The Pôle d’Accueil Universitaire Séolane in Barcelonnette: Qualitative Analysis of Scientific Tourism Between Mountain Experimentation and Mediation

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Introduction

1 In recent years, mountain tourism has diversified in response to changes in tourist practices and mountain usage. Shorter winter seasons due to the absence or low levels of snow, changes in leisure consumption and shorter stays have led some mountain actors to offer scientific tourism (Mao and Bourlon, 2011). Scientific tourism meets the new needs for adventure with a scientific dimension, a cultural setting with scientific content, scientific eco-volunteering and scientific research (ibid.). What it offers is thereby distinct from activities developed around outdoor activities, such as hiking and cycling on snow-covered terrain, which are the main developments observed in this sector in recent years (INRAE, 2021).

2 The diversification in practices of scientific tourism is evidence of a paradigm shift in the notion of tourism from that which qualifies geographic social practices (Dewailly, 2006), such as winter sports designed for mountainous terrain, to that which defines a cultural appropriation of the place (Mao and Burlon, op. cit.), such as mountain tourism (Dérioz and Bachimon, 2009).

3 Scientific tourism focuses more on the experience than on the consumption of local products and activities, and so falls under the category of “a research of meaning and justification during changes in tourism” (transl., Mao and Bourlon, op. cit.: 100). As scientific tourism privileges experimentation (Dérioz and Bachimon, op. cit.), mountain
actors adapt tourist activities to a scientific practice. For example, they may change a hike into a research programme on the biodiversity of species, wherein observations are noted by the hikers. Other mountain areas are innovating by combining culture and tourist practices (pastoral ecotourism). In any case, this scientific culture in tourism calls for adaptations to the requirements of tourist services (reception, accommodation, etc.) and to scientific expectations (levels of expertise, dissemination, etc.).

Beyond differentiating tourism by looking at mountains in a scientific perspective to generate economic and social benefits, the objective of scientific tourism is to characterise the service by its region, integrating the region’s history into a perspective of sustainability. This regional project thus involves various actors in the public and private, and scientific and tourism, sectors, as well as its acceptance by the population. This is notably the case in Barcelonnette, a French commune in the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence region (map 1) and home to the study site for the observation of housing and activities around nature and the environment, also known as the Séolane, which is the name of the rocky massif that dominates the town.

Map 1: Location of Barcelonnette on a map of France in relief with coordinates.

The Séolane arose from organisational intermediation (Nadou and Talandier, 2020) and was founded by a person experienced in project management and committed to the dissemination of knowledge about Barcelonnette. It is the result of several decades of cultural heritage (Schoeny and Sageon, 2005). In this context, how did actors in Barcelonnette come together and decide to offer scientific tourism? How do the fields in which the Séolane is involved structure the scientific activities and in what way are the users of the service involved? Finally, can these scientific tourism services respond
to the ways of life in and visions for mountainous regions, which are becoming more recreational (Corneloup, 2017, 2021)?

These questions precede cooperation between associations, local authorities, companies and even individuals. This system of regional actors, which is understood as an actor’s interactions in a given situation, sketches a model that plays the part of an experiment on a complex phenomenon (Le Moigne, 2012). It is thus a question of understanding, by means of the activities of the actors, the principles guiding the implementation of scientific tourism, the very exercise of which ensures its intelligibility (Piaget, 2004). In other words, this would require moving from structured and lived practices to the production of knowledge on scientific tourism at the Séolane.

With this pragmatic constructivist position in mind (Avenier, 2011), it is now appropriate to address the research objective and method in the first part of this paper. In the second part, we will analyse the principles of action of the Séolane actors using action research, which will allow us to grasp the factors leading to the conception of these principles and their operating mechanisms (Paillé et Mucchielli, 2005). Finally, since this system is not considered as relative and founding knowledge of scientific tourism, but as a hypothesis that is “functionally viable to pursue” (transl., Avenier, op. cit.: 378), we will discuss the transition of recreational mountain activities towards a scientific culture.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework of the Research Objective

The objective of this research is to discuss how the actors of the Séolane use scientific tourism. Organised on the basis of their role and within the framework of their exchanges, each of these actors contribute to giving meaning to the site’s activities. The structuring of observed relationships within this framework creates a system and transforms (Piaget, op. cit.) some of its practices.

Contextualising Scientific Tourism

To understand the phenomenon of scientific tourism, we must first look at the practices in Barcelonnette, as well as how they are implemented by the Séolane. As an object of study, the Séolane thus allows us to grasp significances between scientific activities and the mountain environment in which this tourism takes on its meaning.

This first idea refers to communications-participations (Mucchielli, 2004). Built from the foundations of scientific tourism (Mao and Bourlon, op. cit.), it is understood that communications-participations strengthen the place of the tourist (citizen), who acts for a desirable development of the mountain. These communications are described as a system of thought in action and are elements of communication that can be understood in relation to the contexts in which they take on their meaning for the actors concerned: productions of any kind, concrete realisations, technical objectives, manipulation of objectives, conduct, multiple writings, discourse, attitudes and many paralanguages” (transl., Mucchielli et al., 1998: 8-9). These “generalised communications” (ibid.) therefore respond to a shared problem concerning societal issues around montanous regions, “which goes beyond and involves actors in a game
wherein the emerging meanings are specific to the collective game and not the individual actors” (transl., Mucchielli, op. cit.: 31).

**An Immersive Qualitative Analysis**

In order to understand these emerging meanings within a fixed constructivist epistemological framework that “breaks with convention, and develops a theory of knowledge in which knowledge does not reflect an ‘objective’ ontological reality, but exclusively an ordering and organization of a world constituted by our experience” (Glasersfeld, 1981: 24), this paper will use qualitative analysis. This method allows us to go beyond participant observation in order to observe, and then feel, the most intimate elements of the scientific tourist activities proposed by the Séolane, such as the fragility of the ground with each step we take during a scientific activity on a forest path designed to resist landslides, etc.

The aim of collecting this anthropo-sociological data is to discover this type of cultural, social or psychological experience (hostile, engaging or critical, etc.) for oneself and with tourists. It is a question of living the activity to the fullest in a relationship to time, which combines both research and action since the knowledge of tourists and professionals in the Séolane remains opaque to the observer, without any distance from the action.

“In the field, […] collection and analysis merge as the targeted observations […] are the result of an analysis in management, that is to say an interpretation that emerges” (transl., Paillé and Mucchielli, 2012: 87). It is therefore necessary to establish recursive loops between practical reflection and theoretical reflection in order to satisfy the methodological requirements of qualitative analysis: finding a halfway point between participation and distancing, depending on the conditions of the field and the research objectives (Moussaoui, 2012).

By connecting internal and external analysis with all the actors of scientific tourism, we may understand the viewpoint of decision-makers who do not practice the scientific tourism activities of the Séolane: elected officials, residents and scientists. Writing after the event (Geertz, 1996), in the form of a schematic transcription (Paillé and Mucchielli, 2005) that answers the question of the implementation of scientific tourism by the actors of the Séolane, as well as a refined analysis and an integrated argument (ibid.) on the factors that lead participants to become actors in the scientific tourism activities of the site, offer us the possibility of a more global discussion on the activities of the Séolane (ibid.).

Between immersion and distancing, structure and practice, and analysing subject and analysed field, we are entering into “a construction strategy of transactional compromise” (transl., Foucart, 2012: 272). We also have studied and restudied different materials from the main performing actors (Gasparini, 1996) in the development of Barcelonnette’s cultural, sport and tourist heritage, having already carried out two non-commissioned studies such as this present study. Please refer to the annex for the characteristics of these studies. The studies are based on informative documents from the town of Barcelonnette, the Communauté de Communes Vallée de l’Ubaye Serre-Ponçon (CCVUSP), the tourist office, correspondence with elected officials, 15 field observations (e.g. of scientific events) and 18 interviews with 20 actors, the vast majority of which were recorded and lasted 42 minutes on average.
This article will now delve into the first research result, which answers the question of the cooperation initiated by the actors of scientific tourism at the Séolane and details the system that holds these actors together. This question is answered using a systematic qualitative analysis of this collective production.

The Implementation of Scientific Tourism Embodied by the Séolane

The Séolane was born from a collective and public rehabilitation initiative of an urban area of Barcelonnette after the departure of the emblematic military detachment of the city, the closure of the training centre and the cessation of combat in the mountains. This departure marked the Barcelonettes who had integrated since 1948 as alpine hunters, successors of the Snow Regiment of Briançon.

However, this cultural legacy was not the main reason for the change in infrastructure. Now public, “the rehabilitation of the Barcelonnette barracks went through a phase of physical reclamation and a requirement to maintain a certain level of economic and social activity for the population” (personal interview with the mayor of Barcelonnette from 2014 to 2020 [Édile]). We may also add the mayor’s abilities, as during the ceremony of 8 May 2016, after officially having changed the name of the Craplet District to the 11th BCA (Bataillon de Chasseurs Alpins) District with the sub-prefect, they linked the memory of the place to the image of the revitalised site during their speech by addressing “the former soldiers and the families for whom this past must not be forgotten” in the presence of a young Barcelonnette at the inauguration of the commemorative plaque (photo 1).

Photo 1: Inauguration of the commemorative plaque in honour of the 11th Bataillon de Chasseurs Alpins.

Photo: Haute-Provence Info, Françoise Garnier.
It is a strong message addressed to all, between a totem place (Huguet, 2013) and the need for actions. It is figuratively addressed both to young people and to creators or entrepreneurs who wish to set up at the business hotel in the heart of a mountain valley (CCVUSP).

As we showed in 2005, the emergence of regional features for cultural and sports activities is the result of an evolution in the appropriation of city activities by certain performing actors. It gives rise to changes in practices from which the Séolane now benefits. Barcelonnette was fuelled by its history and culture, which met its economic, geographical, political and social constraints (Gamboa Ojeda, 2004; Meyzenq, 1984). With a heritage that includes religious entrepreneurs (Duby, 1985), military fortifications (from Vauban to Maginot) and the exodus of its population to Mexico (Gouy, 1980), Barcelonnette has elements that contribute to its social and economic trajectory.

Barcelonnette was honoured by a French prime-time programme, Apostrophe (1983), when a documentary novel from Dugrand and Vallaeyes (1983) was launched about the peddlers crossing the Atlantic and landing in Veracruz, where they built a formidable commercial power with department stores, textile factories, etc. This “building spirit” (transl., Coulaty, 2018) materialises when “tradition therefore becomes an active component of modernisation” (Badie, 2010).

However, well before this broadcast bringing “a large number of national journalists who were going to begin to give Barcelonnette its image” (Édile), as early as 1878, under the impetus of the Musée de la Vallée, then of the Musées de la Vallée network and Sabença de la Valéia association (Connaissance de la Vallée (Sabença)), this dynamic had the role, on the one hand, of recovering and conserving knowledge about the heritage of Barcelonnette and, on the other hand, of divulging and explaining it with the aim of rendering it accessible to possible reinterpretation. In this context, it is specifically the personal initiatives of the mayor that have contributed to the success of the Séolane project. As a political project, a management procedure led to its planning.

I discovered letters from an ancestor who had gone to Mexico in the dust in the attic of the family home. In June 1982, for the members of the association [la Sabença], in the form of handouts, I published the story of [my grandfather] in Mexico. This text, supplemented by two other documents, would later give rise to the first edition of "Les barcelonnettes au Mexique" [1992], a printed work that is currently in its 4th edition and is the best-seller of the Sabença created in the spring of 1980. In those years, I was deputy mayor. I was able to participate in the development of this "Mexican" image thanks to the tourist office, where we had just taken over the statutes. I had all the power to create the Musée de la Vallée in Barcelonnette where - by definition, from the very beginning of the study - I wanted the main room to be dedicated to telling the story of this human adventure (...). I thought that at the time, as president of the Sabença [(from 1983 to 2007)] which was developing, and as a deputy with the full confidence of the mayor and the town council, I had the chance to work for my country, that’s all! I can even tell you that I had the mayor sign circulars asking the local cafés to promote tequila or tequila-based cocktails (which were not very common in France at the time) in order to boost our image!!! (...). I am attaching a text that I read at a university conference in Puebla [(Mexico)] in November 2004, a conference that [the Director] of the Museum may have told you about” (excerpt from an epistolary exchange with the Édile).
Today, this heritage work is being pursued by means of scientific census and publication (Bourgeat and Bras, 2021). Without being an alternative to skiing (Édile), and as a complement to holiday and passing tourism (Schoeny and Sageon, op. cit.), the Sabença publishes and organises meetings and trips on the archaeological, architectural, historical and vernacular heritage of the Ubaye valley (schools, forts, Mexican villas classified by UNESCO, etc.).

Thus, following in the footsteps of the Société scientifique et littéraire des Basses-Alpes (founded in 1878 and declared open to the public in 1981) and the Sabença (the “moral, technical and financial relay [for] numerous initiatives [. . .] of research on Ubaye”), and with some elected officials, the mayor founded the Séolane, thus benefiting in particular from the support of the researchers who came to Barcelonnette for their research during the “Causeries en montagne” (as with Georges Duby) and the “Journées du Livre de Barcelonnette” (as with Hervé Gumuchian), to which the researchers were invited during the mayor’s presidency of the Sabença or which they even visited on holiday.

The mayor’s affinity for science and friendships with authoritative academics have enabled her to respond favourably to their requests for temporary and permanent accommodations: “some have settled permanently in Barcelonnette and others have chosen to live there when they retire” (Édile). This rise in quality of Barcelonnette has therefore sponsored the transformation of this military site into a more sophisticated tool for the sciences—and its design can now be modelled (figure 1).

Figure 1: Qualitative system of conceptualisation factors for the Séolane.

This schematic transcription illustrates a model that assembles three zones of protension (curves) concerning the meaning (in italics) given to the rules of exchange in the face of the issues (underlined) for the Séolane actors. It thus reveals the emerging values of the scientific tourism project, which are all from latent organisers (word cloud).

It is now a matter of refining the analysis and integrating arguments on the site’s main fields of action so that we may understand how the structure of these fields allows tourists to become actors.
The Séolane, a University Centre Between Social Experimentation and Scientific Mediation

The revitalisation of this military establishment has been established as a space favouring the development of a “scientific culture in Barcelonnette, access to science and support for research, the main objective of which is to make it available to the scientific community” (development officer of the Séolane [CCS]). Moving from the project to an instrument of development and urban planning for Barcelonnette, the Séolane can be considered as an experiment in living together (Dumont, 2014, 2015) aimed at a quest for meaning, a creative development and the exploration of the norms and limits that the sciences would give to tourists (Rufat, 2019).

The Séolane is therefore presented as “an establishment specialising in the reception of scientists, researchers and professionals” (barcelonnette.com). The centre has an accommodation capacity of 69 people, 31 rooms and 85 catering locations. It can receive up to 100 people in a conference room and has four other meeting rooms with two equipped laboratories, as well as a lounge-bar area for displayed presentations. In 2019, the venue recorded 6,102 overnight stays (a 24% occupancy rate), of which 4,941 were for its “target audience: with a professional focus” and 1,161 were for other “outside the professional field [activities], such as sport or adapted tourism” (activity report, 2019). This represents an increase over three years of its core target from 54% to 81% (ibid.). In the absence of financial data, it is noted that most of the centre’s activity is organised between daily events and receptions, given its low attractiveness in terms of accommodation for its main target audience, due mainly to its isolation in the mountains compared to other easily accessible establishments near large urban (ibid.) or university centres.

The Séolane was granted two distinctive labels. The first label, Esprit Parc National, is a brand of the Mercantour Park (to which the membership of Barcelonnette in 2018 was initiated in 2013 after having set itself the objective of achieving energy autonomy in 2040). Its aim is to promote the products and services of actors who are committed to the preservation and promotion of the territory through its beneficiaries, by offering them outings or stays to discover the cultural or natural heritage (mercantour-parcnational.fr). The other label, Mercantour Ecotourism, is awarded by an association which, since 2012, has brought together tourist operators wishing to organise an eco-tourism sector around the Mercantour Park by means of responsible environmental management of mountain life: promotion of local products, light multimodal travel or stays based on local activities (sheepfolds, refuges, etc.). This second label distinguishes the steps taken towards sustainable tourism that contribute to a more balanced development of the mountains.

In order to operate the Séolane, an association of the same name was created in 2011 with “the aim of welcoming scientists specialising in the study of natural risks and biodiversity” (associative status) and “motivated by the complex geographical and geological situation of Barcelonnette” (CCS). The main idea is to enable scientists to carry out long-term research work and thus ensure their accommodation. During the rehabilitation of the barracks buildings, the main actors of the valley (the city, CCVUSP, school district, associations and some users) and scientists passing through or on holiday came to the conclusion that this new building should also allow exchanges of
the knowledge produced on this reception site while sharing in moments of professional and leisure activities during scientific and tourist stays.

The centre’s activities of accommodation, research support and communication for a large public (“general public” [CCSI]) has generated fruitful interactions between actors (for example, in the form of naturalist stays). In this concentrated and dense space, proximity in terms of language (scientific vocabulary), materials (hotels and exhibitions, etc.) and ideals (scientific cultures) have led to significant connections. They are characterised by their immediacy. Made in real time, these connections oblige and require everyone to be in action: to communicate, to question, to practice, etc. This process of establishing relationships between individuals and elements of communication (e.g. in the form of meeting with a researcher), contributes to the development of the Séolane’s activities. By shedding light on the scientific knowledge produced in Barcelonnette, the Séolane’s activities acquire legitimacy while offering added value to the region. These activities have enabled the Séolane to develop scientific mediation practices, mainly for tourists, associates from the town, universities, the Mercantour National Park, the Côte d’Azur Observatory and the Barcelonnette school district. It is therefore necessary to understand these local mechanisms (Desbiens, 2010) of scientific mediation, which can be qualified as mountain mediation (linked to mountain life).

Scientific mediation, defined by a mix of representations between “institutional practice, militant gesture and scientific concept” (transl., Jeanneret and Rondot, 2013), is organised by the Séolane in the form of tourist operations in an infrastructure intended mainly for the scientific community, with amateurs and enthusiasts who wish to access scientific knowledge on their holiday location being subsidiary. This form of accessibility to regional knowledge is intended to be educational and seeks to bring knowledge and know-how within the reach of a non-scientific public by offering them co-constructed scientific knowledge. This transmission process determines the Séolane model, which is mainly carried out through cultural and scientific activities (conferences, meetings, etc.).

This type of scientific mediation is applied and dynamic and based on feasible daily activities such as walking. In response to local problems, it is founded on the intervention of researchers, teacher-researchers, engineers, technicians and scientific mediators. Using a corpus of data (e.g. maps, images) and study areas, “the Séolane proposes small experiments” (CCSI) that aim to ensure that participating tourists adopt a researcher’s approach to carrying the activities out (ibid.).

The actors of the Séolane—employees and volunteers, researchers and engineers, users passing through or on holiday—deal with the organisational logic generated by the Séolane. The events and the development of scientific expertise are less preconceived than performed. Some activities complement the work of researchers by combining tourist leisure activities with a mountain that has yet to be understood. These forms of exchange within the Séolane are therefore “aimed at making [the researchers’] activity understandable, but also at improving the conditions for receiving theories” (transl., Hacking, 2005: 69). In a way, these processes favour sociocultural actions (tourism, education and training) by configuring them for activities and around knowledge on the biodiversity of the Barcelonnette valley. These scientific mediations are then arranged in such a way that the possible explanations of the results obtained by these
cultural experiences are greatly reduced compared to the many parameters that could be invoked in a normal situation (Jones et al., 2000).

Among these scientific mediations, we mainly identify these actions:

- Conservation of built heritage: geo-referencing of the Napoleonic cadastre, museography and museology of the villas in Ubaye, etc.
- Alpine exploration of the Southern Alps: the Maritime-Mercantour cross-border atlas, etc.
- Surveys: Les oiseaux du jardin (Birds in the Garden), Les Atlas de la Biodiversité Communale (Atlas on Communal Biodiversity), etc.
- Sharing: CLIMALPsud days, etc.
- Participation: installation of an astrological mirror, La lunette du Père Josset, in the framework of the Alpes Azur Mercantour International Dark Sky Reserve by amateurs, etc.
- Transmission: the Geoscience Cafés (ex. predicting an earthquake), etc.

In these different cases, part of the method consists of having tourists observe an independent variable, such as the bearded vulture during a hike. For these scientific mediations, technological means such as a global positioning system (GPS) allow researchers to input variables depending on the observation made by the tourists (ex. altitude, geographical coordinates). Researchers can then correlate this data with their research purpose, be it numbers, breeding pairs, etc., and their research question (reconnection of fragmented populations, etc.). Their results provide answers to certain anthropisation phenomena of the region, such as the conservation of the species and protection perimeters. Tourists themselves are, to a certain extent, actors in this scientific activity (data collection). This is scientific tourism through direct participation in certain research activities. Other experiments will also target tourist behaviour in the Barcelonnette valley by making them aware of the fragility of ecological balances and asking them to contribute to the preservation of the natural (by not feeding the birds) and cultural (by referencing and transmitting dialects) heritage of the mountain. All these scientific mediations link a methodological element of research with a tourist activity (e.g. data collection), justifying the search for meaning by appropriation for tourists and by implication for scientific mediators.

These scientific mediations, “which integrate tourists into stages of research, are conducted essentially by the Séolane researchers with the aim of anchoring science in tourist practices [. . .] and are organised around active scientific research mobilising tourist activities” (CCS). In other words, “it is a question of envisaging research in which bodily activity such as walking and observation are the gateways” (ibid.). These mediations then give rise to experiments for the physical, natural and earth sciences, for tourists as well as for researchers. More numerous during the summer in Barcelonnette—skiing (in the generic sense) remaining the dominant activity—these scientific mediations take on an experimental character: they offer new possibilities of experiencing mountain life through certain aspects that are complementary to the social representations or stereotypes of the lifestyle of its inhabitants.

In this context, recreation takes on collaborative forms between researchers and Séolane tourists. Through “the attention paid to local practices, to proximity exchanges, to creativity, to nature, to sensitive bodily experiences, to the elaboration of atmospheres [and to] local staging” (transl., Falaix and Corneloup, 2017: 88) of the Séolane, scientists and tourists spend time with each other, exchange and agree, knowing that for the latter “the cause of science is heard” (CCS). In an environment such as that of the mountain regions, where the issue of ecological transition (Geels,
is becoming increasingly important due to global warming, this unique form of scientific cohabitation and exchange through recreation finds in these experience-based applications strategies on an individual (e.g. leisure activities) and societal (e.g. use of science) scale for creating new forms of regional development.

Conclusion

The recreational values, derived from the emblematic cultural forms of the mountain and applied in the scientific activities of Séolane are, together with the physical activity necessary to carry them out, part of the essential resources needed for their success. These means of activation are connected with notions of commitment (physical and psychological), elements of heritage (architectural and natural) and a certain approach to the notion of legacy (cultural). This conception of the scientific service of the Séolane is co-constructed through the interrelations found in a dense space and nourished by study areas made available to researchers. For scientists, both present for their research activities and on holiday, this cultural development in the form of scientific mediation is conducive to interactions not only between them, but also with other research structures (Mediterranean Institute of Biodiversity and Ecology). These interactions thus contribute to the common good. On the hologrammatic principle of Morin (2014), we can see a multiscalar effect generating a regional laboratory on the scale of the Séolane, Barcelonnette, the Ubaye valley and the southern Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region, but also at the intersections between them, where environmental and socio-economic issues arise simultaneously at different levels (Compagnon, 2015).

Thus, tourism of scientific culture, through social experimentation and scientific mediation, provides some ecological and socio-economic leads for the region. They are sources of diversification for local tourism based on market principles wherein the development of the region can generally only come about through growth, and therefore through diversified consumption of tourist practices. This is the paradox of mountain tourism which, seeking ways of transition after experiencing the period of the white gold, is still thinking with the same principles of “local actors do not seem to have learned enough lessons” (Director of the tourist office of Barcelonnette). Under financial and time constraints, as well as other effects aimed at economic profit, mountain tourism remains to be redefined.

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APPENDIXES

Benchmarks of the different types of data collection:

a) Document research
Data collection from communication and official documents of the main actors involved in the development of cultural, sport and tourist heritage in the Ubaye valley in order to identify and locate information resources:

- Website of Barcelonnette, its tourist office, UBAYE TOURISME (grouping together the three other tourist offices in the valley: Pra Loup, Le Sauze and Jausiers), the Mercantour National Park, the Sabença and the Séolane, as well as the Facebook pages Mairie de Barcelonnette (2,248 subscribers), UBAYE INFO (3,562 members) and the Mayor of Barcelonnette between 2014 and 2020 (993 friends), still active.

- Official newsletters issued by the town from 2008 to 2021 (40 in total), the CCVU, followed by the CCVUSP, until August 2019 (20) and Status and Activity Reports from 2015 to 2019 of the Séolane (5), plus others for tourism (e.g. Ubaye summer and Ubaye winter practical guides).

- Regular correspondence by e-mail with the President of the Sabença and Mayor of Barcelonnette from July 2005 to June 2021.

b) Field observation (bearded vulture programme), thematic hikes (4), Séolane scientific meeting (astronomy [2]) and scientific outings (mountain talks [7] and Barcelonnette book days [1]).

c) Interviews

18 interviews ranging from 18 minutes to one hour and ten minutes (a total of 13 hours and 13 minutes) of 20 actors were carried out in the field from July 2005 to August 2021 for the needs of three studies: the first was a communication in a colloquium in 2005 (12 interviews) and the two others are in the course of editorial management in 2022 including this one (6 interviews). All three are interested in the devices and cultural and tourist activities in Barcelonnette and in its valley. The corpus, previous to those collected for this research (8 interviews) were recoded then analysed for this study (except those of the President of the Municipal Office of Sports, the Artistic Director of the Enfants du Jazz and the Fêtes Latino-Mexicaines, the Director of the ski school and the Supervisor of the Aerodrome of Saint Pons-Barcelonnette).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Study (year)</th>
<th>Culture and sport (2005)</th>
<th>Recreational transition (2021)</th>
<th>Scientific tourism (2022)</th>
<th>Persons interviewed (number of interviews if &gt;1)</th>
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<td>Head and two agents of the Culture and Heritage Department at the Communauté de Communes Vallée de l’Ubaye (together at the request of the head of the department; focus group type interview)</td>
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<td>Director of the Ubaye Ski Authority at the CCVUSP</td>
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<td>Mayor of Barcelonnette from 2014 to 2020 (2)</td>
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<td>Director General of Services of the town</td>
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NOTES

1. This conception of communication is based on three widely accepted systematic demonstrations:

1) Communication made by a social actor is necessarily meaningful for them. It is part of a system of communications that participates in the emergence of the meaning of expressions produced by the actors in their context.

2) Meaning is always born of a relationship, and the essential elements of this relationship are naturally part of the contexts in which the communication takes place.

3) The communication segments that are considered in the whole system of communications serve to construct the meaning of the communication that is taking place or to set up contextual elements.

All these loops are recursive and work in both directions, between production and meaning.
environment. In order to answer the question of the cultural, psychological and social function of this research, this article presents a constructivist and systemic epistemological approach to social representations that are based on the human experience of participating in tourism and the research missions at the centre. Through documenting this scientific activity by means of qualitative analysis, this paper posits that the Séolane’s scientific tourism opens up a line of questioning on responsible mountain tourism that has not yet been researched within the framework of a transition to recreational use.

Le Séolane est un pôle universitaire qui accueille touristes et chercheurs, dont certains en vacances. Situé à Barcelonnette, ville française des Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, ce système touristique original de mise en culture scientifique a conduit les acteurs du pôle à produire une expérimentation sociale et des médiations scientifiques en lien très étroit avec leur environnement professionnel. Pour répondre à la question de leurs fonctionnements culturel, psychique ou social, cet article s'appuie sur une approche épistémologique constructiviste et systémique des représentations sociales modélisées au travers de l'expérience humaine participant à des actions touristiques et des missions de recherche au pôle. Documentant cette activité montagnarde par l’analyse qualitative, ce tourisme scientifique ouvre à un questionnement sociopolitique portant sur un tourisme montagnard responsable qui reste à concevoir, dans le cadre d’une transition récréative.

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Mots-clés: tourisme scientifique, Séolane, analyse qualitative, expérimentation, médiation scientifique
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