# Chapter 7
# Digital Hospitality[1]

As I have shown above, a significant aspect of the ongoing transformations in the High Atlas is the new economic opportunities that have emerged in the region, principally as a result of tourism. Digital media technology contributes to this transformation in general, and is influencing local tourism practices in particular. Any analysis of these processes of socio-technical restructuring and transformation must therefore be recalibrated in light of the dissemination of *new* or digital media (Coleman 2010; Hirschkind et al. 2017). For this purpose, the following chapter will focus on a trail-running event in the High Atlas. This may seem like an odd example of digital media given that running is a rather physical experience. The focus, however, will not be on the event as a touristic or sporting event, but rather on the trail-running event as a mediated, circulated, and digitalized phenomenon with its own socio-cultural and historically specific preconditions and ramifications. Hence, I attempt to carve out the specific media and data practices which are necessary for the trail-running event to be realized in the first place and through which the organizers can scale different issues and concerns for different contexts and with varying scope.

I will analyse the *Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail* (ZAUT), and mountain tourism more generally as an expressions of—and drivers for—socio-

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technical restructuring in Morocco.[2] I will start by describing the ZAUT as the latest, non-state-driven, individual innovation strategy in Moroccan mountain tourism. Next, I will address the implications of digital media for scaling work and public reach, as well as the corresponding data that translates topography into a digital format. I then put the three thematic areas of tourism, digital media and hospitality into conversation with one other, in order to introduce the concept of *digital hospitality*, suggesting that digital media and data practices are becoming an increasingly crucial part of how the relationship between host and guest plays out in the tourism of the High Atlas Mountains.

## On Media and Hospitality

Before turning to the trail-running event, I present some prior reflections on media and hospitality that serve as background for the argument below. Media in research along the southern Mediterranean shore has recently been discussed in two major respects: first, mass-mediated communication with regard to political and religious reforms (Hirschkind 2006; Spadola 2014); and second, the influence of social media in relation to struggles for greater political participation (Salvatore 2011; Gerbaudo 2012; Jurkiewicz 2018) or their impact on intimate social relationships (Costa 2016; Costa/Menin 2016). More generally, the contemporary anthropology of media emphasizes ethnographic investigation into digital media's specific formation in particular contexts (Horst/Miller 2012; Bender/Zillinger 2015; Pink et al. 2016; cf. Mazzarella 2004). Along these lines, I review digital media technology from the perspective of its consequences and implications *in situ* in order to investigate and articulate the wider processes of transformation of which they are a part. However, as I argue throughout this book, digital media technology is not a prefabricated entity that changes all conditions when

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2    The trail-running event was run by research partners and friends whom I met during my stay. I witnessed the planning and organization of the first event and actually participated by running in the second edition a year later.

implemented. Rather, digital media are made and remade by the people in whose environment such media are implemented.

One implication of digital media technology for touristic encounters in the High Atlas is that it revives a familiar preoccupation of Mediterranean anthropology, namely hospitality. Hospitality constitutes a *fait social* in the Durkheimian sense, and as such it conflates questions of giving, reciprocity, power relations, politics, sovereignty, materiality, space and morality (Selwyn 2000). From this point of view, the concept overlaps with other shared but implicit assumptions and elusive organizational principles, such as kinship, honour and solidarity within relations of family, patronage and friendship, all of which have characterized classic studies in Mediterranean anthropology (Boissevain 1979; Gilmore 1982; Ben-Yehoyada 2016). As one of the central founders of a Mediterranean anthropology, Julian Pitt-Rivers has written the most influential text on hospitality (Pitt-Rivers 2012[1977]) through which he not only became hospitality's central theorist, but also triggered a debate that is still relevant today. Below I shall show the pertinence of this debate and suggest that it even plays a central role in Moroccan mountain tourism. Beyond a mere Mediterranean perspective on hospitality, Matei Candea and Giovanni Da Col's (2012) recent introduction to their revitalization of an anthropology of hospitality in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* represents the most comprehensive and skillful genealogy of the subject. The authors have evinced a growing academic and interdisciplinary interest in the topic in recent years, driven mainly by the philosophical reflections of Jacque Derrida (Derrida 2000; see also Shryock 2008; Still 2010).

In the field of tourism, however, the "problem of how to deal with strangers" (Pitt-Rivers 2012[1977]: 501) is not only a problem of dealing with them, but also of appealing to them. This is usually a more delicate question for tourism entrepreneurs as strangers represent potential clients who need to be attracted, accommodated and satisfied in order to compete in the volatile and often precarious mountain tourism industry. To make explicit the question that guides the research in this chapter: I ask to what extent processes of socio-technical restructuring challenge the interactions and possible relationships between guests and hosts?

In the field of tourism research, the anthropological and philosophical horizons of hospitality tend to be curtailed and hospitality reduced to the activity of providing accommodation primarily as a form of business. However, there are some interesting approaches that have made observations about increased mobility and the wider dissemination of information and communication technology (ICT) (Molz/Gibson 2007), or asked how "technologies of hospitality" (Bialski 2012) might challenge and/or change relations of hospitality. This "mobile" (Molz 2007) or "network hospitality" (Molz 2012, 2014), which can be found across social networks, sharing services and online platforms such as *CouchSurfing* or *Airbnb* (Ikkala/Lampinen 2015), presumably presents peer-to-peer versions of hosting and may even come up with new ways for strangers to interact.

*Figure 18: Ultra Trail participants before the start*



While the studies mentioned above have focused on particular media technologies or specific platforms in order to investigate the changing practices, motivations and expectations of hospitality, I will proceed

in the reverse direction. I will focus instead on a touristic event in the High Atlas and on the media technology, publicness, infrastructure, and cooperation that were produced during the event and that went into its realization. As I will argue, however, hospitality will help make sense of these different aspects in the context of the ongoing transformations in the area more generally. Hence, this chapter is less concerned with attempting to define what hospitality is or is not, but rather employs hospitality in order to analyze what is happening on the ground. Thanks to a readjusted focus on cooperation and an approach to media technology that foregrounds social practices, the scaling work of actors will become analytically tangible. This scaling work, in turn, feeds into—and interacts with—the scalar characteristics of hospitality itself.

## The Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail

In the High Atlas, local tourism practices constitute an aspiration that had not existed in prior decades. Tourism presents itself as a space of possibilities for the way people are creating and shaping the conditions to make a living in mountain areas. Equally, the Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail (ZAUT) must be situated within this historical context and socioeconomic framework. This trail-running event is classified as an *ultramarathon*, an umbrella term for any race beyond the traditional marathon distance of 42.195 kilometres. The Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail is a race consisting of four day-long stages (*étapes*) across the central High Atlas and covering 116 kilometres at a cumulative altitude of 6,400 metres. The total distance is divided between the four individual stages of 17, 36, 37 and 26 kilometres respectively.

Early one September morning in 2018, I stood among the neon-coloured trail-runners at the ZAUT start line. The atmosphere was energized, the excitement palpable. Many of the runners were equipped with high-tech hiking sticks and were activating their muscles with some last-minute stretching exercises or by jumping on the spot. Others took one group photo after another in an atmosphere of joyful anticipation. In total, 38 participants started the run, of whom 33 finished, including

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myself. Of the 38 participants, half were (semi-)professional Moroccan athletes. The other half was made up of European sports tourists from France, Spain, and Germany, as well as members of the Moroccan middle or upper middle-class. At least half as many people as participants were involved in the organization of the event. Although I did not really know what to expect, I had felt relatively well prepared... until that moment. At any rate, "*lmohim musharaka*," as many people told me: the important thing was to participate.

On the previous evening I passed by the huge inflatable start/finish gate, collected my start number in exchange for the participation fee at the registration desk, and made my way to a huge nomad's tent where the official briefing for the ZAUT was about to begin. About 30 people, participants and staff, had already gathered there and formed a semicircle, with a few sitting on chairs though most stood. The participants had arrived in the afternoon, most of them directly from Marrakech, where several had spent their first night as part of the complete event package. Hamou, the main organizer, was welcoming everyone over the microphone. He spoke in French, sometimes adding some words and phrases in Spanish. As an introduction, a video of the marathon for the children from the surrounding villages was projected onto a white cloth had been stretched for use as a screen. It had taken place in the morning of the same day. The video was followed by some images from last year's Ultra Trail.

Each stage had a clearly marked route, mostly on mule tracks up and down rocky mountain slopes and across barren high plateaus, with several refreshment points along the way where the runners could refill their water containers. At the end of each stage a camp was set up, including an inflatable start/finish gate, a speaker system, and a kitchen tent. The organizers provided communal tents and the necessary camping infrastructure, but it was also possible to bring one's own tent to sleep in. The accompanying staff transported the runners' luggage and all the materials and provisions in off-road vehicles and pick-up trucks to the daily camp locations at the end of each stage. Early in the morning, while the participants were getting themselves ready, packing up sleeping bags and personal belongings, the staff prepared

breakfast, including different types of bread, tea, coffee, jam, and honey. They then collected the luggage again and loaded it on to the trucks. After the participants had started on the run, the camp was dismantled and groups of staff headed either to the refreshment points or to the next location at the end of that day's stage. Participants would arrive throughout the afternoon. Upon arrival they would take a shower, relax, chat, walk around, eat something, or receive medical care from the two French nurses on duty if needed.

In order to have permission to start on the Ultra Trail, every participant had to fill out a form. Stating her or his address, passport number, and stating that she or he was physically able to participate. Thus, we had to sign a liability disclaimer and thereby assure that we would ourselves take responsibility for such, that we knew the risks included, and that we waived our rights to make legal claims against the organizers in case some self-inflicted injury or other health problem. It was also mandatory to carry 1.5 Liters of water in the form of a water bag or pouch, sun protection such as glasses, a hat, and appropriate footwear.[3] It seriously dawned on me for the first time that this was probably not going to be a leisurely stroll around the High Atlas and was perhaps instead a little riskier than a mere sports challenge that would test my physical limits. After all, I had been training for the event and considered myself in quite good shape. I had even spent the two weeks leading up to the Ultra Trail running around the village, up and down the adjacent hills. I always felt a little awkward going on those runs as engaging in fitness activities of this type was not of much interest to many local people. Indeed, I knew a total of two people in the entire village who I had occasionally

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3    I did not have a proper water bag with me and had until then not necessarily thought I would need it. I had somehow expected a seamless supply situation where drinks would be provided every kilometer. This was rather naïve. Hamou, the organizer, said that there was no way he could let me participate without carrying water. The rules were strict. However, he was quick in coordinating a water bag for me from one of the helping guides. In the end, I did not need to make use of the offer as my friend Mustapha provided me with a bag. It was the same bag he had used when he ran the first edition of the Ultra Trail the previous year.

seen running, namely a government teacher and a man who worked in tourism. Young adults and some men would regularly play football in the afternoon, especially during Ramadan when a major tournament was organized that included many competing teams from different villages. However, a morning jog was quite uncommon. Indeed, it was both un-usual and amusing for people who saw me running around in my shorts. Some would ask the non-question "what are you doing (*mai tskert*)?" Oth-ers would say "ohh, doing some exercise (*immiq n-riada*)?" When I an-swered I was training for the Ultra Trail, this appeared to justify some-what my behavior and I was met with approving nods or an occasional "let's go (*siir, yallah*)!"

## Increasing Scope: Publicness and *Circulatability*

A local mountain guide and guesthouse owner named Hamou, and Ibrahim—who was a former professional athlete—were the main or-ganizers of the run. Ibrahim was the somewhat famous patron of the event.[4] As a multiple champion of the *Marathon des Sables*, he had organized a number of similar and larger trail-running events in Mo-rocco. Together with a local association for mountaineering and alpine tourism, Hamou developed the idea of creating a trail-running event specifically for this particular region of the High Atlas and got Ibrahim on board. Drivers, assistants for the supply points along the route, helping hands to set up the camp, cooks and kitchen assistants were all indispensable in bringing off the event.

Hamou was only in his thirties and thus did not belong to the very first generation of local guides himself, but his father had already worked as guide, even before the first official national schemes were launched to support mountain tourism. He had also started the family's guesthouse. For this reason, Hamou too had an intricate historical knowledge of the

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4    Hamou had known from other trail-running events before asking him to help organize the Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail. But even before that, Hamou's father had known Ibrahim and worked with him in arranging desert tours for tourists.

workings of regional tourism. This knowledge from own biographical experience allowed him to assess how ways of reaching and communicating with tourists had changed over the years.

> Simon: *Was the tourism business different in the past?*

> Hamou: Earlier it was a little harder to reach people ("f llwl ishqa shwiya"). […]
> In the past, people wrote letters and made inquiries or reservations. You answered them, then they came. In general, there hadn't been that many tourists at that time. Today there are indeed many interested tourists, more than before, but they also send many requests or messages to all possible guesthouses in parallel [via e-mail or via social media]. Then they compare the prices and the answers they get. It has become more complicated.

Local guides like Hamou were well aware of the impact, potential and promise that digital media technology held for mountain tourism in general and for the ZAUT in particular. There was tremendous pressure to make the first edition of the Ultra Trail a success, which Hamou considered absolutely crucial to establish a reputation. From the beginning, an important part of the planning was to create an appealing visual representation of the event, which would not only show a degree of professionalism, but also address and attract possible clients. Only if it could attract a definite and preferably growing number of participants in each of the following years would the ZAUT become profitable in the long term. In other words, the organizers needed to achieve a degree of public awareness as an investment for successfully holding the event in the future. In order to do this, Hamou pragmatically combined different types of media and forms of publication to achieve public visibility and outreach, including a Facebook page to announce the Ultra Trail and make progress with the planning transparent. He and his team even added some participatory elements: for instance, their Facebook followers could vote on the colour of the *finisher t-shirt*. "It's the only marathon where people can decide what the t-shirt will look like," Hamou told me. In this way, the organizers attempted to establish a unique selling

point as compared with other trail-running events. "But Facebook is important (*mohim*), and not only for this" Hamou continued, "most of the interested people and participants asked about the marathon via Facebook. Only a few called by phone."

Later in the process they used the social media platform to spread information about the stages and regularly posted calls for registration. Hamou and Ibrahim had been in contact with many of the trail's professional or semi-professional runners, who made up about half of all participants, calling them in advance, issuing them with invitations and informing them about the run. Trail-running events such as the ZAUT are promising opportunities for aspiring athletes. Even smaller running events could boost one's prospects of a successful sports career. Other groups, such as one consisting of ambitious French hobby athletes, had registered for the event after it had been posted and shared on Facebook. Participants who did not have any personal ties were also able to learn about the event via announcements and coverage in papers and magazines, as well as online.

Hamou also received support from some journalists and trail-running bloggers, with whom he had previously had contact already while working on other trail-running events in Morocco. The journalists wrote announcements and reports about the Ultra Trail in regional and national newspapers.[5] The bloggers drew on their own networks of trail-running enthusiasts and wrote articles for their respective communities or online magazines in Morocco, France and Germany. The organizers were also able to supplement this by including another classic mass medium in their public relations work, namely television reports.[6] Crucially, Hamou and Ibrahim were able to build on existing social relations

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5   Hamou scanned some of these articles and recycled or rather re-circulated them via Facebook. Interestingly, in doing so, Hamou was simultaneously digitising and archiving the articles, as well as making them available to a purportedly wider and more varied readership.

6   Both the Moroccan television station Tamazight (channel 8) and the private TV station BeIn Sports were present at the first Ultra Trail and reported on it. The Ultra Trail was the first sports event in the Azilal region ever to be covered by BeIn Sports.

they had forged over the years in order to expand the outreach for their Ultra Trail venture. In addition to the contacts they had already made, Ibrahim's personal popularity was another important factor in facilitating and promoting the ZAUT. Not only did he have athletic expertise, ties with a transnational trail-runner community, and a reputation of his own, he also had organizational knowledge from similar events he had organized in the past. Moreover, he had good relations with the local political administration and media institutions.

The role of media is decisive in this context. In view of situated ethnography, it seems appropriate to think of media technology not as something that is merely used or utilized, but as something that is produced by the organizers themselves. The ability to circulate is both an achievement and an investment. It is not just a matter of using the right media channels, but also of establishing the conditions for cooperation through social practices. In fact, this speaks to a different notion of publicness. As Hamou and his fellow organizers successively planned and held the Ultra Trail, it simultaneously grew as a common concern. Only as an *issue* did the ZAUT become connectable, circulatable, and contestable. The various practices involved created the issue, mediated it, and "sparked" (Marres 2005) a form of publicness around it.

Beyond the questions of *addressability* and *circulatability*[7] and the extent to which the Ultra Trail has been *made* a public matter, a number of central points can be noted. What Hamou needed to do in order to hold the trail-running event was to draw on and successively expand his network of cooperative relationships. He was able to fall back on the resources his father had already built up and developed. As a guide and guesthouse owner, he was able to draw on material, infrastructure, and co-workers—such as two Spanish friends for audio-visual support—as well as cooks, drivers, people working with pack animals and muleteers, many of whom he already had working relationships with from his day-to-day business. It was hardly surprising, then, that the participants

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7    These neologisms delineate the achievement of initially creating the run as a concern, which can be circulated in and as different media formats; and as such can be directed at and address a potentially interested clientele.

were also staying at his guesthouse the night before the start of the Ultra Trail. The local association for mountaineering and alpine tourism was also crucial,[8] consisting of several guides and tourist entrepreneurs from the area who had organized themselves as a collective. All this organizing by means of joining together in an association also contributed substantially to finding further cooperation partners, such as representatives of local administrations, who provided a regional ambulance for the duration of the event, or a brand of mineral water as the main sponsor.

All this suggests that the feasibility of the Ultra Trail was fundamentally dependent on prior assessments of the available resources in terms of (primarily) cooperative ties and potential relationships. To cooperate and to display touristic activities in a digitally mediated form to generate public visibility helps claim a special niche in the tourism business, a niche that represents an advantage over one's competitors when it comes to reaching and attracting tourists, which in turn stabilizes one's position as a touristic entrepreneur. However, from Hamou's perspective, which I have mainly adopted here, this aim or goal need in no way be shared with others who are involved in order to make cooperation possible. In fact, as an event, the ZAUT is both "plastic enough [...], yet robust enough" (Star/Griesemer 1989: 393) to be compatible with the activities of different participants or communities.

To register and contemplate the various constellations of situated practices that contributed to the organization of the event, I suggest drawing on an analytical framework that uses a media praxeological perspective. This means using a broader definition of media as "cooperatively developed conditions of cooperation" (Schüttpelz 2017: 14),

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8    In a sense, it is also comparable to a *special interest lobby*, where tourist entrepreneurs come together in order to jointly and collaboratively achieve objectives that would be difficult to achieve alone. Hamou first discussed his idea at a meeting of the association. Together they assessed the feasibility of the event. In both the first and second editions of the Ultra Trail, members of the association offered their own resources and labour to help (see also chapter six).

that equally involve social, cultural and technological dynamics and are thus embedded in their specific histories and within the particular situatedness of their surrounding practices. In this context, the "[s]cale and scope of media are achievements that are practically accomplished by the actors through coordinating, delegating and registering/identifying" (Gießmann 2018: 98, own translation). On the one hand, this takes into account the mutual entanglement of media and data practices, while on the other hand fruitfully expanding the focus on media to include crucial questions concerning infrastructural conditions, as well as their ramifications for publicness.

*Figure 19 & 20: Camp site at the end of a stage (left), finish at lake Tislit near Imilchil (right)*



While participants were scaling mountains, Hamou had to *scale up* the event itself in a very different sense. However, this process involves going beyond creating publicity, as it is caught up in a delicate interplay that both brings forth and expands the reach of the Ultra Trail's media, infrastructure and publicness. Increasing the scope thus also means increasing connectivity. Hamou and others cooperatively developed the conditions for the "mutual making of common goals, means and processes" (Schüttpelz/Gießmann 2015), that is, the cooperation that led to the ZAUT and its situated media practices. They had to make use of an array of different resources including social ties, particular sets of values, and material artefacts. This presupposed careful scaling work by the ac-

tors themselves in order to transfer, expand or limit different issues and concerns to different contexts. As will be shown below, this quality also permeates the relationship between guest and host in the touristic landscape of the High Atlas Mountains.

## Tracking Mediterranean Mountains

For tourism, and the Ultra Trail in particular, the topographical and ecological features of the High Atlas are an important resource. This includes the climate, geology, and biodiversity from which the mountains draw their aura of originality, uniqueness, and attraction. Besides the authentic display of culture and cultural heritage (see chapter six), promotional representations of touristic marketing and tourism imaginaries are generally based on these ecological features of natural landscapes (Salazar/Graburn 2014). Hence, what is perceived to be special about the Ultra Trail—and what the organizers are promoting—is not only the sporting challenge of the race, but precisely the fact that the participants run across the High Atlas. It holds the promise of an exceptional physical experience in an extraordinary setting.

Even in the classic treatise on the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel does not start off his seminal work with the sea, but the mountains. He sets out to identify their defining features in comparison to the adjacent plateaus and plains, as well as their contribution to Mediterranean history at large. "[The] Mediterranean means more than landscapes of vines and olive trees and urbanized villages; these are merely the fringe. Close by, looming above them, are the dense highlands, the mountain world with its fastnesses, its isolated houses and hamlets, its 'vertical norths'" (Braudel 1972: 26-27). The Mediterranean area, as he points out on a different page, "has no unity but that created by the movements of men, the relationships they imply, and the routes they follow" (ibid.: 276). And indeed "roads may be steep, winding, and full of potholes, but they are passable on foot" (ibid.: 41), an observation that also applies to the High Atlas.

By its very definition, "trail-running" means to run, or sporadically to hike, on unpaved roads. Especially in mountainous terrain involving

significant ascents and descents, racing on asphalt tracks is rare. Even where wide roads are available, runners prefer small, undisturbed hiking and farming trails. Unusual though it may be in urbanized contexts involving asphalt, there is no doubt that the most direct route across the High Atlas runs along such prototypical trails, which are inscribed in the landscape as expressions of connectivity and mobility, as well as sedimentations of time and memory. They are stabilized by local people who have used them to obtain firewood or to graze their animals, and used seasonally by nomads or semi-nomads who—in the course of exploiting transhumant pastures—have led their oft-substantial flocks from the dry and hot plains in the south to the grazing grounds in the mountains in summer.

Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2000) have written a comprehensive history of the Mediterranean, which emphasizes the fragmented, ever-changing and interconnected aspects of its micro-regions. With regard to mountain areas, they write: "Mountains can seem hostile and marginal areas; yet they are actually closely integrated into the patterns of production and communication that abut them" (ibid.: 81). Horden and Purcell's Mediterranean, like the mountain ranges on its southern shores, has always been connected. In the middle of the ZAUT's second stage at an altitude of almost three thousand meters, it dawned on me that I was corporally experiencing the phrase "the High Atlas has always been connected."

The 36-kilometre route of the second stage took the participants through the High Atlas along mule tracks. There was no such direct route for vehicles. In order to reach the location at the end of the second-stage by driving rather than on foot, the organizers and staff had to make a detour of over 120 kilometers.[9] If one were dependent on motorized vehicles and paved roads, as was largely the case in the colonial

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9    In fact, the detours posed an immense logistical challenge. Because the end points of the second and third stages were so difficult to reach by off-road vehicles, staff were split up. While some travelled directly from the first stage to the end point of the third, others only took on work for the second and fourth stages.

imagination and during the French protectorate (cf. El Qadery 2010; Miller 2013; Burke 2014), the mountains would constitute an obstacle and act as a *natural barrier*. However, the High Atlas has always been a source of livelihood and crossing it has always been possible: Especially by nomadic pastoralists and caravans from the south on their way to the trade centers in the Moroccan plains and by the Atlantic or Mediterranean, albeit along mule tracks and narrow mountain passes. Continuing with this perspective, the absence of paved roads does not pose a problem if you are on foot with pack animals and/or your herds. In fact, stories and kinship ties from the plateaus and valleys to places on the southern slope are the clearest indication that the mountains, both in local perceptions and in their tangible consequences, may not have been as naturally divisive as other perspectives suggest. Distance, after all, is relational and depends a great deal on certain cultural techniques and the particular technological structuration of everyday life. It is exactly those contextual practices of mobility that also shape perceptions of what counts as distant or connected.

In order to make the distances, routes and characteristics of the Ultra Trail comprehensible, the organizers increasingly resort to the datafication of the High Atlas topography and environment. This involves the visual-virtual representation of the trail as data and its conversion into various types of translation in the form of navigational data in both a digitally processable GPX format and painted marks on rocks along the trail.

For the general preparatory meeting before the Ultra Trail, as well as before the individual stages, Hamou and his team set up a video projector and screen to display the particular routes. To provide the most detailed account of the routes, they used GPS data, provided an elevation profile, and employed Google Earth visualizations. Before the start of the second version of the Ultra Trail, for instance, Hamou highlighted some minor changes to the previous year's edition and showed some of the altered route in detail. The GPS data for the track had been loaded into Google Earth, so that we participants and staff were flying virtually over the landscape and the stage for the following day. Hamou drew our attention to several dots on the digital route, which was visualized on the

cloth canvas. These dots designated the supply points where staff would hand out water to the runners and which were set up about every eight to ten kilometers. The virtual route on the screen indicated the distance we were to cover the next day, which was, however, also unfolding at the present moment, thus making yesterday's historic mule tracks digitally tangible.

Nevertheless, in order to run the ZAUT and follow its route, the runners did not necessarily have to use navigation technology such as maps or GPS devices, as the course of the trail had been meticulously marked. Signs painted on rocks and regular supply points where staff were waiting, provided sufficient navigational orientation. After the joint start, the field of participants increasingly thinned out and, depending on their pace, the runners made their way alone or in small groups through the vast terrain. Under the scorching mountain sun, I followed the white arrows and splashes of paint in the landscape, which were sometimes supplemented by a white "X" to prevent a wrong turn, and often I met nobody for several kilometers or even hours. When I occasionally did pass a small settlement, men working in the fields or children herding goats, it seemed almost absurd to me. After all, they were not surreal extras in a manufactured authentic tourist experience: they lived here. The virtuality of the route and the backdrop of the sporting event overlapped and collided with the long-standing realities of life in the mountains.

Although the trails and paths through the High Atlas exist, and have existed for centuries, they are not the same for everyone and at all times. The practices surrounding them and their ramifications of the trails and paths vary significantly. Following Tim Ingold (2000), for those who know the High Atlas and their way around the mountains, "the answers to such basic questions as 'where am I?' and 'which way should I go?' are found in narratives of past movement" (ibid.: 237). Hamou had explored the trails and paths of the High Atlas through his earlier work as a mountain guide. He was able to use his regular tourism commitments to acquire experience about possible alternative routes and to explore the general feasibility of the idea of an Ultra Trail. During the initial planning process for the ZAUT he continually orga-

nized multiday hiking trips through the High Atlas for clients in such a way that it allowed him to reassess parts of designated routes for the Ultra Trail. The course was only really finalized once the organizers had walked the final route again both to capture GPS data for the route and to paint the waymarks. In other words, establishing the route, Hamou had to translate it physically and digitally in order to stabilize and fix it. Wayfinding, in this case, closely coincides with mapping it. Thus, both the waymarks as physical representations, and the recorded GPS track as a digital representation, are based on past movements through space, as condensed forms of working out the route as the organizers went along. For my part, in a parallel and methodological turn, I worked the route out ethnographically by "going along" (Kusenbach 2003), or rather *running along*.

While for both the GPS track and the waymarks it does indeed seem to be the case that "to follow a path is also to retrace one's steps, or the steps of one's predecessors" (Ingold 2000: 237), the implications of doing so differ depending on who is following on behind. For the participants, running along the Ultra Trail is fundamentally a navigational operation that involves stop-and-go orientation and the particular indexicality of the waymarks.[10] It appears to be a practice of map-using-without-maps, either following the GPS track on the device or following the white arrows as if on a paper chase. Neither a map nor any former knowledge of the landscape are required for successful navigation. The topographical features of the High Atlas do not need a visual representation, as they are corporally experienced as one runs through them. Conversely, the GPS route attempts to translate and represent this physical experience of the topography of the High Atlas into data, thus providing information that subjects one's experience of the route to anticipation.[11] For the organiz-

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10    Cf. here also the analysis of photo-audio guides as early automated versions of route-calculation (Thielmann 2016). Given recent debates about autonomous vehicles, questions of digital navigation practices (Hind 2019) have become more pressing.

11    Successful navigation via GPS track, however, does not necessitate the visual representation of the topography either. On the sports watch I used in the High

ers and guides, on the other hand, following a path or trail through the High Atlas may well constitute a movement through familiar landscape, drawing on former experience and knowledge. This is not to suggest that for them physical marks, maps and GPS tracks are obsolete, only that they can further draw on historical and experiential levels, so to speak. Here and on both sides, practices of wayfinding are thus fundamentally practices of making connections.

By referring to representation and navigation by means of GPS data, it already becomes apparent that there is a digital element to Mediterranean connectivity and topography. For the organizers of the Ultra Trail, the use of GPS data and altitude profiles is a way of demonstrating their own professionalism and thorough, data-driven preparation, while making completely transparent what participants can expect from the Ultra Trail. Furthermore, this is a new service for (potential) clients, pointing towards a changing relationship between host and guest. For mountain tourism in the High Atlas too, digitality is a condition of possibility, which in turn catalyzes a new set of digital tourism practices.

## Datafication as Professionalization

All media practices are also data practices. Digital media technology goes hand in hand with new ways of creating issues and making them public. For guides like Hamou, digital media practices increasingly include the datafication of one's own environment and everyday life in order to talk about and present touristic activities:

> Hamou: Today, there are no pens anymore, everything is digital ("*stilo makhddamsh, deba kulshi l-informatik*"). For example, if you don't have a website today, if someone asks you about it, it's very bad. If they're interested, potential clients can't look it up—it's bad, and they may

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Atlas, the route's visual representation amounted to a blue precipitous line in a blank void, a trail in a mountain terrain without surface or mountains.

> not even come. I don't use TripAdvisor or other similar booking por-
> tals. Only Facebook. And there are links on some blogs and an entry
> on GoogleMaps. Because many people use GoogleMaps, it's very good
> if you also find the guesthouse there.
>
> It is also important to know, for example, how to use GPS and how to
> record routes, how to create a height profile. Because even the tourists
> are not as they used to be. They want to know exactly how things will
> be, when it comes to planning a hike, for example: How many kilome-
> tres is that per day? What's the total altitude in meters? How steep is
> the gradient? In the past, you simply said that the route takes about
> five hours. That's not enough anymore. Tourists expect more details
> nowadays.

That tourist expectations of the provision of information have changed
is pivotal. Not only does datafication signify a degree of professional-
ism, which the ambitious touristic entrepreneur is eager to display, it
also produces a different standard for communicating about touristic
offers, activities, and details. Hamou was explicit about the fact that he
perceives how one communicates with potential clients as a central as-
pect of the tourist's decision-making process:

> It's not just the price that counts—whether a Gite costs 300Dh or
> 100Dh per night, for example. It also depends on how you write to
> potential clients and how you talk to them. For example, sending a
> friendly answer with lots of information. And with pictures of the
> rooms, the food, the guesthouse. So, it depends above all on the
> strategy.

What is more, to overlook or simply disregard these new expectations
concerning standards of information exchange and to fail in the pru-
dent handling of inquiries is the equivalent of sabotaging one's own
business—hence the need for a tourism strategy that has to reflect the
changes wrought by digital media. To a certain extent, digital media
technology puts tourism entrepreneurs under pressure. If a tourist
entrepreneur does not participate appropriately, this will most likely be-
come a competitive disadvantage. This means adapting both standards

for information policy and practices of communication.[12] The field of mountain tourism has gradually become digitalized, which has changed how tourists are reached and how information for (potential) clients is provided and presented.

In other words, guests expect *more* or different data, and hosts must see to it that they fulfil these expectations. Pitt-Rivers (2012[1977]) writes that the "roles of host and guest have territorial limitations. A host is host only on the territory over which on a particular occasion he claims authority. Outside it he cannot maintain the role" (ibid.: 514). Although—or perhaps precisely because—it is "founded upon ambivalence" (ibid.: 513), hospitality constitutes a reciprocal but unequal relationship of respectful mutual recognition between host and guest, which allows strangers and locals to engage in interactions with each other for a limited period of time. Commonly, this interaction takes place in a specific spatial setting (in the guest room, for example, or the *parlour*) and primarily involves concern for the physical well-being of the guest. To what extent can these aspects be transferred to the touristic spaces of the Ultra Trail or the virtual spaces of the digital world?

## Towards Digital Hospitality

Without over-emphasizing Mediterranean anthropology's analytical tool, in the High Atlas Mountains hospitality indeed constitutes an important everyday value and practice. This is particularly cultivated in touristic situations, such as the ZAUT. From registration to transportation and accommodation, the organizers aim to offer a full service

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12    It goes without saying that a prerequisite for this and for successfully attracting tourists is appropriate language skills and a degree of digital literacy. This may lead to a race between competitors in terms of who is first or fastest in appropriating technology and adopting standards. Hamou, for example, is in favour of more ICT-focused and intensive education and training (like most, he has acquired his technological knowledge autodidactically), and he believes that the more satisfactorily one can use digital tools, the greater the competitive advantage in tourism.

package. Accommodation in the camp was simple and the meals rather basic, although there was a greater variety of food than the average breakfast in the High Atlas, which mainly consists of bread and oil. The food for the joint dinner was mostly inspired by Moroccan cuisine and was prepared either by the staff in the kitchen tent or sometimes by partners from the villages where camp had been set up. There was of course green tea with mint and sugar as tea constituted the veritable epitome of Moroccan hospitality. But all in all, the Ultra Trail as a sporting event does not aim to score points with luxurious equipment and comfort, but with adventure, which is what ultimately determines the participants' expectations. Hence, the Ultra Trail aspires to offer a professional organization and authentic impression of the High Atlas to deliver this adventurous experience. This is the basis and motivation for hospitable action.

Besides the actual accommodation and catering, folkloristic elements displaying collective identity and public culture are another crucial part. The end of the last stage included a closing event with music, dancing, and an award ceremony. At the ceremony the main organizers, Hamou and Ibrahim, invited the runners with the best overall times on to a makeshift stage and awarded them with gifts in front of the assembled crowd of participants, staff and guests. The gifts, which included woven garments and carpets, reflected the cultural identity of the High Atlas. Moreover, from the start a rider had accompanied the group of runners, dressed in the robes of the noblemen (*igurramen*) and carrying a wooden treasure chest on a mule, which had the symbolic weight of containing the gifts for the winners. The organizers had also engaged a local music group consisting of men and women all dressed in "traditional" Amazigh clothing. They performed *ahidus*, an important regional genre that combines playing the drums, chanting poetic verses mostly in a repetitive call-and-response pattern and dancing shoulder to shoulder. Typically, this is danced collectively at weddings or occasional celebrations, but for some time now it has also been an integral part of folklore shows on national television channels, as well as in tourist programmes. For some, folklore groups are a way of attempting to participate in the tourist business, that is, in what Michael Herzfeld calls a

"global hierarchy of values" (Herzfeld 2004), without individually being able to become a touristic entrepreneur or a certified guide due to a lack of training, education or resources.

The scope of the tourist services offered, here characterized by both the materials of the infrastructure provided for the Ultra Trail, the means of bodily sustenance and the authentic impressions and experiences of the cultural identity on display convey the degree of successful hospitality. In their successful efforts to revitalize the concept of hospitality, Candea and Da Col (2012) draw attention to Ortner's work, in which she points out that "hospitality, mediated through substances, does not merely *elicit* co-operative responses but *coerces* them" (ibid.: 9, original emphasis). Furthermore, as Shryock (2004) points out, hospitality constitutes a "field of ritualized exchange in which performance animates and responds to social critique" (ibid.: 36). He argues that among Balga Bedouins in Jordan "hosts must 'fear' their guests", because "[r]eputations are at stake" (ibid.). Hosting someone always entails moral ambivalence, which may even turn negative. Guests can accuse the hosts of not living up to their responsibilities as such, while the guests can be accused of overstaying or abusing their hosts' hospitality (Pitt-Rivers 2012[1977]; Shryock 2012). Dealing with the perceived radical alterity of the stranger can evoke suspicion, potential threats, and mistrust.

In the tourism sector, this risk presents itself not only as a moral and social conundrum, but as one that can affect economic viability. Tourists are the responsibility of their hosts, who must not only try to meet the expectations of their guests, but also assume their responsibility towards them. It is therefore not surprising that the organizers of the Ultra Trail try to hedge any possible risks. In concrete terms and as mentioned initially, the participants have to sign a waiver, for instance, as a prerequisite for starting the run. They confirm that they are participating in the race at their own risk, that they are in the necessary physical condition to do so, and that they are aware of the health risks involved. The explanation for this is as simple as it is drastic: in this dangerous relationship between these two parties, everything is at stake for the host. Should a serious accident involving tourists occur, it will not only affect the rep-

utation of the tourist entrepreneur, it may entail meticulous—or even repressive—investigations by the state authorities. Hence, to be able to present all official permits and legally sound documents is more than a mere economic necessity, it is an existential one.

Instances of mediation (communication and audiovisual coverage of the event) and datafication (GPS data, elevation profiles) permeated the actual ZAUT run, through which the organizers intended to enhance the quality of their hospitality. But at the same time the touristic accommodation and service is increasingly subject to a *datafied valuation* itself, which complicates the moral dilemma of hospitable relations even further. Nowhere are the benefits and risks of hosting someone for one's own social and economic reputation more closely linked than in the mechanisms of valuation brought about by the recent review processes on social media platforms, apps, blogs or websites. In the context of mountain tourism, they are not only public statements about the quality of particular touristic work and efforts, but also about the potential for further cooperation:

> Hamou: If you do good work, you'll earn money. If you are only sleeping, money will not just fall from the sky like rain ("*Iflus maghadish ykun bhal ansar*"). If you are busy, travel a lot, put an effort into brochures, it pays off. And if you are sincere ("*nishan*").
>
> If, on the other hand, you lie to people or mislead them, it will harm you. There was, for example, one guesthouse in the area that was running well in former times. But now it doesn't work anymore ("*makhddmsh*"). The owner had lied to people ("*kdub*"). Then it spread by word-of-mouth, blogs, and the internet that this one guesthouse should be avoided.
>
> This is also a new development due to the internet and the increased exchange of information. You must always be careful and completely on guard ("*attention*"). You always have to treat them well, because otherwise [through the available social media] your reputation and thus your business could suffer very quickly. It is even better to let a customer who is unhappy depart the next morning without having to pay anything for the overnight stay. It is better not to insist on the

money so that he is not angry and then writes something bad on the
Internet—which a lot of people and the whole Internet could read,
and which could negatively influence future business.

Especially with regard to online portals and social media platforms,
datafication is widely perceived as an opportunity to reach more people
through targeted information in a (semi-)automatized way. However,
this automation always has the potential to backfire, as the opaque
algorithmic routines at the back of digital platforms may jeopardize the
very same touristic business efforts they were supposed to support.

To illustrate this, consider the business of tourist transportation in
Marrakech. "I was last year's best rated driver in Marrakech on book-
ing.com," Abdelwahed bragged, shortly after I had met him for the first
time. He was a full-time driver in his late twenties. His claim, which I
could not easily verify, seemed at least a little unlikely, though not com-
pletely impossible. Indeed, he worked for a local chauffeur company and
was driving a tidy minivan of a European brand. "Positive reviews and
comments are crucial in our business. That's why you always have to be
respectful and polite as a driver," he continued to explain. His company
worked exclusively as a sub-contractor for booking.com. Whenever
tourists would book transportation together with their accommodation
package, booking.com would delegate the transportation request to
one of its local sub-contractors. "Disrespectful behaviour leads to bad
reviews, and bad reviews are very bad. It can cost you your job."

He went on to tell the story of his colleague, who had behaved un-
professionally and at times quite disrespectfully. Once he had slandered
a client on the phone and proceeded to make derogatory comments
to himself about her while she was sitting in the car with him. Un-
beknownst to him, however, she spoke fluent Arabic. She confronted
him and left an extremely scathing review afterwards. This was not the
only such incident. The accumulation of negative reviews—for which
he himself was responsible—ultimately led to his dismissal. After all,
his reputation—in other words a good online rating—was crucial to his
boss: as soon as there are too many negative reviews of the drivers or the
company as a whole, booking.com will no longer award any contracts

to the company. If booking.com terminates the collaboration and sacks the subcontractor, the entire basis of the company's business could be lost.

Similarly, owners of guesthouses, and even receptionists, ask customers or clients for comments and online reviews. This is common practice and has increased considerably in recent years. Often, staff openly urge clients to write a positive comment and ask them to explicitly mention their own name when doing so. While bad comments or reviews can have serious consequences for one's socio-economic position *outside* the digital platforms, positive ones are perceived as verifying one's value and degree of responsibility. However, it is not merely a question of diligence and of one's social relations with fellow workers or clients that indicate a successful work ethic, but also the hierarchization calculated by algorithmic operations. Consequently, comments and positive online reviews have become hard currency for touristic entrepreneurship. In short, online reviewing represents an evaluation of the performance of hospitality. Beyond that, it publicly signals the virtue of a host to strangers, who have yet to actively engage in the hospitable interaction at all. Indeed, depending on the rating, they may not even consider doing so at all.

Two further considerations are pertinent here. The first is whether there is still hospitality in Pitt River's sense of *dealing with strangers* when guest and host both face each other as part of an online community via a platform such as Airbnb or CouchSurfing. This is because, in order to log on to such platforms, users have to disclose a lot of personal data about themselves or create a profile. This profile is supposed to convey a degree of knowledge and familiarity, and thus turn the unknown guest into a less strange and even more recognizable counterpart. In addition, there are certain desired manners and (n)etiquettes[13] that can charac-

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13   This spelling is intended to draw attention to the importance of etiquette both online and offline, because etiquette in technology is also referred to as netiquette. These represent a code of conduct that encourages polite behavior and respectful interaction with other users on the Internet, especially in online forums and on social media platforms.

terize such a community, which leads us to our second consideration: Personal information—or an appealing online profile—are also access requirements for the platform, and these are then processed further. They are processed both by the algorithms in the background of the platform and by the users, whose expectations of the (later) face-to-face hospitable interaction are also fuelled by online information and communication. This might affect the morally ambiguous status of the hospitable relations as a whole.

If it is true that "each major 'event' of hospitality [...] encompasses a multiplicity of singular events and transactions where altruism and selfishness, trust and suspicion, benevolence and malice are present but never *co-present*," and that it is "this careful *avoidance of simultaneity* which makes hospitality the locus of moral dilemmas—and generates its peculiarly charged affective space" (Candea and Da Col 2012: 11, original emphasis), then digital media technology might call precisely this into question. Digital media and data practices do indeed have the potential to create the co-presence and simultaneity mentioned above.

To exaggerate, and from a merely provisional perspective, this could suggest that hospitality might be mediated and measured in a radically different way, rather than exclusively elusive or transcending concepts such as honour, grace and religious duty,[14] but also the hard facts of algorithmic truth would then form a possible basis for motivating, driving and sanctioning the host/guest relationship. This would, in turn, also indicate the digitization of a moral dilemma, which has always been part of hospitality. Notwithstanding the full extent of the consequences, hospitality has been influenced by processes of mediation and digitization, too. This is why I suggest the term *digital hospitality*.

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14    Here, Pitt-River's analysis of the figure of the beggar and their relationship to the sacred and to hospitality should be recalled (Pitt-Rivers 2012[1977]: 506-513), as well as his position on the concept of grace (Pitt-Rivers 1992).

Digital hospitality,[15] then, represents an extension of the relationship between host and guest, both temporal and spatial. In the field of Moroccan tourism, conventional aspects of hospitality have been updated in being digitally connected to an (moral) archive. While longstanding moral implications continue to be crucial, digital hospitality conveys—in a more all-encompassing fashion—the fact that digital media technology is increasingly part and parcel of how hospitable relations are played out. The modes, values and interactions of hospitality relations are not only mediated—to a degree appropriate to the context—but increasingly digitally spelled out and restructured: in *classical* situations of hospitality, specific materialities or substances can play a decisive role. It is not that they have become obsolete, they are merely supplemented. Take, for example, the sharing of food and other commensality, and consider how its meaning becomes amplified or supplemented by way of the following interactions: the (sometimes formalized or even ritualized) drinking of tea, coffee and alcohol together; the sharing of data, such as the provision of GPS tracks; as well as engaging in supposedly immediate digital communication (while adhering to certain technical, informational and semantic standards associated with the type of media chosen for establishing contact). These are among the *substances* that enable and facilitate the exchange between host and guest, thus forming the basis for hospitable relations in the sense of digital hospitality.

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15    I am not referring to the narrower sense of the term as it is frequently understood in the context of User Experience Design, that is, as an attempt to make the virtual experience of an interface, platform or software more intuitive or inviting to the user, thus improving the way users feel *accommodated* when interacting with technology. Cf. Gude (2010), who has suggested the term *digital hospitality* in a computer science context that contrasts strongly with what I propose here.

## Conclusion

The practices of hospitality also contain and enhance scalar characteristics. Through its digitized form, "hospitality's role as a practical way of shifting scales" (Candea 2012: 43; see also Herzfeld 1987) seems likely to gain even greater and more accentuated significance. A promising "emphasis on scalar analysis" (Herzfeld 2020: 162) in order to map out cultural and social changes should include a perspective that focuses on digital media practices, as I argue in this paper. In practices of digital hospitality, certain types of standards, information policies and forms of data(fication) are conflated, which together not only determine the reputation and level of professionalism of tourism entrepreneurs, but also increase both the scope for addressing potential customers and the likelihood of success in their individual scaling work. Simultaneously this constitutes a tentative advocacy for the ongoing relevance that some of Mediterranean anthropology's *topoi* do possess as conceptual tools. This presupposes, of course, that such *topoi* are carefully grounded in history and are based on specific ethnographic accounts.

The Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail is an account of individual strategies and struggles in the face of globally circulating ideas that are taken up and modified within a specific context. If scale is the achievement of the actors themselves—an implication derived from Latour (2005b: 183-185)—the place where things become scalable is in and through those situations and practices of cooperation, at the point where the pragmatic forging of new relations—that could pay off in the future—coincides with drawing on past relations and existing social ties. In this way, digital hospitality becomes another crucial element in the efforts of touristic entrepreneurs at scale-making and increasing scope in order to cooperate and make connections within the volatile mountain tourism sector of the High Atlas.