

Article

The Long Road to Low-Carbon Holidays: Exploring Holiday-Making Behaviour of People Living in a Middle-Sized Swiss City

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Abstract: Decarbonising holiday travel is crucial for climate change mitigation: policy interventions need to encourage less frequent trips, closer destinations, and travelling on the ground. To increase effectiveness, interventions should fit with the specific ways holidays are perceived and performed in each context. We explore the holiday behaviour of people living in a medium-sized city in Southern Switzerland (Lugano, 70,000 inhabitants), with the aim of identifying key intervention strategies for a future “community challenge” encouraging the population to take low-carbon holidays. We combine a literature review with $n = 15$ qualitative, semi-structured interviews that allow us to understand the reasons for taking a holiday, the favourite destination and activity types, and the transport mode choices. As Switzerland is characterised by high cultural and linguistic diversity providing the feeling of being abroad even at a short distance from home, it could be a valuable holiday destination for Swiss people themselves. Located at the centre of Europe, it is also well-connected by train with many holiday destinations abroad. Gaps between pro-environmental attitudes and holiday behaviour suggest leveraging digital carbon trackers showing how carbon emissions compare between holiday and everyday life. Also, interventions could leverage social norms via social networks, local influencers, and travel agencies.

Keywords: holiday; long-distance travel; low-carbon holidays; interviews; community challenge



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1. Introduction

In the Global North high-speed and increasingly accelerating society [1,2], in which freedom of movement has become a right [3], hyper-mobile practices based on air travel are the norm [3–5]. For instance, the last Swiss Mobility and Transport Census (SMTC) performed before the COVID-19 pandemic shows that, in 2015, the average Swiss citizen travelled 25,000 km, nearly 9000 of which by plane, mostly on international travel [6]. Recent post-COVID studies [7] suggest that similar trends have started to take place again. Most air travel is for holiday purposes: again, according to the SMTC, in 2015, only 14% of air trips by the Swiss population were taken for business purposes [6], and in the post-COVID era, this percentage is even expected to decrease due to the substitution of business travel by teleconferencing [8]. Enabled by the large-scale availability of cheap travel offered by low-cost airlines, which was also facilitated by a historically tax-exempt aviation industry [9], flying for holiday purposes is highly fuelled by the continuous construction and reconstruction by mass media and social networks of new far-away holiday destinations to be discovered and consumed [10]. Tourism marketing, coupled with the diffusion of low-cost airlines and the high incomes in Global North countries, turned air travel into an expectation or even a right [11]. Flying is, in fact, currently perceived as a cheap, convenient, time-efficient, and

socially desirable form of leisure consumption, closely connected with feelings of individual freedom [12–15].

However, current air-based holiday practices conflict with global decarbonisation goals, as travelling by plane, on average, produces ten times more emissions than travelling by train and twice the emissions of travelling by bus [16]. Recent research also demonstrated that the overall global warming potential of flying is about three times higher than the one associated with its CO₂ emissions alone [17]. According to recent estimates, the tourism sector is, in fact, responsible for about 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions [18] and CO₂ emissions due to tourism transport, which is figured to increase by 25% by 2030 compared to 2016 levels [19]. Furthermore, the climate impacts of air travel also raise critical issues about equity and justice across countries and generations: people living in Global North countries claiming flying as a right are especially impacting those who are not flying yet or might never have the chance to do it [20]. Finally, air travel is counterproductive for tourism itself, as climate change and air and noise pollution make tourist destinations themselves less attractive to tourists [21–23].

For at least two decades, airline companies have invested in technology innovation measures, looking for technically and economically feasible alternatives to fossil-based aviation. Research has, however, demonstrated that alternatives to fossil fuels would not really manage to satisfy the ever-growing global demand for aviation, at least not before the next three decades [24]; neither will the (highly contested) biofuels [25] nor solar flying [26]. Further, large-scale development of (hybrid) electric or hydrogen planes supporting the electrification of short-haul flights is unlikely to happen before 2050 [27]. Systemic and interconnected initiatives pursuing an “aviation climate governance” are thus needed [28], which include radical changes in infrastructure provision and planning, regulations, taxation regimes, emission trading schemes, and changes in shared cultural meanings and social norms [20,25,29–31].

In such a framework, Gössling and Higham [32] developed a novel conceptual framework for the tourism economy, grounded in a “low-carbon imperative” that envisions lower carbon emissions by tourism activities per unit of tourism value created. Ideally, this entails achieving decarbonisation goals by reducing travel distances (marketing closer destinations and demarketing long-haul ones), favouring a change in transport mode choices, and increasing the length of stay while also creating value for tourism destinations and reducing leakage. To meet these goals, changes in social norms may be promoted [33] by leveraging bottom-up phenomena like the Swedish *flygskam* (the shame of travelling by plane [34]) or *tagskryt* (boasting oneself for travelling by train [35]), and also by enacting novel specific initiatives. This is exactly our aim for activities we will perform in a Swiss-based transformative research project focusing on the region of Lugano (Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, a middle-sized Swiss city of nearly 70,000 inhabitants): we will design and real-life test a “community challenge” grounded in the “low-carbon imperative” conceptual framework, aimed at engaging individuals in a collective process to reduce their holidays’ carbon impact. The challenge will promote lower holiday frequency, shorter travel distances, and higher use of low-carbon transport modes, and its features will be customised to the specific holiday-making behaviour of the Lugano population. By tailoring the challenge to specific physical or social contextual factors that currently influence outbound holiday behaviour by people living in the region of Lugano, we expect to increase its effectiveness.

Research has largely studied tourism behaviour and its key determinants, though frequently in a fragmented way, as shown by an extensive review of 519 articles published between 2000 and 2012 [36]. A comprehensive set of driving factors for tourist consumer behaviour was, however, identified by Bray [37], who focused on the individual level, finding values, motivations, attitudes, personality, expectations (mostly influenced by media and word-of-mouth), the satisfaction of previous choices, and trust as key tourist behaviour determinants. In addition to such individual-level factors, Cohen et al. also identified key social-level factors that play a role in current tourist behaviour: the available

technology, the values and attitudes of Generation Y, and the trend of ethical consumption [36]. Merging individual- and social-level factors in a recent comprehensive handbook on consumer behaviour in tourism, Horner and Swarbrooke argued that tourist behaviour is influenced by demographic (gender, nationality, education, age), psychographic (state of mind, perceptions), cultural background (beliefs and attitudes), social position, and economic (purchasing power) factors [38].

Despite these findings about general determinants of tourist behaviour, the specific holiday behaviour of the Lugano population has not been investigated yet. Indeed, Lugano is a particularly interesting context to analyse and address with transformative research. One of the ten largest urban agglomerations of Switzerland (though still classified as a middle-sized city based on its population), it is both a lively economic centre dominated by tertiary (business and finance) activities, hosting a small but highly international and growing university, and also an inbound holiday destination, attracting domestic and international tourism due to its lake and mountain settings that offer both cultural and outdoor recreational opportunities.

In order to inform the design of our future “community challenge” and to tailor it to the Lugano population, we thus performed specific research activities aimed at addressing the following research questions:

- How do the people of Lugano currently conceive and perform their holidays?
- Which factors drive their holiday-making behaviour, especially regarding travel-related choices (travel distances and transport modes)?
- Which factors enable or constrain opportunities for their holiday travel decarbonisation according to the “low-carbon imperative” conceptualisation?

To address these questions, we performed explorative research via qualitative, semi-structured interviews with a sample of the Lugano population, supported by a review of the scientific literature focusing on travel behaviour for holiday purposes. Our findings allow us to obtain a clear picture of the current holiday behaviour of the Lugano population and to identify practical recommendations for our future community challenge promoting low-carbon holidays. Beyond Lugano, however, our findings can be generalised to urban contexts with similar characteristics, both in Switzerland and abroad.

In this article, we summarise the analyses we performed and the related findings. The article is organised as follows: Section 2 introduces the interview-based methodology we used to address our questions and presents our sampling strategy. Section 3 presents and discusses our key findings by summarising the reasons for taking a holiday (why), the favourite destination types (where) and activities (what), and the transport mode choice (how), as well as presenting our recommendations for a low-carbon holiday community challenge. Section 4 concludes by reflecting on the limitations of our approach, discussing the applicability of our findings to contexts other than Lugano, and presenting venues for future research.

2. Materials and Methods

We conceptualised “holidays” as long-distance travel that includes an overnight stay away from home and is performed for leisure purposes. To set the concept of long-distance, we followed [39], who referred to 400 km or longer travels.

Coherently with our mostly explorative approach, we decided not to choose a specific theoretical framework to refer to. Rather, we opted for a “grounded theory” framework [40] expected to help us collect information on holiday-making phenomena from a variety of perspectives rather than investigating a specific, pre-defined set of variables identified by a single theory. Thus, we first performed interviews with the people of Lugano, whose guidelines were inspired by a preliminary literature review about holiday-making by people living in Global North countries, then analysed them and finally compared our findings with those of previous research.

2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

For the same reason why we chose a “grounded theory” framework, we opted for semi-structured interviews as our main research method: starting from flexible guidelines, they allow us to accommodate the specific contents and insights brought forward by each interviewee and are, therefore, ideal for exploratory analyses such as ours, aimed at gaining a broad understanding of the whole process around holiday-making and travel-related aspects.

The interview guidelines started with a general description of the interviewees’ holidays (frequency, duration, people they travel with, favoured periods of the year, what holidays mean to them). Then, we investigated the processes of destination choice and holiday planning by clarifying whether and how the respondents get inspiration or advice and by whom. We also explored the choice of means of transport to reach the destination by considering the role of socio-demographic and psychographic factors, such as personal and social norms, and investigating perceived enabling and impeding factors around the use of each means of transport. We also explicitly investigated current competencies around the use of on-the-ground travel alternatives (e.g., booking train tickets) and perceptions (and possibly also experiences) around the concept of slow travel. Finally, we investigated the type of activities usually performed and the food usually eaten at the destination and concluded with questions about attitudes towards the environment, awareness of holidays’ climate and environmental impacts, and pro-environmental behaviour during everyday life at home.

Again, in coherence with our “grounded theory” framework, we performed the interviews as long as they were progressing by using a purely inductive approach to allow possible specificities of the Lugano population to emerge, unconstrained by previous theoretical or empirical findings. Once we completed the analyses, we then performed an in-depth literature review of the topics that emerged from them. Finally, we compared the insights emerging from the interviews with the insights we found in the scientific literature to identify coherencies and possible contrasting elements. For such a comparison, we specifically focused on the scientific literature dealing with holiday-making and related travel choices in contexts other than Lugano, similar to the socio-economic perspective.

2.2. Sampling Strategy

To identify the sample of interviewees, we adopted a purposive sampling strategy aimed at identifying a small but sufficiently heterogeneous sample in terms of holiday behaviour, and especially travel behaviour, which lies at the core of our research questions. We first recruited a large number of potential interviewees by means of an open call in the “MyLugano” newsletter by the City of Lugano, reaching more than 15,000 subscribers. The newsletter post, published in September 2023, invited individuals to answer a short online questionnaire to apply for an interview aimed at better understanding their holiday behaviour, promising a 50 CHF reward for the selected interviewees. The application questionnaire measured the socio-demographic and holiday travel variables reported in Table 1. Overall, we received 219 complete applications, which we then analysed in order to select a sufficiently diverse—though not representative—interviewee sample. For this purpose, we performed a cluster analysis based on the holiday travel variables we measured in the questionnaire:

- Means of transport typically used for holiday travel (four ordinal categorical variables representing the use of car, plane, coach, and train, categorised as “1—I never use this transport mode”, “2—I sometimes use this transport mode”, “3—I always use this transport mode”);
- Number of holiday travels (>400 km) per year (numerical, continuous variable).

We used a hierarchical clustering algorithm (Ward method, use of Gower distance for the dissimilarity matrix to deal with both categorical and numerical variables) via the R “Cluster” package [41]. The clustering results are reported in Table 2 and Figure 1. We identified four relevant clusters: individuals performing many holidays per year that have

no preferences for the means of transport (Cluster 1); individuals mostly travelling by car or by plane (Cluster 2); individuals that rarely travel for holiday purposes (>400 km, Cluster 3); individuals performing many holidays per year, mostly travelling on the ground, by train or bus (Cluster 4).

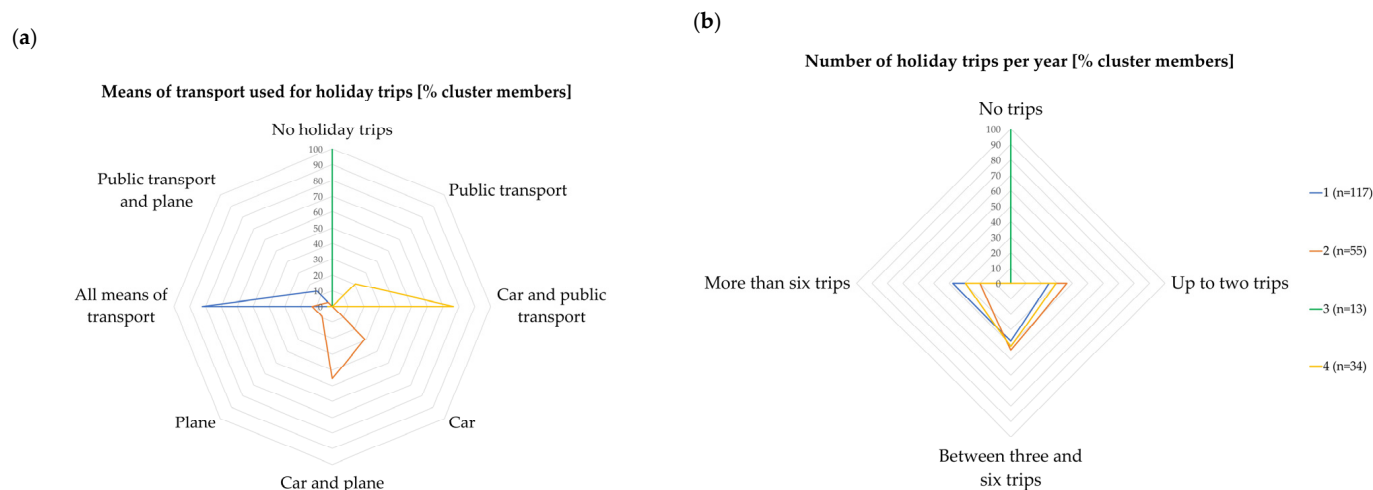


Figure 1. The four clusters of interview applicants ($N = 219$, each line represents a cluster): (a) based on the transport modes used for holiday travel; (b) based on the number of holiday travels per year.

Table 1. Characteristics of the interviewees compared with the full set of interview applicants.

		Interview Applicants ($N = 219$)		Interviewees ($n = 15$)	
		n	%	n	%
Age	18–34	36	16%	4	27%
	35–44	67	31%	5	33%
	45–64	99	45%	5	33%
	65+	17	8%	1	7%
Sex	Male	105	48%	8	53%
	Female	112	51%	7	47%
	Other	2	1%	0	0%
Education	Compulsory school	5	2%	1	7%
	Vocational school/Apprenticeship	37	17%	0	0%
	High school or equivalent	39	18%	1	7%
	University	116	53%	12	80%
	PhD	22	10%	1	7%
Occupation	Employed	169	77%	11	73%
	Unemployed	2	1%	0	0%
	In education	6	3%	2	13%
	Homemaker	10	5%	1	7%
	Retired	22	10%	1	7%
	Other	10	5%	0	0%
Number of holidays (>400 km) per year	No trips	13	6%	3	20%
	Up to two trips	59	27%	7	47%
	Between three and six trips	82	37%	4	27%
	More than six trips	62	28%	1	7%

Table 1. Cont.

		Interview Applicants (N = 219)		Interviewees (n = 15)	
		n	%	n	%
Plane use frequency for holidays	Never	67	31%	8	53%
	Sometimes	126	58%	4	27%
	Always	26	12%	3	20%
Train use frequency for holidays	Never	67	31%	5	33%
	Sometimes	130	59%	7	47%
	Always	22	10%	3	20%
Bus use frequency for holidays	Never	157	72%	10	67%
	Sometimes	53	24%	4	27%
	Always	9	4%	1	7%
Car use frequency for holidays	Never	43	20%	5	33%
	Sometimes	114	52%	4	27%
	Always	62	28%	6	40%

Table 2. Clusters of individuals of the Lugano region that applied for the interview (N = 219).

		Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 3		Cluster 4	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
		117	53	55	25	13	6	34	16
Means of transport used for holidays (>400 km)	Car	0	0	16	29	0	0	0	0
	Car and plane	0	0	25	45	0	0	0	0
	Car and public transport	5	4	0	0	0	0	26	76
	All means of transport	96	82	7	13	0	0	1	3
	No holiday trips	0	0	0	0	13	100	0	0
	Plane	0	0	5	9	0	0	0	0
	Public transport	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	21
	Public transport and plane	16	14	2	4	0	0	0	0
Number of holidays (>400 km) per year	No trips	0	0	0	0	13	100	0	0
	Up to two trips	29	25	20	36	0	0	10	29
	Between three and six trips	44	38	24	44	0	0	14	41
	More than six trips	44	38	11	20	0	0	10	29

We then randomly selected a few applicants within each cluster and checked their holiday travel and socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, occupation, education) in order to ensure that the resulting group was sufficiently heterogeneous. Based on such a check, we manually refined the interviewee selection by prioritising the interviewee sample heterogeneity in cluster membership (and especially in holiday travel characteristics) over its heterogeneity in socio-demographic characteristics. As a result, we identified fifteen individuals (six for cluster 1, which is the largest one, and three each for the remaining clusters) who, in January 2024, were invited to join a 45-min individual interview. Additional sample refinements then had to be performed as, ultimately, some of the selected individuals were no longer available for the interview. Table 1 shows the average characteristics of the resulting interviewee sample compared to the characteristics of the interview applicants, while Table 3 characterises each interviewee. Though highly educated individuals were predominant in the resulting interviewee sample (a potential source of bias in our analyses), the sample was, however, characterised by broad heterogeneity in the number of holiday travels per year and in the means of transport used. Thus, we judged it to be well-suited to tackle our research questions aimed at understanding holiday-making behaviour and the enabling and impeding factors that especially influence travel-related choices. The interviews were performed in Italian via the MS Teams software in the months of January–

March 2024; they were recorded (a total of 9 h and 40 min of video recorded material), fully transcribed in Italian, and then analysed according to a Qualitative Content Analysis approach [42] with the support of the Taguette (version 1.4.1) open source software. The analysis was performed as the interviews progressed using a purely inductive approach to allow possible specificities of the Lugano population to emerge, unconstrained by previous literature findings. After having completed the 15 interviews, we reached saturation [43]: the information provided by the last individuals started to be redundant compared to previously collected material. Therefore, we did not perform additional interview rounds beyond the initially planned 15 ones.

Table 3. Characteristics of each interviewee ($n = 15$).

ID	Age	Sex	Education	Occupation	Number of Holidays (>400 km) per Year	Means of Transport Used for Holidays (>400 km)	Cluster
1	18–34	Man	University	In education	Between three and six trips	All means of transport	1
2	35–44	Woman	University	Employed	Up to two trips	All means of transport	1
3	35–44	Man	University	In education	Up to two trips	Public transport and plane	1
4	45–64	Man	University	Employed	More than six trips	Car and public transport	1
5	45–64	Woman	University	Employed	Up to two trips	Car and plane	2
6	18–34	Man	University	Employed	Up to two trips	Car	2
7	35–44	Woman	High school	Employed	No trips	---	3
8	35–44	Woman	University	Employed	Between three and six trips	Public transport	4
9	65+	Man	University	Retired	Up to two trips	Car and public transport	4
10	45–64	Woman	PhD	Employed	Between three and six trips	All means of transport	1
11	45–64	Man	University	Employed	Up to two trips	All means of transport	1
12	35–44	Man	University	Employed	No trips	---	3
13	45–64	Woman	University	Employed	Up to two trips	Car and public transport	4
14	18–34	Man	University	Employed	Between three and six trips	All means of transport	2
15	18–34	Woman	Compulsory school	Homemaker	No trips	---	3

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, we summarise the main learnings about the holiday behaviour of the population living in the region of Lugano, discussing them in light of the previous literature. We summarise our findings around the following elements: the reasons for holiday-making and the determinants behind them (why), the choice of the destination (where), the activities at the destination (what), and the choice of the means of transport (how). Then, across them, we discuss the role of stages of life and environmental awareness in configuring current holiday behaviour and in acting as enabling or impeding factors for change.

3.1. Why

The motivations for holiday-making emerging from the interviews (open questions in which the interviewees were invited to freely mention one or more reasons why they like to take holidays) are summarised in Figure 2 by using the same categories already used in the literature [44] to allow comparisons with their results. The most frequently cited motivation deals with the opportunity to get rest and relax oneself. However, our interviews suggest that people tend not to be driven by a single motivation, as they frequently organise their holidays to enjoy a combination of relaxation, experiencing new places, activities, and events, and socialisation opportunities.

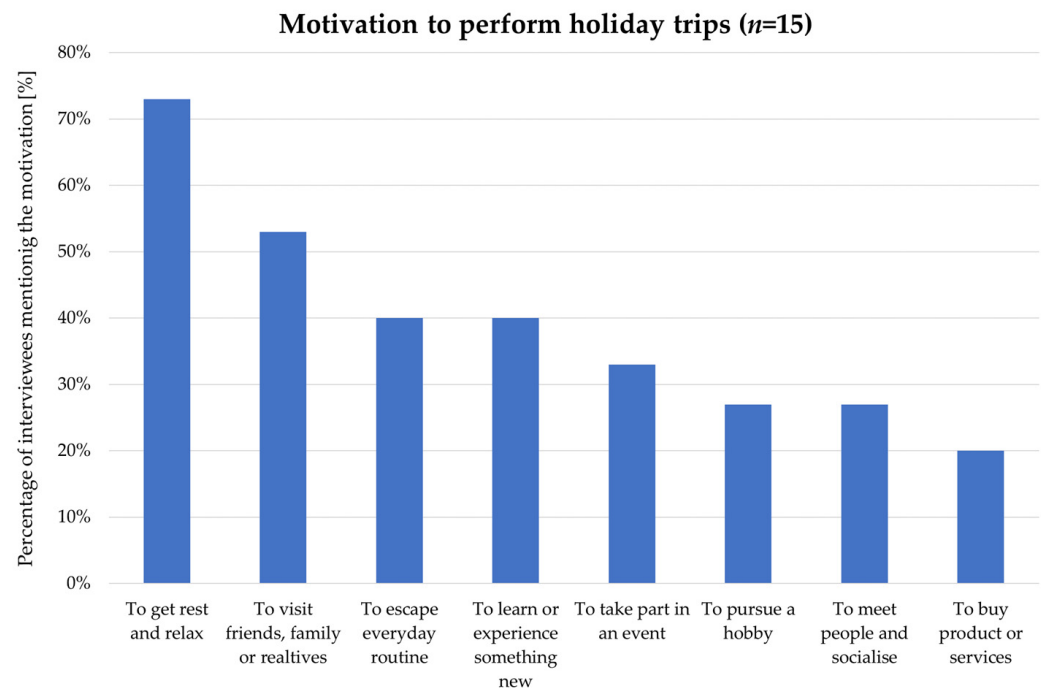


Figure 2. Motivation to perform holiday trips, using the same categorisation as [44].

3.1.1. The Social Context: Migratory Backgrounds and Cosmopolitan Social Ties

Recent reviews found that between 40% and 50% of leisure travels are performed for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives [45–47]. The interviews suggest that such a trip purpose is very common among people living in Lugano (Figure 2), also because many Lugano inhabitants are expats with migratory backgrounds. Official municipal statistics collected in the year 2023, in fact, show that 41% of the Lugano population comes from abroad, the most frequent citizenships being Italian, Portuguese, and German (respectively, 24.6%, 1.6%, and 1.4%). For such expats, the very concept of a holiday seems to correspond with the idea of going back home, embracing loved ones, and seeing the hometown again. Thus, travelling over long distances, possibly multiple times a year and over short periods of time, is an essential component of maintaining strong ties with their close social network.

Previous research has also shown that a large presence of inhabitants with migratory backgrounds and expats might also stimulate trips to foreign countries where people previously worked, again to maintain social ties. Namely, people living in denser metropolitan areas may be more prone to travel at the international level due to their broader and more dispersed cosmopolitan social network and the wish to nourish it [48–51]. This phenomenon clearly also appears in Lugano, which, far from being a metropolitan area size-wise, is characterized by a dynamic economic system that attracts professionals, entrepreneurs, and university students from abroad. This type of holiday is caused by very different reasons (and also affected by different constraints) from the “explorative tourism” aimed at discovering new destinations [52]. Within the broad set of measures aimed at reducing air travel, holidays to visit family and friends have, therefore, been specifically regulated to enable and support them while trying to limit their carbon emissions. Finally, the very fact of living in an international, economically dynamic context might attract highly educated people open to diversity and otherness; also, thanks to their language skills, urbanites may have strong wishes for experiencing different cultures and destinations, which would drive them to frequent (and possibly far-away) holiday travel [44].

3.1.2. The Material Context: Escaping from the City

Previous research [44] found that the residents of large cities and dense and central areas tend to perform more international holidays than their rural and suburban counterparts. Also, research found that people lacking recreation opportunities in their everyday lives tend to increase the frequency of their holidays—a phenomenon called the “barbecue” effect [53]. Furthermore, studies found that having access to a private yard or garden is associated with less energy consumption for holiday trips by plane [54,55] and by car [54]. Having access to a private garden would not only reduce the need for outdoor escapes, but it would also require time for maintenance, thus leaving less time for holidays (e.g., [56,57]). Namely, typical factors characterising urban areas, such as limited access to public green spaces, crowding [58], and residential dissatisfaction [56], would create the need to escape urban environments. An inverse correlation was found between recreation opportunities in urban areas and the number of holiday nights [59]. Furthermore, denser urban areas offer easier access to travel infrastructures (e.g., better connection to airports or high-speed trains [60]), practically supporting the wish to escape.

These findings are, however, debated as, for instance, no significant influence of the housing type or of having access to a garden was found on holiday-making frequency [56,61]. Our interviews cannot provide strict evidence on the phenomenon, as—different from large metropolitan areas—escaping into natural surroundings is also relatively easy for those living in central Lugano. However, they suggest that people living in less dense neighbourhoods, outside the city centre and rich in outdoor recreational areas, indeed have fewer wishes to escape far away (Table 4, ID 7).

Table 4. Summary of insights on the reasons why people living in Lugano go on holiday.

Why: The Reasons for Holiday-Making		
Topic	Main Themes	Examples from Interviews
Motivations to go on holiday	People tend to be driven by multiple motivations	“We try a little bit to divide the trip just into—I don’t know—visiting the city and some interesting things that are there, then a few days maybe in nature visiting some nature parks rather than botanical parks and so on, and then maybe at the end a little bit relaxation, so . . . sea, beach.” (ID 2)
	For expats, holidays mean going back home, seeing loved ones, and revisiting the hometown	“I am an expat, so for me vacation is going back to the place I was born and raised and to find my family again.” (ID 12)
The social context: migratory backgrounds, expats, and cosmopolitan social ties	Migratory backgrounds prompt visits to past homes and push expats to maintain their social connections abroad	Q: “So you always take vacation, to go back to your place of origin?” A: “Yes, yes.” Q: “And do you ever take trips to other destinations?” A: “Very few, they are trips anyway related to visiting other family members who live maybe in areas more or less close to where I reside now.” (ID 12)
	People living in dense urban areas have larger social networks, which lead them to perform more international trips	“I am going to Poland this year always with friends and we are meeting again. One lives in Holland, the other lives in Poland, and we have not been seeing each other for a long time, so we arranged three days.” (ID 4)
The material context: escaping from the city	Presence of green spaces just outside the city limits the need to travel far at weekends	Q: “Do you ever do weekends in places close to your home, for holiday purposes?” A: “Absolutely yes, very much. I really like to go and discover all the nooks and crannies all over Ticino, yes. I absolutely love being out in nature.” (ID 7)

3.2. Where

Some people do not travel to reach a specific or favourite destination [62]: their wish for holidays is detached from the destination and the activities available there [47]. Some Lugano interviewees clearly hinted at this phenomenon: they prioritise aspects like relaxation, entertainment, dining out, or shopping, regardless of the specific location, and just want to feel like being on holiday. Indeed, it is a common desire for people to take holidays to interrupt the monotony that gradually wears them down [60]. The wish to break free from the daily routine propels individuals towards seeking an escape, and the allure of changing context takes precedence over the destination choice. For others, instead, the destination has high personal relevance [63]. For instance, interviewee ID 3 (Table 5) wishes to specifically visit Costa Rica, not to lose himself on tropical beaches he might also find elsewhere, but to discover a standing army-free country and to taste their special liquor. In other cases (ID 4), emotional connections are created between a person and a holiday destination, which is thus regularly visited over the years [64].

Table 5. Summary of insights on the choices of holiday destinations by people living in Lugano.

Where: Destination Choice		
Topic	Main Themes	Examples from Interviews
Destination choice	For some people, the important thing is to leave, no matter where	“At a particularly stressful time in life maybe you’re looking for a more isolated place, away from the chaos. I’m looking for something different from the current situation that doesn’t make me feel good at 100 percent.” (ID 8)
	The desire for feeling on holiday and escaping everyday life prevails over the destination	“For me there is a holiday when I go outside the territory mainly, outside Switzerland, to disconnect, to find new culture, new things that are a little different from my everyday life.” (ID 1)
	Still, some people carefully choose their destination based on personal relevance and/or emotional connection to a specific place	“I learnt, through YouTube or TV documentaries, it’s a country that doesn’t have the military. I also have a friend who told me about that. It’s a series of factors that add up and afterwards it stays in your head. . . My friend who talked to me, who has a distillery there, the fact that they make aguardiente. . . Costa Rica is stuck in my mind.” (ID 5) “We always had a hotel in Plan de Coronas in Italy, which has always been our reference, a hotel with a spa.” (ID 4)
Intermediaries and influencers	People in one’s close circle (family and friends) drive the destination choice	Q: “Does word of mouth play an important role for you in choosing a destination?” A: “Let’s say a good part, not completely. Only for people who know me. . . people who know what I like. Otherwise, I generally choose. However, obviously if a person that I know says ‘Look, this place here is made for you’, then I trust.” (ID 7)
	Intermediaries such as travel agencies also play a pivotal role	“If you decide with one with an agency, it’s much faster because they already know what you can see etc.. So, then they make you choose based on what you like.” (ID 8)
	Word-of-mouth via influencers and social networks (Instagram, YouTube) also shape choices and discovery of new destinations	“Well, objectively, the social networks keep pestering you with advertising... So, obviously, I always take a look. Sometimes you really discover destinations through social networks . . . For example, I discovered Grazzano, the village of Grazzano Visconti. I discovered it in a Christmas season on social networks. I didn’t know about this place, I saw it, I liked it, and the next year I went to visit it under Christmas.” (ID 7)

Table 5. Cont.

Where: Destination Choice		
Topic	Main Themes	Examples from Interviews
Close-to-home destinations	Thanks to its different languages, Switzerland offers opportunities for feeling on holiday near home	“One of the advantages of Switzerland is that there’s always this change of nature and culture anyway, and that’s always nice. Then going beyond the Gotthard, the fact that you speak another language already makes you feel on holiday. I feel more on holiday if I go to inland Switzerland, than if I go to Italy.” (ID 5)
	The region of Lugano offers plenty of opportunities to explore the surrounding areas	“I do it very often [exploring the region where she lives], even just for an afternoon outdoors. There are beautiful places here! I think it’s important, before knowing the rest of the world, to know well where you live. So, to know your own area. It’s useless for me—let’s say—to boast oneself about ‘I know New York very well’ and then you don’t even know where Valle Maggia is.” (ID 7)
	However, holidays within Switzerland are expensive	“Honestly, I take very few vacations in Switzerland, and you know too, the life, the cost of living is exorbitant. If you want to take a hotel, with what I pay one night here, I pay four nights somewhere else.” (ID 1)

3.2.1. Intermediaries and Influencers

Destinations are increasingly identified based on word-of-mouth, following suggestions from close circles of family, friends, and colleagues—particularly, family and friends due to their close, emotional acquaintance with the individual [65]. Our interviews (ID 7) confirmed that individuals typically think that their close circle peers know their tastes well and, therefore, can be trusted. In Lugano, as in many other places worldwide, however, intermediaries, such as travel agents, local tourist destination websites, and social media, are also increasingly influencing destination choices: frequently using the strategy to report on their own personal experience, they tend to present themselves as trusted people suggesting the most interesting places to visit and things to do [47].

Other intermediaries may also play a role in destination choices, such as international celebrities and their—usually high-carbon—lifestyle: they tend to set social norms that increase the wish for travelling more often and farther away [66]. Similar effects can also be produced by less famous influencers active in social networks that promote products about fashion, sport, or travel [67]. Specifically, tourism influencers, such as travel bloggers or digital nomads, promote holiday destinations and experiences, giving their opinion about activities, restaurants, or hotels and sharing tips and tricks about travelling and exploring new places via their Instagram reels. They have, for instance, created trends for weekend trips to Barcelona or Ibiza for young Europeans: not that far away, they are ideal short-break flying destinations [68]. If they are intrigued by the name of a new destination or by the entertainment opportunities it seems to offer, people search for it on the Web and watch YouTube videos to decide whether to make it their next holiday escape (ID 7, ID 8 in Table 5).

3.2.2. Close-to-Home Destinations

Our interviews suggested that distances do not necessarily need to be long to feel like being on holiday. The very fact of moving to a different language context may be sufficient for immediately getting into the “holiday mood” (Table 5, ID 5). From this perspective, living in Switzerland offers the great advantage that different regions use different languages (which come with different cultures as well): by travelling short distances, one can easily feel like being on holiday and far away from daily routines—even when remaining quite close to home. Stretching this idea further, one can even think of promoting “stayca-

tions" [69], namely spending the holidays at home and enjoying the opportunities offered by the surroundings of one's place of living. The feeling of being on holiday, in fact, may not necessarily depend on where and how far from home people are as long as they enjoy their time with a tourist mindset [70].

Our interviews clearly indicated the opportunity for promoting closer-to-home holiday destinations. On the one hand, local tourism operators may leverage the migrant background of many inhabitants, who appreciate exploring their new surroundings and getting to know them. On the other hand, native people are proud of the Lugano region and openly suggest stronger tourism marketing initiatives, as it could compete with renowned tourist destinations (Table 5, ID 7). Promoting closer destinations might not necessarily result in the substitution of long holiday periods away from home, but it might at least help to reduce frequent short break weekends aimed at escape from urban contexts and everyday routines. Still, the promotion of the local context for "staycations" or closer-to-home weekends might not always be successful, according to our interviews. Some perceive Switzerland as too expensive, and if they have the opportunity for overnight short breaks, they definitely prefer taking a plane to somewhere in Europe rather than dealing with high Swiss tariffs (Table 5, ID 1). Besides marketing, closer destinations would probably also benefit from discounts and financial incentives.

3.3. What

While some people crave holidays in which they can just relax and enjoy eating or drinking, possibly with other persons, others arrange their holidays around specific activities and/or types of social interactions: something that they enjoy very much, that they cannot perform during their everyday life [71].

Activities performed at holiday destinations often bring together the wish for world exploration, the passion for nature, and personal hobbies. For instance, an interviewee mentioned she uses her holidays to go trekking, while another one goes scuba diving (Table 6, ID 10, ID 4). Some persons are attracted to very specific events, especially for short breaks of just a few days: the presence of specific cultural, musical, or sports initiatives is the reason itself for the holiday and the destination choice. Such an "activity-driven" destination choice may not only happen with temporary exhibitions; it may occur whenever there is the possibility to experience something new, which is typical and characteristic of certain places and related lifestyles. For instance, an interviewee mentioned her wish to visit Prague (Table 6, ID 1), not because of monuments or cultural attractions but rather to experience a "beer spa" that apparently only exists there.

Food is definitely among the most relevant experiences people are searching for during holidays, which can also influence the destination choice, as, for example, in the above-mentioned case of Costa Rica and its liquor. While some people love holiday dinners out, others look for specific wine- and food-tasting experiences. As holidays are seen as opportunities for escaping from everyday life, phenomena of "moral licencing" tend to emerge [72], and this typically happens with food: when on holiday, people tend to eat more than usual and allow themselves to make an exception to the rule, as "a holiday is a holiday" [73]. Our interviews clearly indicate that, on holiday, people tend to eat more and go to restaurants more often, compared to when they are at home (Table 6, ID 11), and the literature has shown that, on holiday, people tend to gain weight due to both quantity and quality of ingested food [74]. On the one hand, this is due to the wish to try local specialties (Table 6, ID 11). On the other hand, going to the restaurant is again connected with the wish to escape from the daily duties around cooking, which are usually performed at home (Table 6, ID 2). During holidays, individuals wish to break away from their daily routines, sometimes opting for radical shifts compared to their day-to-day lives.

Table 6. Summary of insights on the holiday activities performed by people living in Lugano.

What: The Activities at the Destination		
Topic	Main Themes	Examples from Interviews
Activities	Some people arrange their holidays around specific activities that provide wellbeing and personal satisfaction (pursuing a hobby, enjoying time in nature, exploring the world)	<p>“I did trips based on trekking. You go to the place and then from there you go on foot doing the treks. You move by public transport and then you do the hike. Usually, those were one-day treks, so if you did not want the all-day hike, you could go back to the base.” (ID 10)</p> <p>“I really like animals and scuba diving. I usually look for sea destinations, with the possibility of diving and then possibly a city to visit, with interesting, museums, rather than just architecture.” (ID 4)</p>
	Going to a specific city to attend an event or for a specific experience that is widespread	<p>“Soon we are going to Hamburg—a place that I would never have considered. But we go to see an opera, it’s a special event. So, we will also visit the city, but we mostly go for this event, which makes the city attractive for us.” (ID 11)</p> <p>“Like now a friend of mine came back from Prague and did something I had never done. She told me that there’s the very beer sauna, the beer spa. Fascinating, and I’m curious.” (ID 5)</p>
Food	On holiday, people tend to eat more, also licensing themselves to some exceptions to the rules	<p>“Cooking. . . no, because a holiday. . . it has to be a holiday. I already cook all year round, so bars, restaurant or street food stalls, a little bit of. . . I mean, it depends on the country?” (ID 6)</p>
	Some persons even go on holiday on purpose for food and wine tasting	<p>“I really like tasting whiskeys, rums, or even different types of beer. So, maybe I say to myself . . . this time let’s go... let’s go to Bruges, let’s go and try beer tasting a bit. Or. . . let’s go to Scotland. . . I’ve wanted to do it for a long time, to try those whiskey productions.” (ID 1)</p>

3.4. How

Travel emissions constitute the most significant part of a holiday’s environmental impact [75] as the destination is usually reached via high-carbon planes or cars: in many countries, holiday travel dominates the yearly carbon emissions related to individual mobility. This is particularly true for affluent countries, such as Germany [76], Norway [77], Finland [61], and Iceland [44]. Different factors influence people’s transport choices, such as cost, travel time, perceived comfort, and attitudes towards the means of transport itself.

3.4.1. The Current Norm: Planes and Cars

From our interviews, planes and cars emerge as the most common means of transport to reach holiday destinations and usually as the nearly automatic choice. Indeed, many interviewees state air travel is fascinating, as it allows them to reach far away and exotic destinations, though the reasons why they choose it are very practical and concrete. As already remarked by the literature, workers tend to perceive it as the only option to reach their holiday destinations within the short period of time of their paid vacations from work [78]. Namely, flying is chosen as it allows them to save precious holiday time.

Furthermore, flying is perceived as cheaper than the train (Table 7, ID 1). Overall, coherently with previous research (see, for instance, [79]), from our interviews, the combination of time and money saving emerges as the key factor behind air travel choices, much more than comfort. Nevertheless, for those travelling with large families or over very long distances, air travel is still perceived as a costly option. In such cases, the perceived high cost of air travel does not lead to alternative transport choices, but rather, creative strategies are enacted to identify the cheapest plane tickets on the market, such as using VPN connections to mimic being located in other countries (Table 7, ID 14), or booking flights on Tuesday night at 2 am (Table 7, ID 1), respectively, where and when tickets are supposed to be cheaper. Provided that cheap tickets are found, air travel may also have additional side benefits: some people like the very idea of spending time at the airport as

an anticipation of the activities they will perform at the destination, like shopping, having a drink, or observing people from other places of the world (Table 7, ID 1).

Table 7. Summary of insights on the transport modes used by Lugano people to go on holiday.

How: The Transport Modes to Reach Destinations		
Topic	Main Themes	Examples from Interviews
Plane	Ensures the connection speed people are looking for	“If you’re talking about a long distance, obviously the issue of speed in reaching a destination makes airplane more competitive.” (ID 10)
	Perceived as cheap	“Between train and plane, I definitely choose plane, unless I find a train ride that takes an extra two hours, but cost-wise. Because normally the problem with traveling by train, you’ll know that as well, is that it’s not so cheap. Instead, if you take easyJet, Ryanair or Wizz Air you find quite cheap flights” (ID 1)
	Booking strategies are enacted to save money by cheating the ticketing algorithms	“Once we have chosen the destination, on a Tuesday I wake up at two o’clock in the morning to book a flight. [...] I don’t know if this is true—maybe it happens every day—but I have to say that it has always worked for me: by looking for flights on a Tuesday at two o’clock in the morning, I find cheaper flights. [...] Honestly, I don’t know if it’s an internet lie, however this works for me.” (ID 1) “I also know people who through VPN book flights and hotels simulating they are in other countries.” (ID 14)
	Some people appreciate spending time at the airport	“So, since I was a kid, I always liked to take these trips; so, growing up and then travelling alone, I’m comfortable, you know, walking around, seeing a little bit even in the [airport] stores, maybe even going into the waiting room a little bit to have a drink and take the plane. The whole, the atmosphere that I see in general has always fascinated me... then there are more beautiful airports than others, like, Madrid airport, even though I speak Spanish I don’t really like it, but the one in Amsterdam fascinates me just because of its atmosphere as well. Kind of like that.” (ID 1)
	Offers flexibility and freedom	“I really like to be, if I can, independent. Not to be tied to schedules, because I get anxious by the idea that by that time I have to leave from there, to be there at that other time, and then later leave again... That gives me a lot of anxiety and I don’t like anxiety on holiday; so, basically, I prefer to go with my own car.” (ID 7)
Car	Some people get anxious from driving over long distances along highways	“I’m afraid of other people’s driving styles and especially afraid of highways filled more and more with drivers who don’t know how to drive.” (ID 5)
	For families, it is cheap (more people travelling together, less per capita costs)	“Often even when I go to Tuscany, I would like to go much more by train, but traveling in three people costs almost as much as flying. So I go by car: I have flexibility and it costs less.” (ID 5)
	Allows people to carry more luggage with them	“My wife doesn’t skimp in the amount of luggage to take away, so having the car. . . let’s say allows you to bring with you a larger amount luggage. Instead, when you travel by plane, let’s say you’re a little bit obliged to take away the bare minimum. So, more or less like also in the train, that’s it.” (ID 4)

Table 7. Cont.

How: The Transport Modes to Reach Destinations		
Topic	Main Themes	Examples from Interviews
Train	Perceived as comfortable	"Ah, I like the train so much, it's one of my favourite ones. If you can combine the schedules and everything, it is the one I prefer, because anyway there's less stress, less bureaucracy. There is less stress also to go to the airport... You can also relax during the trip. So the train is my preferred option." (ID 11)
	Some train routes are holiday attractions themselves	"There's a train going through the upper part of Ticino, I think it is called Centovallina... This train is scenic, you can see the landscape." (ID 3)
	Booking international train tickets is less easy (and less practiced) than booking air travel tickets	Q: "You gave me the example of Prague before. . . Would you know how to book a train to Prague?" A: "I've never tried to do that. Certainly, the first thing I would do would be to go into the website of the Swiss railways. If I can't find it, maybe I'd type 'Lugano-Prague trains' in Google and see what I come up with." (ID 3)
	Perceived as slow due to the limited coverage of high-speed railways	"There are few high-speed routes. And so, let's say if I go to Rome, I'll gladly take the train. I've already gone to Naples by train, but if I have to go to Spain, it's complicated. It's the network, let's say the diffusion of the high-speed network, that perhaps makes the choice a little limited." (ID 11)
	Perceived as expensive	"In Switzerland unfortunately if you don't have the "half price" the prices are really very, very high compared to the rest of Europe. In Italy, even if you take a first-class ticket, it's still feasible, you don't suffer too much from the cost." (ID 4)
Coach	Perceived as unsafe due to the dangers of road-based traffic and not always sufficiently competent coach drivers	"I'm afraid of coach drivers' driving style and especially afraid of reactions to highways filled more and more with drivers who don't know how to drive.... Since I saw on the A2 a Flixbus touching the wall next to the highway, I said no to coaches too." (ID 5)
Ferry boat	Allows to carry cars that offer flexibility at destination and storage capacity for personal belongings	"I happened in the past to go to my relatives by plane, but then things changed, so the choice of the ferry was better, because I needed the car." (ID 12)

Cars are as appreciated as planes, mostly due to their flexibility and the feeling of freedom they convey due to the lack of schedules and timetables (Table 7, ID 7). Some people, however, only choose the car when distances are below 400–500 km. Above them, they tend to opt for the plane (Table 7, ID 10) because driving for hours is perceived as tiresome and, along the highways, as risky.

3.4.2. The Alternatives: Trains, Coaches, and Ships

A few of the interviewees consider trains as viable and valuable options to reach their holiday destinations (Table 7, ID 11). Trains are appreciated for the comfort they offer in directly reaching city centres, for the possibility to focus on things other than driving (e.g., reading, eating, scratching the legs by visiting other coaches), and for the opportunity to admire the landscapes that pass by. They are particularly appreciated and, therefore, concretely taken into account for holiday travel; if high-speed and/or inter-change connections are available, that can ensure short travel times. Unfortunately, however, high-speed railways are only available to reach some places (Table 7, ID 10). From Lugano, Southern Italy is perceived as very well connected, thanks to high-speed railway routes, while reaching Spain or Portugal by train definitely seems to be unfeasible (Table 7, ID 11).

A fundamental additional limitation of trains lies in their cost: trains are generally perceived as more expensive than planes or cars. Especially for routes within Switzerland (Table 7, ID 4), a few interviewees even consider train tickets as “unreachable” for those that do not hold a “half-fare travelcard” (i.e., a card sold for a fee by the Swiss Federal Railways allowing to always pay half of ticket prices). Often, considerations about trains’ limited flexibility, coupled with their high costs, are fundamental reasons for disregarding them. For some families, in particular, the train is not even taken into account for holiday travel, exactly for cost reasons: they prefer to travel by car, as its cost is constant, no matter how many family members are travelling (Table 7, ID 5). Overall, the role of price as a key factor in the choice of the means of transport for holiday travel is even more decisive than travel time [80].

Even when fast and affordable connections are available, the train may still be affected by other limitations. Despite short inter-changes that are appreciated to limit travel time, when they are too tight, they become critical due to the risk of missing connections (Table 7, ID 7). Also, luggage may be a critical factor that makes trains less suitable for holiday travel, especially for large families (Table 7, ID 6). Further, the need to share spaces with other people, possibly for many hours, is a matter of concern for some of the interviewees (Table 7, ID 6).

Finally, another key shortcoming limiting the use of trains for holiday purposes lies in the lack of familiarity with booking international train tickets. All the interviewees stated that they know how to book a train ticket for Switzerland or Italy, though they seem to be more familiar with booking a plane ticket than a train one since online travel booking platforms seem to only offer air travel options, giving visibility to cheap flying solutions only (Table 7, ID 1). Instead, buying cross-border tickets is perceived as a more complex operation. Indeed, none of the interviewees ever thought of using trains to travel outside of Switzerland or Italy, and they never did it either (Table 7, ID 20, ID 3).

Among the interviewees, only one person explicitly talked about loving to travel by train. Due to such a passion, she and her husband tend to only consider railways for their holidays: being aware this is quite an unconventional choice, she jokes by depicting herself as “a mad person” (Table 7, ID 10). In cases like this one, train travelling is a holiday attraction “per se”: travelling along the train route is the purpose of the holiday itself. In Switzerland, this could be done quite easily for short breaks close to home, as the country offers several well-known scenic railway routes across the Alps, the most famous of which is “the red Bernina train”. For Lugano people, similar opportunities are also possible for even closer-to-home daily or weekend short breaks, such as the one along the “Centovallina Railway” (Table 7, ID 3) that runs across the border between Switzerland (Locarno) and Italy (Domodossola).

Also, for cycling, sailing, or campervan holidays, the concept of holiday highly overlaps with the concept of travelling. Indeed, sailboats and campervans emerged for some interviewees as the ideal means of transport they associate with holidays, though such holidays are rarely practised. Others mentioned they had performed cycling holidays. The interviews, however, indicate that cycling holidays, and more generally “slow travel” [81], are mostly appealing to those with sufficient time free from work and family constraints, included in social networks, allowing them to find other people to share these experiences with.

Among other possible means of transport to reach a holiday destination, coaches were only marginally hinted at during the interviews. Indeed, they are only rarely used for holiday purposes, as they are generally regarded as uncomfortable and unsuitable for holiday-making (Table 7, ID 5). Finally, ferry boats were mentioned by one interviewee (Table 7, ID 12), who uses them to reach their family living in Southern Italy while carrying the car as well. This provides large luggage capacity (everything can be stored in the car) and travel flexibility at the destination (no need to rent a car), overcoming the burden of car driving for several hundred kilometres.

3.5. Cross-Cutting Aspects

We conclude by presenting two cross-cutting aspects, which basically characterise all the holiday-making components we have presented so far (why holidays were performed, where to go, what to do, how to reach the destination): the specific stage of life in which individuals are into and their environmental awareness.

3.5.1. Stages of Life

The interviews showed that both the meaning of what a holiday is and the way it is performed are not constant over an individual's life. Rather, these elements are constantly evolving; depending on the period of life, individuals redefine their holiday wants and needs (, Table 8 ID 10). Previous research identified two main life events that influence holiday behaviour: having a child and getting retired [82].

Table 8. Summary of insights around holiday-related cross-cutting aspects by Lugano people.

Cross-Cutting Aspects		
Topic	Main Themes	Examples from Interviews
Stages of life	The meaning and way holidays are performed change throughout a person's life, evolving constantly	<p>"Over time [my way of traveling] is changing, evolving; so, there was a time when it was pure fun, typically when I was around 25 years old. Then it became more about the romantic aspect of the destination. Then, with the birth of my daughters, it evolved again: we focused on finding places where basically even the girls could have a little bit of fun or give a little bit of relaxation to us parents. Whereas now, if we come to today, it's the enjoyment of travelling to artistic destinations. For example, going to Florence, going to see museums, going to Tuscany, or to Rome and Venice. Now I love to combine the two experiences, that is, the aspect of travelling, enjoying landscapes, feeling the emotions raised by the places, with the cultural aspect." (ID 10)</p> <p>"I have to say that, without family, when you don't have children, then you're much more flexible and can do a lot more things. If you have to accommodate everybody and you have to concentrate everything in those two weeks in August. . . you always have to find a compromise that works for everybody." (ID 5)</p>
	Having a child is a key life event shaping holiday behaviour	"I tell you, since my son was born—and my son is 9 years old—we have never taken holidays by plane. It used to happen and now it doesn't, he's 9 years and we definitely haven't gone on airplane holidays." (ID 8)
	People with children fly less due to increased costs and organisational complexity	"Post-children clearly narrowed the distance [...]. When my son was almost a year old, we went to the Dominican Republic. But here it was so... traumatic... The plane trip so long, and he so small. . . I got sick and I said, 'Well... maybe it's better to avoid.' I mean, we wanted to keep the same standard of living and traveling that we had before we had the baby, however, we realised that then it wasn't such a relaxing holiday, and we couldn't do the things we did before anyway." (ID 2)
	Older people have more time for travelling but health conditions may act as limit factors	"I think that with age you change a little. Well. . . when we were younger, we travel with less organisation. Now we look at different types of holidays. It's clear, with age, you also have to take physical ailments into consideration." (ID 9)

Table 8. Cont.

Cross-Cutting Aspects		
Topic	Main Themes	Examples from Interviews
Environmental awareness	When on holiday, people with high pro-environmental behaviour during daily life tend not to consider their environmental impact (attitude/behaviour gap)	"I try to take care of the environment. Since I live here, for the last ten years I've been doing the annual bus pass: if I can, I travel by bus to work every day, I avoid using the car. Before, when we lived in Italy, well. . . Where I lived, public transport was almost non-existent, so we were obliged to have two cars. When we came to live in Lugano, we kept one car, because—we are lucky!—both me and my husband work in Lugano. He walks or rides his motorcycle and I ride the bus. So, if we can avoid using the car, we gladly avoid using it." [Though when asked about considering climate issues when planning her holidays] "Yeah, no, no, no, maybe I don't think about that. Or even the fact that I take the plane. . . I don't think about CO ₂ . I mean... It's not that I don't think about it. . . I know about CO ₂ ... However, it's not that based on that information, whether I consume CO ₂ or not, I choose another destination." (ID 2)

Our interviews clearly indicated that holiday behaviour can be largely different depending on whether individuals can just think of themselves, their needs and wishes, and if they have to deal with the needs and wishes of other family members (Table 8, ID 5). In particular, the presence of young kids emerged as a key factor: not only does the presence of kids change activities at the destination (Table 8, ID 8), but it also changes the frequency of holidays, the distances travelled, the means of transport used, and the destination choice. Previous research highlighted that having a child leads to flying less due to increased costs and organisational complexity [82], which also emerged from our interviews: families with small kids tend to travel less, over shorter distances, and mostly use the car. Travelling with kids over long distances is perceived as stressful (Table 8, ID 2), and most parents—even those that are used to travel—tend to travel less frequently and prefer closer destinations, opting for the car due to its large carrying capacity. Furthermore, travelling with kids by plane or train is more expensive than travelling by car, as parents need to buy tickets for them as well.

Once people retire, novel opportunities for travelling arise, as they have more time and frequently also the needed money. For instance, research has shown that the so-called "baby boomers" (born between 1945 and 1964) are among the most frequent long-distance travellers across European destinations [83] and, in fact, the tourism industry is increasingly marketing retirement as "a time for travelling" [84]—until when health conditions become a limit [82], as also our interviews have shown (Table 8, ID 9).

3.5.2. Environmental Awareness

A broad body of literature found that income and education are important predictors of flying for holiday purposes [60,85,86]. There is, instead, less agreement among researchers about the role of psychometric variables in driving tourism behaviour, particularly regarding pro-environmental awareness and attitudes. When asked to talk about the choice of their holiday destination and how to reach it, most of our interviewees never explicitly mentioned environmental motivations. When directly asked about the environmental impacts of their holiday behaviour, most of them indicated a lack of awareness.

This may suggest a general low interest in environmental topics. However, when explicitly asked about pro-environmental attitudes in their everyday life, all the interviewees stated they care for the environment. Their responses thus hint at the phenomenon of "moral licencing" that we have already indicated above, which is coherent with many findings from previous research. Despite [50] some research finding that people adopting sustainable behaviour in their everyday life also tend to adopt sustainable behaviour when

on holidays [60], most research suggests the opposite: individuals tend to distinguish between holidays and everyday life, taking more responsibility for climate change in the latter [12,14,15,73,87]. Particularly, research has shown that individuals tend to adopt a “compensation approach” [87,88], according to which they licence themselves to less sustainable holiday (travel) behaviour as compensation for strict environmental behaviour at home. Such a “compensation approach” clearly emerges also from our interviews (Table 8, ID 2), providing evidence of the “attitude–behaviour gap” already theorised by previous research: individuals perform holiday air travel behaviour, even if they consciously engage in highly pro-environmental behaviours at home [89]. Paradoxically, previous research has even shown that individuals with pro-environmental attitudes are among those who travel more by plane [85,90,91]. Even though they are used to low-carbon lifestyles at home and aware of a “flyers dilemma”, namely of the tension between the personal, short-term benefits produced by flying and the collective climate impact it entails [73], they continue performing air travel for holiday purposes. However, a whole year of very sustainable behaviour at home might be jeopardised by just one long-haul return flight in terms of carbon impact [92,93]. Increasing awareness of how holiday behaviour contributes to the whole amount of individual carbon emissions over a whole year might help to reduce the attitude–behaviour gap and might, therefore, be one of the key components of the future “community challenge” we will launch to the Lugano population.

3.6. Recommendations for Future Interventions Promoting Low-Carbon Holidays

The insights we collected from the interviews suggest three key recommendations for the “community challenge” promoting low-carbon holidays to the Lugano population. First, we suggest breaking the perceived dualism between everyday life and holiday time by making explicit the compensatory phenomena we observed. This could, for instance, be done by providing individuals with feedback on the carbon impact of their holidays compared to the carbon impact of their everyday behaviour. Understanding how much their holiday behaviour contributes to their personal carbon footprint might help individuals opt for different behaviour for their next holiday. Particularly, this appears as a promising strategy for individuals with high pro-environmental awareness, as they would be stimulated to opt for alternatives that better align with their values, thus filling their “attitude–behaviour” gap.

Having triggered individuals to rethink their holidays via the provision of feedback, we then recommend suggesting closer, alternative destinations where people could still satisfy their need for escape. Destinations across Switzerland could be marketed as valuable alternatives to far away destinations, provided that they are promoted as “away” by emphasising the differences in language and cultural contexts characterising the Swiss cantons. Combined with novel “staycation” offering stimulating enjoyment and exploration of one’s own local context, promoting national destinations seems to be a promising approach to reduce the number of holiday trips, at least for those used to frequent flying short breaks and weekend trips abroad, as they still offer opportunities for experiencing the diversity from everyday life people are looking for. Closer holiday destinations, however, do not necessarily need to be within Switzerland, as travelling on the ground by train would still allow reaching destinations abroad while keeping carbon emissions low. Train travel could, for instance, be promoted via discounts coupled with communication campaigns highlighting the presence of time-efficient routes. Particularly, campaigns emphasising individual economic benefits (in addition to the environmental ones) might encourage the choice of destinations in neighbouring European countries towards which good railway connections exist, as Switzerland is ideally located in the centre of the European railway network.

Finally, provided that closer destinations and on-the-ground travel alternatives are available, we suggest promoting them by leveraging word-of-mouth, as people tend to trust travel suggestions if they are shared by friends, family, and peers. Namely, we suppose that encouraging conversations—either in-person or via online tools and platforms—about sustainable travel and sharing personal experiences of eco-friendly holidays might spark

interest and motivate others to adopt similar behaviours. Furthermore, as intermediaries like destination websites, social media, and travel agents also play a role in the decision-making process, they might be leveraged as well to promote low-carbon holidays as “the normality” via social media platforms. Indeed, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube can be powerful tools for reaching a broad audience, sharing eco-friendly travel options, inspiring behaviour change via “influencers”, and supporting the discovery and diffusion of low-carbon holiday behaviours [94].

These three recommendations fit with broader attempts to promote behaviour change with “nudge” techniques that use automatic feedback tools and customised suggestions to change behaviours. In the tourism domain, similar interventions have recently been performed [95,96], and future initiatives could draw from an established body of literature dealing with the use of feedback and persuasive technologies in the domain of local mobility (e.g., [97–100]) to obtain practical suggestions on how to turn our recommendations into specific intervention techniques.

4. Conclusions

Travel for holiday purposes is a major contributor to global carbon emissions, and the decarbonisation of holidays is increasingly included in key goals for climate change mitigation. We posit that, besides fostering technology efficiency improvements on the supply side, policy interventions could act on the demand side, encouraging closer destinations and on-the-ground travel rather than by air. Such interventions should, however, fit with the specific ways holidays are perceived and performed in a given context. In this article, we explored the holiday behaviour of people living in a small-sized city located in Southern Switzerland (Lugano, about 70,000 inhabitants), focusing, in particular, on travel-related aspects. Our analysis contributes to filling the knowledge gap about the holiday behaviour of people living in medium-sized European cities such as Lugano.

Our analysis combined an in-depth investigation of the specific holiday behaviour of the Lugano population, performed via semi-structured interviews based on a “grounded theory” framework, with a review of the scientific literature on holiday travel behaviour. We adopted a purposive sampling strategy, drawing our interviewee sample from clustering self-selected individuals who responded to an open call via a newsletter post. To limit possible biases due to such an initial respondent self-selection, we ensured broad heterogeneity in the interviewee sample via a dedicated procedure: we first clustered the post respondents ($N = 219$) based on their (self-reported) holiday travel behaviour (number of holiday trips per year and means of transport used) and then selected the interviewees within the clusters by first looking for high diversity in their holiday travel behaviour, and then balancing their socio-demographic characteristics as much as possible.

In doing so, we obtained a heterogeneous sample of interviewees, especially regarding holiday travel behaviour—the core of our analysis. In spite of the relatively small size of the resulting sample ($n = 15$), with the last interviews, we reached saturation. Furthermore, the insights from our interviews were highly coherent with elements emerging from previous research performed in other contexts. We thus believe that, despite our focus on Lugano, the self-selection, and the limited sample size, our findings about holiday travel behaviour can be generalised to other middle-sized cities of inland Europe, particularly those located in multi-language (and thus multi-cultural) countries, such as Switzerland and Belgium.

Overall, the insights we gained allowed us to better understand (1) the dominant motivations for going on holiday, (2) the types of holiday destinations, (3) the activities performed during holidays, and (4) the means of transport typically used for holidays by the Lugano population. Moreover, two cross-cutting insights emerged as key determinants of current holiday behaviour: the stage of life that individuals are into and their environmental awareness. Based on the results we obtained, we identified promising leverages to act upon in the “community challenge” for low-carbon holidays we will soon launch to the Lugano population to favour low-carbon holidays: (1) providing feedback on one’s overall carbon emissions by accounting for both daily life and holiday-making, (2) marketing

closer destinations by emphasising their diversity and time-effectiveness of travelling on the ground, and (3) engaging influencers, relevant peers, and tourism intermediaries in promoting low-carbon holiday alternatives.

Our future research on the design and launch of the “community challenge”, supported by strict policy evaluation analyses, will tell if, once implemented in real-life interventions, our recommendations can actually succeed in encouraging concrete and long-lasting change towards low-carbon holiday behaviour. Ideally, this will be performed via fully experimental (randomised controlled trial) or quasi-experimental research (matching a comparable control group to participants of the community challenge) by automatically collecting travel data via smartphone apps in order to reduce possible measurement error and self-reporting bias associated with traditional survey-based data collection processes.

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