

# WHY DO PEOPLE HIKE? HIKING THE ISRAEL NATIONAL TRAIL

NOGA COLLINS-KREINER & NURIT KLIOT

*Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Haifa, Haifa, 31905, Israel.  
E-mail: nogack@geo.haifa.ac.il; nuritk@geo.haifa.ac.il*

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## ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to better understand why people hike the Israel National Trail (INT) and the behavioural, experiential, and spatiotemporal phenomena that accompany this activity. In this explorative study, we assumed that hiking the INT encompasses both universalistic aspects of hiking, in its capacity as a mobility system shared by hikers of long-distance trails worldwide, and particularistic aspects of hiking, that can be identified through the scientific research of hiking using concepts such as 'place attachment', 'sense of place', 'state and nation building', and 'socialisation of civic consciousness', within the particularistic framework of Israeli nationhood, culture, and history. The first stage of our research was the formulation and distribution of a questionnaire aimed at assessing hiker motivation and the nature and features of their hiking mobility on the route, including spatiotemporal dimensions, experiences and behavior, and place identity and sense of place. Altogether, 210 questionnaires were completed by hikers on the INT over a one-year period, from March 2013 to March 2014. Overall, our analysis of the findings through the lens of Parson's particularism vs. universalism pattern variable revealed hiking the INT to be a mobility system characterized by many of the general, universalistic aspects of hiking, but also, and perhaps most notably, by a number of particularistic aspects that are key to understanding the unique role of hiking in Israeli society.

**Key words:** hiking, Israel National Trail, mobilities, place attachment, ideology, motivations

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## INTRODUCTION

Two aspects of Israeli culture pertaining to long-distance hiking trails make the country an intriguing arena for research on the subject. First, for its size, (20,770 sq. km), Israel has one of the largest and most developed hiking trail networks of any country in the world. More than 10,000 km of hiking trails, marked by hundreds of thousands of coloured symbols and printed on a series of 20 high resolution topographic maps, make the Israeli countryside a landscape imprinted by trails (Rabineau 2013; SPNI 2016).

Second, in Israel, the *tiyul* (in Hebrew), or hike, has long featured as a prevalent means

of maintaining and promoting emotional affinity and affiliation to the country as a 'place' (Ben Yoseph 2011; Dror 2011). Touring the land constitutes an important element of a complex system of cultivated, ritualised cultural practices that have become a form of 'civil religion' representing a pilgrimage to the motherland (Katriel 1995; Avishar 2011). It is therefore quite surprising that few empirical studies have thus far been conducted on hikers in Israel in general and hikers on the Israel National Trail in particular.

This study considers the culture of hiking that has evolved in Israel since its pre-state period. As already noted, this culture finds



Figure 1. *The Israel National Trail.*

spatial expression in the country's unique dense network of trails, as well as in the central role hiking plays in the socialisation and education of the Israeli population in general and youth in particular.

The first aim of this study is to better understand the culture of hiking on the Israel National Trail (INT) and the behavioural experiential and spatiotemporal phenomena that accompany this activity. The INT is a 1,000 km cross-country trail that runs the length of Israel, from Kibbutz Dan in the

north to Eilat in the south (Figure 1). Located in its entirety within the boundaries of Israel's 'Green Line' (pre-1967 borders), the INT traverses historical sites, monuments, and numerous settlements, exposing those walking it to diverse populations and landscapes. It was first opened to the public in 1986 and is currently celebrating its 30th anniversary. Over the past decade, a growing number of individuals and groups in Israel have increasingly been choosing to hike the INT. Indeed, over the years since its

establishment, and consistent with its name, the INT has truly emerged as the national trail of the country.

The second aim of this study is to distinguish between the universalistic and particularistic aspects of the Israeli culture of hiking as manifested along the INT. In this explorative study, we assumed that hiking encompasses both universalistic aspects of hiking, in its capacity as a mobility system shared by hikers of long-distance trails worldwide, and particularistic aspects of hiking, such as 'place attachment', 'sense of place', 'state and nation building', and 'socialisation of civic consciousness', within the particularistic framework of Israeli nationhood, culture, and history.

We expect this study to generate meaningful new insight into the current state of the culture of hiking, which has been extensively investigated in the past (Solnit 2000; Amato 2004) but is in need of further exploration of some of its present cultural aspects (Timothy & Boyd 2013). We also anticipate the provision of added value to the current body of literature concerning the mobility of hiking and motivations for hiking. In accordance with the mobilities approach presented in the following section, we aim to begin filling this gap in the literature and to gain a better understanding of hiking systems in Israel and around the world.

## MOBILITIES AND HIKING

We conceptualise hiking as a dynamic system, a form of behaviour, and a process. Hiking is a slow-paced simple mobility characterised by its 'intermittent face-to-face relationship with other people, with other places, and with events' (Urry 2007, p. 37). As such, it runs counter to the 'time-space convergence' of other forms of mobility and communications (Abler *et al.* 1975; Amato 2004; Kellerman 2012).

Hiking, as a form of walking, can be understood as a cultural activity that is made distinctive and meaningful by the physical features and material textures of place (Lorimer 2010). Kay and Moxam (1996) distinguish between two categories of rural walking practices. The first category includes 'sauntering', 'rambling', 'strolling', 'promenading', and other conventional forms

of walking that are easy, casual, relaxing, sociable, and accommodating of spontaneous participation by groups of mixed abilities. The second category, which is more relevant to the focus of this study, includes 'marching', 'trail walking', 'trekking', 'hiking', 'mountain climbing', and other esoteric and minority activities that are strenuous, rigorous, challenging, and rewarding, and that require advanced planning. 'Thru-hiking' refers to the act of hiking a long-distance trail from one end to the other and is most commonly associated with the Appalachian Trail and other long distance trails, including the INT.

In engaging theories of mobilities (Han-nam *et al.* 2006) we make use of Talcott Parsons' 'general theory of action', particularly its pattern variables construct, which was developed in conjunction with Edward Shils in 1951 'as a theoretical framework not only for the theoretical analysis of social systems but also for analysis of action in general, and ... of personalities and of cultural systems' (Parsons 1997, p. 42). Parsons observed that people can have personalised and formally detached relationships based on the roles they play, and on this basis he proposed five sets of 'pattern variables' (that is, pairs of dichotomous concepts between which people must choose when evaluating their relationship to various objects) for conceptualising the characteristics associated with each kind of interaction. The first pattern variable, affective vs. neutral affectivity, refers to whether a person is either oriented to maximum satisfaction from a given choice or adopts a neutral position with respect to rewards. The second, quality vs. performance (or ascription vs. achievement), refers to whether a person defines others according to their biological traits (evaluating others according to who they are) or their performance (evaluating others according to what they do). The third, self-orientation vs. collective orientation, distinguishes between orientation stemming from personal interest and orientation stressing the importance of the interests of the group. The fourth, specificity vs. diffuseness, distinguishes between orientation toward an object in narrow, specific terms and in more 'diffuse' terms that

lie beyond the range of obligations dictated by one's role.

The fifth pattern variable, and the one with most relevance to this study, is based on the dichotomy of particularism vs universalism: whether an object or situation is judged according to uniform criteria (universalism) or according to the individual's specific relationship with it (particularism) (Parsons & Shils 1951; Parsons 1967, 1977). In our analysis of the literature on hiking in general and hiking in Israel in particular, the particularism vs. universalism pattern variable proved to be extremely helpful in its ability to encompass both the uniform aspects of hiking as a universal activity and the specific attributes, conditions, and circumstances of the activity as a mobility system in local settings. The rationale and innovation of this article is therefore twofold: its exploration of hiking through the unique lens of Parson's particularism vs. universalism pattern variable, and its use of the mobilities approach to provide new insight into this well-studied recreational activity.

To situate our two aims of gaining a better understanding of hiking motivations and behaviours and exploring the dual nature of hiking as both a universalistic and particularistic mobility system in appropriate scholarly context, the following two sections review the literature on hiking as a world-wide system of mobility that cuts across cultures, countries, and localities, as well as the literature on the particularistic aspects of hiking in the context of Israeli statehood and culture.

## UNIVERSAL ASPECTS OF HIKING

The motivations, experiences, perceptions, and behaviours of hikers on a route or trail are full of meaning and significance, often resulting in a conceptual difficulty in discerning between the various motivations and purposes for the activity on the one hand, and the patterns of experience and behaviour while hiking on the other hand (Solnit 2000; Arnold 2007). In an attempt to distinguish between these aspects, the universal motivations for hiking, and the universal behavioural, experiential, and socio-temporal aspects

of hiking, will be discussed below in two separate subsections.

**The universal motivations and experiences of hikers** – Motivations to embark on a journey may be blurred, ambivalent, focused, or multiple (Smith 1992; Slavin 2003). Nonetheless, in this subsection, we survey the individual motivations for hiking that have been identified by the academic literature on the subject.

According to the literature, spiritual and religious motivations are the most important reason for making journeys such as pilgrimage, of which strenuous walking is an inseparable component (Eade & Sallnow 1991; Coleman & Elsner 1995; Arrellano 2004; Coleman & Eade 2004; Blom *et al.* 2008). Another factor cited is curiosity, which is widely portrayed as a desire to encounter the unknown *vis-à-vis* various *terra incognita* but also more poetically described by Solnit (2000) and Phillips (2010, p. 449) as a 'form of seduction' and the quest for 'a psychic state achievable through geography'. Another factor discussed is escapism, referring to situations in which the main motivation for travelling is the desire to flee something that exists in our daily lives and the yearning for experiences that are the diametric opposite (Eade & Sallnow 1991; Blom *et al.* 2008).

The literature also makes frequent reference to the motivations of self-reflection, reflexivity, and self-development, as walkers tend to cultivate dispositions and techniques that promote inner-reflection in search of self-actualisation and self-restoration through what has been referred to as the 'walking cure' or 'psychotherapeutic walking' (Robinson 1989; Wallace 1993; Edensor 2000). The centrality of nature, the environment, and landscape as a venue for walking, and the sense of inner peace and tranquility that is engendered by hiking in remote natural environments, have also been noted as common universal motivations. Thru-hikers in the UK and the United States have also cited love of nature and scenic beauty as common motivations to hike (Brownson *et al.* 2000; Coble *et al.* 2003; Turley 2011). Hiking in natural environments has also been identified as a factor that encourages nature conservation

(Svarstad 2010), although in reality hiking may actually prove detrimental to nature (Solnit 2000; Ingold 2004). Svarstad identifies three categories of meaning construction among hikers in Norway that are also indicative of motivation: hiking as pure recreation, hiking as a critique of modern society, and hiking as a category of belonging, as demonstrated by the importance of hiking in landscapes reflecting traditional Norwegian ways of life (Svarstad 2010).

Physical well-being has been identified as a motivation for hiking and walking, as reflected in the widespread recommendation of these activities as a prescription for obesity, heart conditions, and other medical problems (Brownson *et al.* 2000). Another motivation cited by the literature is mental well-being, as hiking and walking are thought to be activities that 'recharge our batteries' and hiking itself has been described as 'pure antidepressant' (Edensor 2000; Amato 2004; Svarstad 2010; Turley 2011).

Another motivation-related question addressed by the literature is why tourists expose themselves to the pain, fatigue, illness, cold, stomach problems, and other physical maladies associated with hiking. According to Edensor (2000, p. 93), 'beyond the trial of physical endurance and mental strength lies that promise of a more confident self and return to a masculine bodily essence, replete with fantasies about getting back in touch with Nature'. In reference to hiking the Pennine Way, Wainwright (quoted in Edensor 2000, p. 93) explains: 'You do it because you want to prove to yourself that you are man enough to do it. You do it to get it off your conscience. You do it because you count it a personal achievement, which it is, precisely'.

Additional motivations identified in the literature include social proximity, which has been defined as the basic 'human need of interaction with fellow human beings' (Kellerman 2012, p. 23), and Frisby and Featherston's (1997) emphasis on the human will for connection and the attraction people feel to one another simply for 'free playing sociability', which has been noted by Sheller and Urry (2006) as an important resource for mobility research. A final motivating

factor noted by the literature is 'communitas', which refers to the intense community spirit, feeling of solidarity, and sense of togetherness and equality that allows a community to share a common experience, usually through some kind of 'rite of passage' (Turner 1969). Other researchers have defined hikers on long-distance trails as a 'community' or a 'travelling community' (Slavin 2003; Arnold 2007; Turley 2011). Proponents of walking with companions stress sociality and the importance of meeting people, the development of friendships, the formation of unique walking communities, and the opportunity it provides to share thoughts (Turley 2011).

**The universal behavioural, experiential, and spatiotemporal aspects of hiking** – Because the universal behavioural, experiential, and spatiotemporal aspects of hiking characterise all hikers, regardless of the motivations for their journey, are addressed separately in this subsection.

One common way of thinking about walking is the notion of walking-as-pilgrimage. On the route itself, the pilgrimage experience marks a transition from the mundane to a special, sacred state, yielding experiences that have been described alternatively as transformation, enlightenment, life changing events, quests for inner-self and for the holistic experience, and meditative walking as a state of trance and lethargy (Smith 1992; Slavin 2003; Holmes-Rodman 2004; Coleman & Eade 2004). Pilgrimage is a form of mobility in which destination lies at the heart of the movement but in which, like walking and hiking, the journey itself is also significant. Indeed, the tradition of walking in Europe stressed that what mattered most was the knowledge to be gained on the journey to one's destination (Wallace 1993; Solnit 2000; Ingold 2004).

Those who engage in strenuous walking and hiking as 'serious leisure' (Stebbins 1982) employ a host of methods and behaviours to achieve the required level of fitness, including material and mental practices pertaining to diet, equipment, and physical and social abilities (Edensor 2000). Hiking also provides a whole range of sensory stimuli,

pleasing and painful, to the body and soul, including the process of coping with difficulty, through which, according to Sennett (1994, quoted in Edensor 2000, p. 102), 'the body comes to life'. Thru-hikers commonly claim that successfully completing a thru-hike is 80 per cent psychological. Indeed, hikers must adapt to different lifestyles and environments along the trail (Arrellano 2004; Turley 2011), and to do so they engage in spatial, gestural, visual, auditory, and ecological literacies to read and interpret their physical connection with the surroundings and use multiple forms of intelligence and experimental learning (Arnold 2007).

The system of hiking mobilities is grounded in spatiotemporal fabric. Temporal aspects of hiking include its rhythm, duration, and temporality. The natural walking rhythm of the human body is approximately 3 miles or 5 kilometres per hour (Solnit 2000; Slavin 2003), and, as the body falls into a rhythm at this pace, walking becomes meditative (Slavin 2003). Walking and hiking are differentiated in duration, with walking being measured by hours and hiking being measured by days, months, and sometimes years (Coble *et al.* 2003; Svarstad 2010; Turley 2011). Temporality combines these aspects of time with more subjective facets of the passage of time during hiking.

#### **PARTICULARISTIC ASPECTS OF HIKING IN ISRAEL: PLACE ATTACHMENT, IDEOLOGY, EXPERIENCE AND BEHAVIOUR**

Hiking in Israel is strongly embedded in Zionist state building and nationhood development. The national identity shared by members of a nation tends to include a strong geographical element, as nations have been constructed over time as imagined communities with their own homeland (in some cases a 'fatherland' and in other cases a 'motherland'). By combining state and nation in the nation-state, sovereign territory is merged with sacred homeland to convert space into place (Taylor 1999). Janowitz (1985) argues that citizenship in the past has been bound up with patriotism and

nationalist ideology, but that these concepts have since become battered ideas under constant intellectual attack. He therefore introduces the term 'civic consciousness' to denote a person's positive and meaningful attachment to his or her nation-state.

Hiking is depicted in the literature as a form of bonding between citizens and their homeland and as an element of 'civic religion' (Almog 1996; Taylor 1999). Amato (2004, pp. 120–121) explains that early nineteenth century Romantic voices served to reinforce pedestrian tourism, asserting that 'by roving the countryside on foot, one practiced a kind of "landscape patriotism"', which can perhaps be best conceptualised as 'sense of place': a construct encompassing four components of place (time, location, community, and landscape) (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977; Buttner & Seamon 1980) and a sense of belonging and authenticity. Places are viewed as having the effect of 'pushing' or 'pulling' people (Sheller & Urry 2006, p. 214), and the place attachment construct is conceptualised as the extent to which an individual values or identifies with a particular environment (Kyle *et al.* 2003).

The meanings people ascribe to places are necessarily political because place meanings create and structure social differences (serving to distinguish 'us' from 'them', and 'locals' from 'outsiders'). Moreover, claims of what belongs to a place (that is, what kinds of meaning and practices are deemed authentic to it) are often invoked to assert power and authority over it (Williams 2002). 'To talk about the politics of place is to recognise the historic and geographic context within which meanings, values, social interactions and practices are re-produced' (Williams 2002, p. 354).

Trails necessarily reflect the heritage, cultural history, and archeology of the countries in which they are located. The West Highland Way of Scotland, for example, is a 152 km trail that combines exceptional natural landscapes with Scottish heritage, history, and archaeology (Breejen 2007). Svarstad (2010) has noted that hiking in Norway enables people to step back in time to see how their ancestors once lived. As a result, it is

often difficult to differentiate between cultural heritage and the politics of place. One particular set of performances of place occur when a certain place is central to nationality (Urry 2007). From this perspective, hikers on the INT are exploring the politics of place.

In Israel, the '*tiyul*' (in Hebrew), or hike, has been and remains a popular mode of teaching, learning, and experiencing the 'Land of Israel' aimed at maintaining and promoting emotional affinity and affiliation to the country as a 'place'. Youth movements and school children of all ages hike in places with importance to the cultural and political revival of the state of Israel – places charged with biblical, historical, and archeological meaning (Avishar 2011; Ben Yoseph 2011; Cohen & Sasson 2011; Dror 2011).

Ben David (1997, p. 140) has shown that Israeli hikers can be understood as playing two distinct roles *vis-à-vis* land in Israel: a ritualistic role of actualisation by which they serve to 'mark territory' and declare ownership of the land and a second role by which they become part of nature and strive to conserve the environment. In this way, hikes can be conceptualised as symbolic acts that are representative of two categories: 'nature and society' (Ben David 1997, p. 130). One aim of this study is to clarify whether these motives and experiences are also characteristic of hiking the INT.

## METHODOLOGY

The first stage of our research was the formulation and distribution of a questionnaire aimed at assessing hiker motivation and the nature and features of their hiking mobility on the route, including spatiotemporal dimensions, experiences and behaviour, and place identity and sense of place. The questionnaire, which allowed for multiple responses and was administered to hikers via the internet, asked respondents questions referring directly and indirectly to three benchmarks: before, during, and after the hike.

Altogether, 210 questionnaires were completed by hikers on the INT over a one-year

period, from March 2013 to March 2014. The questionnaire was in Hebrew, and all respondents were domestic hikers. We employed a snowball approach to pass on the questionnaire via social media such as Facebook, email, blogs, and walkers' websites. Approximately ten different internet sites and social networks were used to distribute the questionnaire, with websites specially designated for walking the INT proving particularly helpful in reaching as many participants as possible. Although our study employed a non-random convenience sample, we believe the results to be a representative sample of the community of INT hikers, as the questionnaires were distributed for a full year via the internet and ultimately reached a large number of respondents from varied backgrounds, as will be shown below. It should be emphasised that in a subsequent study of 276 INT hikers conducted in 2015, we found the profile of the hikers to be almost identical to the profile of the sample used in this study.

The questionnaire had two purposes: first, to explore hiker-characteristics, such as age, gender, and socio-economic status, and to analyse hiker-motivations. The questionnaire's second purpose was to distinguish between two major systems of hiking-mobility: a universalistic system and a particularistic system, based on one of Parson's (1977) five pattern variables of social systems.

The second stage of the research was a descriptive statistical analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, which will be presented in the findings section, and the third stage involved analysis of our findings using the particularistic vs. universalistic pattern variable, which lays the foundation for a subsequent section dedicated entirely to this subject.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings are presented in accordance with the literature review. Due to the explorative nature of the study, we first present our findings regarding hiking the INT as a mobility system in general and, as noted above, leave our overall analysis of the particularistic-

Characteristic		Number of Hikers	Percentage of Total
<b>Gender Structure</b>	Men	120	57
	Women	90	43
	<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age Structure</b>	Under 20 (18-20)	5	2
	20-29	87	42
	30-39	26	12
	40-49	23	11
	50-59	44	21
	60-69	24	11
	70-79	1	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Income Level</b>	Significantly above average	24	12
	Above average	49	25
	Average	28	12
	Significantly below average	62	31
	Below average	39	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Religiosity</b>	Religious	21	10
	Non-religious	183	90
	<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Residence</b>	City residents	115	60
	Non-city residents	77	40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Approach to Hiking the Trail</b>	In sections	123	66
	In one trip	70	33
	<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Education</b>	Elementary	1	1
	High School	15	10
	B.A.	66	43
	M.A.	54	35
	Ph.D.	16	11
	<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Motivations for Hiking</b>	Spending time with friends	210	100
	Love of nature	191	91
	Love of the country	155	76
	Physical and athletic	142	68
	Leisure activity	118	56
	Spiritual, religious, and cultural	92	44
	<b>Total</b>		<b>210 Respondents</b>

Figure 2. Personal and sociodemographic characteristics of the hikers.



universalistic aspects of this system for a subsequent section.

**Characteristics of the hikers** – This subsection presents the personal and social-demographic characteristics of the 210 hikers who responded to the questionnaire (Figure 2) and compares their attributes to comparable data from elsewhere in order to better understand their profiles. The Israeli sample was found to be unique with regard to three features: gender structure, age structure, and income level. In terms of gender structure, in contrast to the dominant presence of male hikers found in the literature (Kyle *et al.* 2003; Arnold 2007), the Israeli sample reflected a much closer male-female ratio, with 57 per cent men and 43 per cent women. This structure can be assumed to exercise influence on the motivations for hiking, such as sociability and physical and mental well-being, as well as on the forms of mobility on the route, such as hiking alone or with companions, friction of distance, and the sensory stimuli of body and soul.

In terms of age structure (Figure 2), the Israeli hikers fell within two primary age groups: young hikers on the one hand and hikers over the age of 50 on the other hand. This can be compared to Kyle *et al.*'s (2003) findings that most hikers are between the ages of 19 and 55 and that most thru-hikers are 35 years of age or younger, as well as Arnold's (2007) finding that the largest group of walkers consists of 18 to 29 year olds. The discourse on hiking the INT in the social media reflects the hike's status as 'a rite of passage' among young people in Israel and the desire of many to walk the entire trail as thru-hikers. It is also indicative of the hike's role as a group/community custom among older hikers who complete the hike gradually, section by section, and also likely reflects patterns of employment and higher education in Israel.

Israeli hikers were also found to be unique in terms of their income level (Figure 2). Whereas most thru-hikers on the Appalachian Trail in the United States earn an average household income of less than \$40,000, which is below the national average, Israeli hikers on the INT could again be divided

into two groups: one that earns less than the national average income and another that earns considerably more. This may be linked to the age structure of the hikers and may affect different attributes of the walkers, such as their investment in preparation, their planning, and the purchase of special equipment for the hike.

The Israeli hikers bore resemblance to hikers elsewhere in their education, place of residence, and heterogeneity. Kyle *et al.* (2003), for example, found most hikers to be well educated, possessing at least some post-secondary education, and the same was found to be true of walkers on the INT. Moreover, like Turley's (2011) study of thru-hikers on the Appalachian Trail, we too found respondents to be 'a cross-section of society', and like Svarstad (2010), we found hikers on the Trail to have a higher level of education and to be primarily city dwellers (60%). Only 10 per cent of the Israeli hikers in the sample agreed with the statement 'religion is important for me' (responses of 4 and 5 on a scale of 1–5).

Respondents were requested to specify whether they hiked the INT in one continuous trip or in sections. Our findings show that two-thirds of the sample hiked the trail in sections and that only one-third hiked it in one trip. For those who completed the trail in one trip, the average duration of hiking was between 35 and 75 days. For the others, who hiked the trail section by section, the duration was extremely heterogeneous, ranging from two to six years. The temporality of hiking was also varied, with some hiking a section every month and others engaging in longer hikes once every few months. Some hikers reported selecting special dates for their hikes, such as birthdays or bar-mitzvahs in the family or in order to commemorate, whereas others reported that the temporality of their hiking changed pace over time, from steady hiking for a number of months to a sluggish pace and completion of the trail after many years.

Only 36 per cent of the hikers had a daily target distance in kilometres whereas 43 per cent did not. The daily rhythm for the majority of hikers ranged from 10 to 25 km per day. As in other studies, respondents

reported increasing the distances they walked after beginning to use the trail (Brownson *et al.* 2000). In this way, as we will discuss in greater detail in the section dedicated to the particularistic and universalistic aspects of hiking the INT below, Israeli hikers manifest a universalistic semblance to hikers elsewhere in the rhythm, temporality, and duration of their hiking, as well as the particularistic facet of ritualistic hikes to mark family events and commemorate deceased loved ones.

**Motivations for hiking the INT** – The motivations for hiking the INT were assessed directly and indirectly by questions referring to three benchmarks: before, during, and after the hike. Respondents were asked explicitly about their motivations using questions allowing for multiple responses. They were also asked to rank their level of agreement with relevant sentences on a scale of 1–5. Initially, our findings appeared to be consistent with the literature's assessment that motivations for hiking may be blurred, ambivalent, or multiple (Smith 1992; Slavin 2003), and we too found hiking the INT to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon.

However, on closer examination of our findings (Figure 2), we observed that many of the universal motivations discussed in the general literature play only a minor role in motivating hikers on the INT and that most were actually motivated primarily by particularistic social motivations. Indeed, the most important motive for hiking the INT, cited by 100 per cent of the respondents, was 'spending time with friends', which can be classified as a form of 'communitas' (Turner 1969), as defined above.

Also indicative of the importance of communitas as a motivating factor for hiking the INT are responses to another question aimed at assessing the company (if any) with whom the respondents hiked the INT, which reflected that over 50 per cent hiked it with friends and another 20 per cent hiked it with trail 'partners'. Almost half (47%) of the respondents also cited 'company' as a very important element of their experience on the INT. In contrast to the literature, in which communitas emerges in the religious context of pilgrimage, communitas as a

motivation for hiking the INT emerges neither in religious form nor during a religious ceremony but among a select group of individuals that can best be described as a group of friends or companions (often referred to loosely as 'the gang'). In modern Israel, such social groups appear to have assumed the role of religious institutions in creating new communities bound together by communitas, although the communities they create do not live together in a single space or place.

Other scholars have defined hikers on long trails as a 'community' or 'travelling community' (Slavin 2003; Arnold 2007; Turley 2011), and this description can also be applied to the Israeli case study at hand. The case of the INT is also consistent with the writings of Frisby and Featherston (1997), who examine mobility with a focus on the human desire for connection and the attraction that people feel toward one another simply for 'free playing sociability', which, as noted, Sheller and Urry (2006) view as an important tool in the study of mobility. Though community and communitas evolve among other hikers in different locations, it is its relative importance (100% of the respondents indicated walking with friends as a motive for their hike) in the Israeli context that makes it so noteworthy, and, as will be discussed in the section dedicated to the particularistic and universalistic aspects of hiking the INT below, so particularistic to Israeli hikers.

The social motivation interacts with many other aspects of hiking on the INT, such as the gender composition of Israeli hikers and the mode of hiking chosen (alone or with companions). In this and other ways, it strongly impacts the hikers' experiences on the trail.

The second most influential motivation for hiking the INT, indicated by 91 per cent of respondents, was a 'love of nature, the environment, and the landscape'. This motivation was reaffirmed by responses to a question that explored the most important facets of the trail, in which 81 per cent of respondents pointed to the magnificent views it offers as a common motive for hiking the trail. It is also consistent with the view of thru-hikers in the United States and the UK,

who cited love of nature and scenic beauty as 'their motivation to hike' (Brownson *et al.* 2000; Coble *et al.* 2003; Turley 2011). The motivation of 'love of nature' may interact with the motivation of hiking as a means for other ends, but is also closely tied to the sense of place that Israeli hikers revealed in their responses. As we will argue in the section dedicated to the particularistic and universalistic aspects of hiking the INT below, orientation to nature and the environment is extremely particularistic in its manifestation among Israeli hikers.

The third most important motivation indicated by hikers in the Israeli case study was 'love of the country' (74%) and ideology (22%), or, to use Amato's (2004, p. 120) terminology, 'landscape patriotism'. Fifty per cent of the respondents ranked a sense of identification with the Land of Israel as the first and 'most important' facet of the trail, and an additional 26 per cent ranked it as 'important'. When asked to classify the degree to which hiking the trail enabled them 'to express ownership of and affiliation to the Land of Israel', 31 per cent of the respondents indicated 'very high' and 21 per cent indicated 'high'.

Additional variations of love of the Land of Israel and ideological motivation emerged in hikers' responses to other questions. For example, 13 per cent of the hikers cited 'knowing the Land' as one achievement of their hike, and 77 per cent cited 'becoming one with the land' as one of the most important aspects of hiking the INT.

As almost all the hikers surveyed were non-religious (90%), love of and affiliation with the 'Land of Israel' are indicative of a 'civic religion' or civic consciousness, which must be considered in conjunction with the special value that hikers assign to hiking the INT with friends and family members. This is partially manifested in the ritualistic behaviour of hikers, as 18 per cent reported conducting customary ceremonies while on the trail to mark the beginning of the Sabbath or to commemorate a friend or loved one killed in one of Israel's wars. Many of the hikers expressed strong emotions towards the land, which they described as 'magnificent' and 'beautiful' and as possessing

'beautiful landscapes' and 'beautiful sites'. History and archeology were specified by 51 per cent of the respondents as two of the most important facets of the trail. This aspect of hiking is addressed by the literature that explores hiking as a manifestation of the nation-state building process, civic culture, and civic consciousness and depicts it as a means of bonding between citizens and an element of 'civic religion' (Janowitz 1985, Stephenson 1995; Taylor 1999). As noted above, these responses are clear reflections of the longstanding effect of the Israeli culture of hiking and support the findings of Israeli literature on this subject.

The fourth most influential motive – 'physical and athletic motivation' – was cited by 68 per cent of the respondents as a motivation for their hiking, and 48 per cent singled out hiking as the most important activity for bodily strength, physical fitness, and health. In response to a question designed to assess the most important aspects of the INT, 59 per cent of the respondents cited the physical challenge it presented. Physical capability was also cited as one of the hikers' self-reflection outputs, that is, as an element of self-assessment that emerged during the hiking. In this way, the hikers on the INT were similar to other hikers elsewhere in the world.

Hiking as a leisure activity, specified by 56 per cent of the respondents, was the fifth most influential motive. Other universalistic motivations such as adventure, challenge, courage, and skill enhancement also did not emerge as major motivations for the Israeli hiker in response to this or other questions. Similarly, escaping from everyday life was also not found to be a motivation for respondents, and neither was curiosity or a desire to explore unknown places.

Spiritual, religious, and cultural motivations are frequently cited in the literature as common motivations for hiking (Eade & Sallnow 1991; Blom *et al.* 2008), and 44 per cent of the hikers in the sample cited the hike's spiritual and mental challenge as a motivation. In response to another question, 43 per cent of respondents characterised the hike's spiritual component as 'very important' and 44 per cent indicated only moderate agreement with this characterisation. The

universalistic motivation of self-reflection, reflexivity, and self-development was also cited by hikers on the INT, in accordance with the findings of other studies (Robinson 1989; Wallace 1993; Edensor 2000).

Finally, 32 per cent of the respondents identified psychological aspects as a very important component of their hiking, and some responses to the question 'What did you learn about yourself while hiking?' related to elements such as devotion to the goal (of hiking), determination, ability, character, will-power, and mental fortitude, all of which are indicative of the importance of this motivation. Only 2 per cent of the Israeli hikers in the sample cited a religious motivation for their hike.

**Spatiotemporal experiences and behaviours of hikers** – The experience and behaviour of hikers on the INT proved to be full of meaning and significance for the respondents. In response to a question regarding the identity of their hiking partners, which allowed for multiple responses, a majority (55%) indicated having hiked the INT with friends; 22 per cent hiked in organised groups; 20 per cent hiked with a spouse or a girlfriend/boyfriend; 20 per cent hiked with other partners; and 13 per cent hiked with various family members. Only 12 per cent walked alone. This finding stands in stark contrast to the international literature on the subject, which indicates that approximately half of all hikers hike alone – which is seen as promoting self-development, communion with nature, self-reliance, and harmony of body and soul (Edensor 2000; Slavin 2003; Amato 2004) – and the other half hike with one or more companions – which is seen as promoting sociability, the development of friendships, and the formation of unique walking communities, and as providing an opportunity to share thoughts with others (Edensor 2000; Turley 2011). The extremely high incidence of hiking in groups is a unique element of hiking on the INT and should be considered in conjunction with the motive of 'communitas' identified above.

In their responses to open-ended questions, the hikers discussed the feelings and thoughts they experienced during the hike,

which typically dealt with different aspects of their lives. It was this 'internal experience' which they regarded as the focus of their journey, not the actual act of reaching their destination. This experience is consistent with the nineteenth century Romantic tradition in which walking was not merely a means of reaching a destination but an activity with its own unique pleasures and virtues (Wallace 1993; Solnit 2000; Ingold 2004).

The importance of hiking as a mobility that integrates body and soul received moderate support from respondents, who ranked this aspect as being of medium importance. Only half of the respondents agreed strongly with the statement 'hiking the INT is very challenging to individuals and allows them to push themselves to the limit and to overcome the many difficulties of the trail', and another 26 per cent expressed more moderate agreement. Sixty four per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement 'there is no time for self-reflection while hiking, as you are totally absorbed in the rhythm of hiking'. When asked whether they agreed with the statement 'hiking the trail was difficult and necessitated significant physical and mental effort', approximately half of the respondents expressed lack of agreement with the statement and the other half expressed only moderate agreement. Although the literature portrays hiking as providing a wide range of pleasing and painful sensory stimuli for the body and soul (Sennet 1994; Edensor 2000), Israeli hikers expressed only moderate agreement with statements reflecting these aspects of hiking. The only aspect specified by more than half of the respondents related to the process of self-reflection that occurs while hiking. The universalistic notion of hiking as an activity that integrates body and soul is related to other universalistic motivations such as physical and mental well-being, walking-as-pilgrimage, and perhaps also the temporality of hiking (rhythm, duration, and pace).

Although, as mentioned above, only 2 per cent of the hikers indicated a religious motivation for their hike, this finding should be considered in conjunction with another major motivation for hiking the trail – love of the Land of Israel – which may be

indicative of a secular form of pilgrimage. Indeed, hikers of the INT described their hikes using pilgrimage-like jargon similar to the manner in which hikers around the world have described their hikes: as an 'experience', a 'transformation', 'enlightenment', 'a life changing event', 'a search for inner-self', 'meditative walking', 'a state of trance and lethargy', and 'a quest for the holistic experience' (Smith 1992; Slavin 2003; Holmes-Rodman 2004; Coleman & Eade 2004). For example, just as walking El Camino de Santiago is not about reaching Santiago de Compostela but about the journey itself (Slavin 2003) and just as hikers on the Inca Trail depict their journey as a process of self-learning (Quinlan-Cutler *et al.* 2014), many Israeli hikers spoke about hiking the INT in a manner resembling the phenomenon of pilgrimage, referring to feelings of 'ability', 'self-knowledge of their own abilities', and 'learning about oneself'. These responses point to the relevance of the universal phenomenon of walking-as-pilgrimage, despite the absence of a religious motivation for the hike.

Much of the data elicited by the open-ended questions confirmed the multi-dimensional nature of the experiences along the trail. For example, when asked to report on the thoughts and reflections they experienced during the hike, one-fifth of the respondents related to personal issues, such as soul searching, career, family, and significant others; approximately 15 per cent related to the land itself (with references to the beautiful and wonderful land, beautiful landscapes, and beautiful sites); and 12 per cent used the time to reflect on 'everything' – the world, the essence of life, and their very existence. Other topics included nature, pleasure, happiness, freedom, serenity, love of the land, friends and people, and the trail itself. Some also reflected on food and water and the waste and trash they observed on the route.

The hikers' perceptions of what they achieved by completing their hike were also conceptualised as multi-dimensional experiences and related to sociability (15%); knowing the land (13%); the act of hiking (13%); mental and spiritual achievement (12%);

happiness, satisfaction, and enjoyment (11%); and physical health and achievement (9%). A smaller number of respondents related to nature and landscape and a sense of personal achievement. The data also clearly indicates that the hikers' experiences on the trail interacted with place attachment, love of the land, and social motivation, and the multi-dimensional structure of the experiences while hiking revealed both universalistic and particularistic facets of the activity.

The literature exploring the mobility of hiking depicts it as a multi-dimensional experience involving a wide range of spatial, gestural, visual, auditory, and ecological literacies (Arnold 2007), which is consistent with the experience of hikers as they adapt to the different lifestyle and environment of the trail (Arrellano 2004; Turley 2011). Our findings confirm that hiking the INT is indeed a multidimensional experience characterised by sociability, knowing the land, the act of hiking, mental and spiritual experience, and physical, health-related, and bodily achievement.

### **PARTICULARISTIC AND UNIVERSALISTIC ASPECTS OF HIKEING THE INT**

The above analysis provides us with a deeper and more complex understanding not only of hiking on the INT but of hiking in general, as depicted in Figure 3.<sup>1</sup>

Universalistic attributes of hiking were found to play a role in hiking the INT before, during, and after the hikes themselves, which always involved a degree of mental and physical planning. However, our findings indicate that, in the Israeli case study, the particularistic motives for walking were more prominent than the universalistic motives observed elsewhere, as shown in Table 1.

The hiking mobility system of the INT is universalistic to the extent that it can be characterised by a set of internationally widespread motivations (such as love of nature, the environment, and the landscape; a desire to partake in physical and athletic activity; leisure activity; and the spiritual and mental

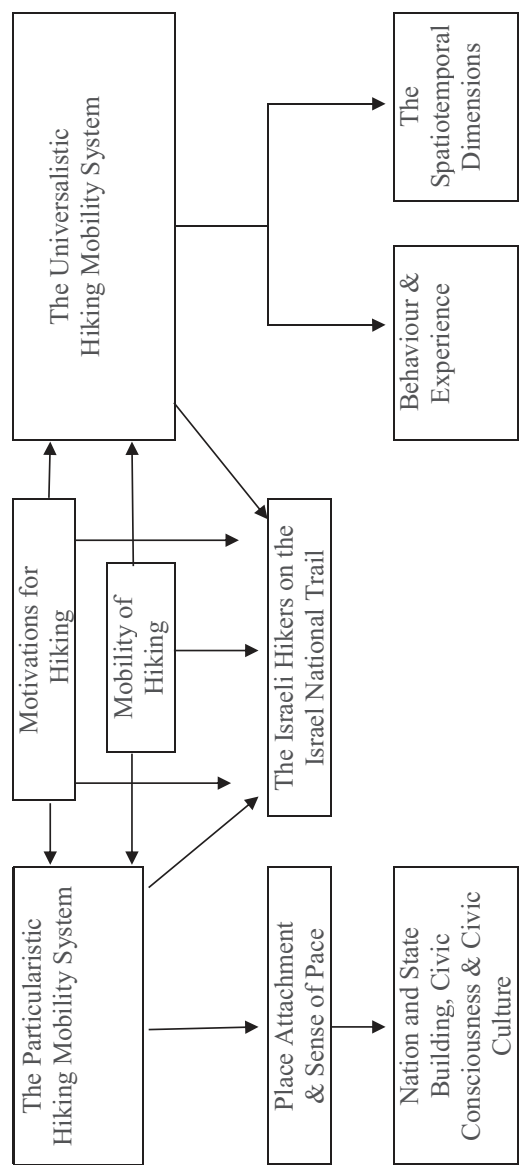


Figure 3. A suggested conceptual framework for hiking.

Table 1. *Universalistic and Particularistic Assemblages: Level of Identification by Respondents<sup>a</sup>*

Categories	Universalistic assemblage	%	Particularistic Assemblage	%
Motivations	Love of Nature	91	Social "Communitas"	100
	Physical and Athletic Motivations	68	Hiking as Manifestation of Nation and State Building	76
	Self-Reflection, Reflexivity, and Self-Development	64	Love of Country	74
	Serious Leisure	56	Ideology	22
	Spiritual and Cultural Motivations	42		
	Religious Motivations	2		
	Hiking as Discipline and Technique	69	Hiking with Companions	88
Experience and behaviour	Hiking as End or Means	66	Becoming One with the Land	77
	Multidimensional Structure and Experience	47	Identification with the Land	76
	Body & Soul	36	Hiking as Affiliation to the Land	52
Achievements of hiking	Hiking Itself	13	Sociability	15
	Mental and Spiritual Motivations	12	Knowing the Land	13
	Happiness, Satisfaction, and Enjoyment	11		
	Physical, Health, and Body	9		
Obstacles to hiking	Physical Difficulties	41	Social Constraints	6
	Mental Difficulties	13		
	Health Difficulties	10		

<sup>a</sup>Percentages were calculated based on the number of responses to each question, and only questions answered by more than 80% of all respondents were used for analysis

challenge with which it provides hikers) and a long list of internationally shared spatio-temporal experiences, emotions, and behaviour (such as hiking alone, hiking as a means for other purposes, walking-as-pilgrimage, and the multi-dimensional structure of the activity).

The INT hiking mobility system is particularistic to the extent that it can be characterised by unique specific attributes of the individual's relationship with the activity itself (such as the social motivations of 'communitas', spending time with family members, love of the country, and ideology) and by a number of spatiotemporal experiences and behaviours that are unique to the Israeli hiker (such as the high incidence of hiking with companions and the large role played by the 'soul' element of 'body and soul').

The particularistic attributes of the Israeli hikers of the INT emerge primarily in their

motives for walking, a prominent example of which is the centrality of *communitas*. Whereas the literature typically discusses *communitas* in its religious form, the phenomenon of *communitas* is manifested in Israeli society in many different ways, involving people and their connection to the land and the country. Israeli *communitas* is part of an ethos that stresses the importance of family, friends, community, and country, which in Israeli culture are perceived as integral parts of one's extended family.

On this basis, we argue that hiking the INT has emerged as an element of Israeli society's traditional sense of collectiveness and is one component of a postmodern 'ritual of socialisation' by which the value of solidarity and personal commitment to others receives emphasis as part of the process of nation building. In this way, the mobility of hiking the INT is political (Adey 2010), as

reflected in the notable role it plays in ideological political socialisation in Israel. Place identity and sense of place play a particularistic role, as they serve to generate psychological and emotional links between people and places.

The motive of 'love of the country' has a strong reciprocal relationship with sense of place, love of the motherland, and civic religion, and is of course shaped and embraced by Israeli culture. Like these motivations, it is particularistic in its orientation to the land of Israel as a whole and specific regions, locations, and sites that are viewed as integral to the country's history and geography in particular. As such, in conjunction with social motivations and 'love of nature', it serves to reinforce the assessment of the Israeli hiking mobility system as highly particularistic in character.

Our findings regarding place attachment as reflected in the responses interact with the primary motivations for hiking the trail: company, love of nature, and love of the country. Sense of place and place attachment are also related to 'walking-as-pilgrimage' and its effect on mobility can be understood as 'pulling' people.

Cresswell (2006, p. 3) has described 'mobility' as the dynamic equivalent of 'place', and the meanings that people ascribe to places are necessarily political (Williams 2002). In the case of Israel, the mobility of hiking is strongly embedded in the Zionist state building process and the practice of socialisation, which promotes it as a means of reinforcing attachment to the land of Israel (Katriel 1995; Ben David 1997; Cohen & Sasson 2011). This sense of place is strongly reflected in the particularistic nature of Israeli hikers' responses to the survey questions.

Overall, our analysis of the findings through the lens of Parson's particularism vs. universalism pattern variable revealed hiking the INT to be a mobility system characterised by many of the general, universalistic aspects of hiking, but also, and perhaps most notably, by a number of particularistic aspects that are key to understanding the unique role of hiking in Israeli society.

## CONCLUSION

The first finding of our study of hiking the INT is the fact that long-distance trails are indeed 'systems', or compounds of many systems. This compound system of hiking is a dynamic composition fuelled by motivations and by spatiotemporal processes of movement. Consistent with other studies, we too found hiking the INT to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon with 'blurred, ambivalent, focused, or multiple' motivations and purposes (Smith 1992; Slavin 2003), although in this case study particularistic motivations relating to social interaction and state-related ideology proved to be of unique importance.

Our second finding is that hiking trails cannot be understood as binary phenomena with attributes and motivations that are, for example, either particularistic or universalistic in nature. Rather, they must be viewed as complex, multifaceted phenomena characterised by a multiplicity of different and changing combinations of motivations, facets, and experiences, each with significance that can best be understood on scales ranging, for example, from ideology to enjoyment, or from purely physical walks to walks with mental meaning, as portrayed by Timothy and Boyd (2015) in a number of case studies from around the world.

Third, we found the activity of hiking the INT to be deeply embedded in the Zionist state-building process and Israeli and Zionist socialisation, which promotes hiking as a means of reinforcing attachment to the land of Israel (Ben David 1997; Katriel 1995; Cohen & Sasson 2011). This sense of place is clearly reflected in the extremely particularistic character of the Israeli hikers who participated in this study.

Fourth, employed in conjunction with the mobilities approach to gain a better understanding of hiking systems, the particularism vs. universalism pattern variable of Parson's general theory of action was found to add a useful theoretical dimension by enabling a view of the hikers as actors with a unique orientation toward one particular object – the INT. The culture of hiking in Israel was



found to be a particularistic culture that is strongly rooted as a civic religion and that reinforces attachment to the land of Israel. The significance and meaning of these elements were found to be very high among Israeli hikers (our first expectation). Nonetheless, the universalistic components of Israel's culture of hiking will be of interest to researchers exploring hiking as a mobility system in terms of its spatio-temporal behaviour and experiences and its universalistic motivations. The Israeli respondents in this study provided in-depth insight into hiking's significance in and effects on their lives.

Finally, the limitations of this exploratory study include its small, non-random snowball sample, which may have influenced its findings. Though the questionnaire was distributed over the course of an entire year and was made available to hikers of different ages and from different regions and localities, the extent to which it constituted a representative sample of hikers requires additional consideration. To clarify this question, we intend to develop a larger sample in the future and to conduct extended open interviews with walkers to ensure its reliability. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, only limited testing was conducted for reliability and validity. This is something we intend to test more thoroughly in our ongoing research on the topic. In addition to these limitations, options for further research aimed at better understanding the mobility of hiking may also include the use of different research methods (such as open ended interviews, the analysis of blogs written by walkers, and participant observation) and assessment of the applicability of our findings to patterns of hiking among non-Israeli hikers on the INT and on other trails around the world, particularly in countries in which hiking serves as a means of socialisation.

#### Note

1. We embrace Cresswell's approach to the study of Mobility and concur with his assessment that: 'Formerly, research of mobility was held apart by disciplinary and sub-disciplinary boundaries that mitigated against a more holistic understanding of mobilities' (Cresswell, 2010, p. 160).

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