination and a customer relationship management (CRM) system for the entire destination to develop a common business strategy. Such a system could enhance the customer experience by understanding their linguistic needs.

One actor highlighted the necessity of establishing a tourism law in the municipality of Anniviers (see Appendix VIII). Such a law would ensure collaboration among tourism stakeholders and empower the tourist office as a central destination manager. This would facilitate collaboration and product development among all interested tourism stakeholders. Additionally, it would allow for targeted actions in multiple languages and shared finances, which are essential for expanding the destination's brand beyond borders.

Vercorin Tourisme does not have specific expectations towards Anniviers Tourisme as they are separate entities, but collaboration between both development organizations remains crucial. Vercorin has observed the recent success of ski resorts Grimentz-Zinal and St-Luch/Chandolin and believes the destination is well-positioned for future evolution (see Appendix XI).

6. Managerial recommendations

The recommendations were formulated based on the research question, “How does the Val d’Anniviers adapt to its multilingual clientele, and what recommendations can be formulated to optimize the tourists’ experience?”. This part of the thesis answers the second research objective.

To formulate effective recommendations, it was imperative to first understand the initial situation, which was discussed in the previous chapter. This discussion encompassed both the positive and negative aspects of the current situation, as well as the expectations of tourism stakeholders from local development organizations.

Drawing from existing literature, it becomes evident that providing appropriate recommendations is crucial as it can significantly impact the entire destination and its customers.

The recommendations presented in these following chapters were derived directly from the interviewees, the author or emerged during the discussion between both parties. They can be grouped into three categories: general and easily implementable suggestions that require fewer resources, recommendations that require significant resource allocation and other recommendations that indirectly affect language adaptation in the Val d’Anniviers. Some recommendations will be easier to implement than others, as some will require more resources and may be of lower priority for a destination that needs to address other urgent issues with greater impact than language adaptation.

6.1 General recommendations

A key recommendation for the entire destination is to ensure that all information is available in at least three languages (French, German, English), considering that these languages reach the majority of customers. Furthermore, there is a suggestion to include additional languages on Anniviers Tourisme’s website. Specifically, three actors suggested adding Dutch to cater to visitors from Belgium or the Netherlands, which historically have always been significant for the destination. However, it must be noted that Anniviers Tourisme

had previously translated the main pages into Dutch. This was halted because it was considered overly resource-intensive compared to the actual benefits it provided.

Given that some secondary homeowners do not speak French as their first language, it would be practical for the municipality to translate all owner-related documentation into at least two languages: German and English. This should include the website for secondary homeowners in Anniviers (see Appendix XII). This recommendation, emphasized by both the real estate agency in Grimentz and Anniviers Tourisme, acknowledges the need for improvement in this area.

A recommendation applicable to all stakeholders, especially ski schools, is to ensure staff can communicate in languages understood by clients. Providing quality service requires clear communication, particularly in unfamiliar environments such as in the mountains. Local ski schools could follow the example of the Swiss Ski School in Villars, which conducts language proficiency tests as a part of its staff entrance exams (G. Salamin, personal communication, January 18, 2024).

Addressing the lack of multilingual guided tours in the destination, it would be important to provide translated documents for participants who do not speak the tour language if a polyglot guide is unavailable.

6.1.1 General recommendations with indirect influence

The following expectations may have a limited impact on improving the experience for multilingual customers, but they could offer some additional value for the destination.

Another small yet feasible change would be to include top events on the welcome signs at village entrances in languages other than French. Events like “Sierre-Zinal” or the “Grand Raid BCVs”, which attract visitors nationwide, could benefit from translations in German and English on event signage.

Given that some stakeholders already plan their seasonal strategies on the European school holiday calendar, it could be advantageous to align commercial actions according to the client demographics during these periods. For instance, hosting a “Belgian week” with

more Dutch-speaking staff and documentation or special events in resorts could attract this market.

Considering the diverse nationalities and cultures of foreign customers, it is important for the hospitality sector to understand their needs and expectations. Making special efforts to welcome and accommodate these clients can lead to satisfied customers who may return to the destination.

6.2 Key recommendations

One important recommendation arising from the observed situation is the need to enhance German proficiency throughout the destination, as highlighted by six out of the 10 interviewees. This could be achieved by:

- Organizing primarily German language courses, with English as an additional option if necessary, for all interested tourism employees. These courses should be offered at an affordable price and scheduled to accommodate the working hours of each sector within the tourism industry.

Offering these courses could significantly improve German and English proficiency in the destination. Employers can motivate employees by highlighting the long-term benefits, such as personal growth and career advancement. They could even cover the fees for those committed to staying for another season, which would help in retaining staff. Collaboration with the *Université Populaire Anniviers* or local bilingual individuals could prove beneficial. This is particularly important as existing training institutes primarily serve licensed companies, which restricts accessibility for some tourism actors in the destination. Five interviewees have shown interest in organizing these joint courses, while three enterprises already have staff participating in proposed language courses offered by training institutes. Additionally, one organization conducts internal courses, and two others had organized in the past but cancelled them due to the difficulties in motivating staff. While some actors advocate for company-level language courses to maintain a competitive advantage and customize training according to specific needs, others support common courses for all actors to foster collaboration and ensure consistent service quality.

Additionally, creating a lexicon containing essential terms and phrases in German and English for the entire destination, particularly for the hospitality industry, could be beneficial. Two interviewees, Anniviers Tourisme and the cable car company Grimentz-Zinal, endorsed this idea, with five out of 10 enterprises already implementing it internally. A unified lexicon for the entire destination could further enhance service consistency.

Another more resource-intensive recommendation is the introduction of language-friendly distinctions. Although such distinctions have not yet been used in the tourism industry according to existing literature and research, they could add significant value and enhance the customer experience in the destination. Additionally, they could provide added value for enterprises, as clients may choose their company over others if they know they will be effectively understood. These distinctions would serve to indicate where visitors can find assistance in their preferred language. Additionally, obtaining such a distinction could serve as a motivational factor for businesses, encouraging them to offer multilingual services.

- The proposed approach involves creating two distinctions for the destination: “Deutschfreundlich” and “English-friendly”. These distinctions could be represented as logos on websites or at receptions, signalling to tourists that they are welcome to communicate in either language.

Furthermore, considering the diversity of visitors, adding distinctions for languages such as Dutch or Italian could also be beneficial.

An additional recommendation that could be beneficial for all stakeholders in the destination is to have full-time accessible individuals available for the translation of all tourism documents within the destination:

- It would be advantageous to have polyglot individuals residing or familiar with the destination, who are prepared to assist with the translation of documents and websites for a fee or a reciprocal arrangement with all tourism companies in the area. This reciprocal arrangement could include benefits such as a paid ski pass for the entire destination, access to specific activities, etc.

Having dedicated individuals within the destination who are easily accessible to all stakeholders enhances collaboration and avoids the need to search for contacts when

assistance is required. Ensuring clear communication in multiple languages at a reasonable price is crucial, as translation agencies often exceed local companies' budgets. Alternatively, stakeholders could use online tools for translation, while qualified individuals review the translations to ensure they meet quality standards. Typically, the required languages include German, English and Dutch. This recommendation is supported by two interviewees, with three companies already engaged in such collaborations.

Another major recommendation that could be implemented at the cantonal level is to foster collaboration through partnerships with local institutions such as the HES-SO and tourism stakeholders in the canton of Valais.

- The partnership would be beneficial for both entities. Students would have the opportunity to gain on-field experience by assisting tourism businesses during their curriculum. For tourism businesses, this partnership would be particularly helpful during peak periods when they may lack the capacity to handle all tasks internally.

Students could support businesses by providing translations, managing their social media accounts, assisting with website maintenance, and developing and implementing new products. This assistance could be provided not only by tourism students but also by students from other branches such as economics or computer science.

Collaboration between companies and the Haute école spécialisée de Suisse occidentale (HES-SO), including participation in the "Team Academy" curriculum, is already established and involves working on real projects for these companies. This idea could be further integrated into the curriculum by offering remuneration to students seeking part-time employment or incorporating relevant projects into existing modules. Through this initiative, funds would be directed toward local institutions, ensuring that resources remain within the canton and directly benefit those in training.

6.3 Paradoxical recommendations

The proposed recommendations aim to enhance customer experience and satisfaction in the destination of the Val d'Anniviers. However, it is important to acknowledge certain recommendations that, while aiming to improve multilingual communication, may contradict

others in certain aspects. The destination must maintain its identity and not compromise its local authenticity solely for the sake of enhancing customer experience. It is imperative to consider the needs and desires of the residents living in the destination.

One of the more contradictory recommendations revolves around the balance between using online technologies and preserving human interaction. While using online tools is appealing, it is equally important to maintain direct human contact. One interviewee emphasized that tourism actors should avoid relying solely on translation engines and should instead prioritize engaging in natural, direct conversations.

Another paradoxical recommendation is that, while striving to become an attractive destination by adapting to a multilingual clientele, it is crucial to preserve the authenticity and identity of the destination. One of Anniviers' added value is its deeply anchored and well-preserved authenticity, which is not commonly found in larger ski resorts such as Crans-Montana, Verbier or Zermatt. To maintain the local identity, it is important to begin by communicating in the local language and not exclusively address all clients in English, as is often the case in those larger resorts. This practice negatively impacts the local population, who prefer to be addressed in their local language by local service providers (Friedli, 2020). Initially, the local language should be used, followed by switching to a language the client understands to maintain this appreciated local identity. The need for preserving the local culture was emphasized by three interviewees, highlighting the importance of maintaining the destination's authenticity.

Furthermore, the destination must be cautious when translating documents for its non-French-speaking clientele. While translation is essential, translating every detail can result in lengthy and unfocused information, diminishing the appeal of the printed material. To address this issue, trilingual translations should be combined into a single document rather than distributed across multiple brochures. Additionally, only key information should be translated on printed documents, while additional language options can be made available online.

These contradictory recommendations highlight the delicate barrier between enhancing customer experience and preserving the authentic identity of the destination. Stakeholders need to remain careful to ensure the sustainable development and long-term success of the Val d'Anniviers.

Conclusion

Main findings

This thesis has provided a comprehensive overview of the current state of services catering to a multilingual clientele in Val d'Anniviers. It has identified deficiencies in the provision of these services by tourism service providers, along with opportunities for further development. The analysis revealed that while efforts are being made to offer services in multiple languages, there are notable areas for improvement. These include the lack of proficiency in the German language, compounded by challenges in securing German-qualified staff. Additionally, there are shortcomings in translating essential documentation into the main languages of the clientele – French, German and English – as well as in adapting tourism products across these languages.

Main recommendations

To address these shortcomings, tailored managerial recommendations have been formulated. Firstly, to address the issue of German-qualified staff, organizing common language courses for all tourism employees would enhance proficiency and standardize service quality across the destination.

Secondly, to address the deficiency in having all essential documentation translated, it would be beneficial to engage polyglot individuals for translation services, either through a fee-based arrangement or otherwise. Collaborating with locals or individuals familiar with the destination would ensure an accurate representation of information and tone, thereby minimizing miscommunication.

Lastly, indicating the availability of English or German-proficient staff at service points would improve the customer experience by facilitating effective communication. This can be achieved by creating distinctions indicating which service provider has English- or German-proficient staff.

Limitations

Moreover, the main limitations of this study include potential bias from interviewees toward presenting their enterprise in a more positive light than the actual reality of the current provision of multilingual services. Additionally, the implementation of the recommendations formulated may be challenging due to factors such as budget constraints, time limitations and shortage of qualified employees. Furthermore, while enhancing the experience for multilingual visitors is crucial, preserving the authentic identity of the destination remains a priority. Improving the services provided through the recommendations may positively impact these visitors; however, it must ensure that locals are not negatively affected.

Future research and perspectives

As the first study of its kind for Val d'Anniviers, further research could explore the impact of language on visitor experiences from the demand side. Conducting interviews with visitors during peak seasons would provide valuable insights into their linguistic needs and expectations. A comparative analysis between the demand and supply sides could help identify further necessary improvements. This would bridge any existing gaps and enhance the overall experience for multilingual visitors in Val d'Anniviers, while still maintaining the destination's unique identity.

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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, including the partner company with which I collaborated on this project, with the exception of those who provided me with information needed to write this paper and whose names follow : Mr. Julien Petit, Ms. Camille Kaufmann, Mr. Marc Chabloz, Ms. Valérie Solioz, Ms. Caroline Adler, Mr. Florian Monnet, Mr. Michael Moret, Mr. Guillaume Salamin, Ms. Laurence Stolf-Massy, Mr. Guillaume Rochet, Mr. Arthur Clivaz.

Sierre, the 13th May 2024

Nina Zufferey

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Zufferey', with a stylized flourish at the end.