Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

100-3 | 2012

L'émergence des marchés du sport et du loisir dans l'arc alpin

Combination of geographical and socio-economic proximities

The “mountain and nature sports tourism” commodity chain in the Rhône-Alpes region

Eric Boutroy, Philippe Bourdeau, Pascal Mao et Nicolas Senil

Édition électronique

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/1920>

DOI : 10.4000/rga.1920

ISSN : 1760-7426

Cet article est une traduction de :

Combinaison de proximités géographiques et socio-économiques - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/1890> [fr]

Éditeur :

Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine, UGA Éditions/Université Grenoble Alpes

Référence électronique

Eric Boutroy, Philippe Bourdeau, Pascal Mao et Nicolas Senil, « Combination of geographical and socio-economic proximities », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [En ligne], 100-3 | 2012, mis en ligne le 08 mars 2013, consulté le 08 décembre 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/1920> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.1920>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 8 décembre 2022.

Creative Commons - Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Combination of geographical and socio-economic proximities

The “mountain and nature sports tourism” commodity chain in the Rhône-Alpes region

Eric Boutroy, Philippe Bourdeau, Pascal Mao et Nicolas Senil

- 1 The role of space in economic dynamics was taken into consideration at a relatively late stage. In spite of a few pioneer works examining the heterogeneous localisation of individuals, possessions and phenomena (from Marshall to Von Thunen), it was not until the 1980s that space ceased to be considered solely as a neutral support for economic activity and exchange, but was rather seen as having an active role in development processes. Comprehended as a social construct, territory appears to be connected with various proximities, potential creators of comparative advantage.
- 2 In taking a close interest in a number of exceptional cases of economic or technological innovation hubs, research has revealed, within these productive complexes, both the existence of intense relationships between the various firms and close local system ties generating common cultures and shared know-how. The various works have given rise to various conceptualisations, – Industrial District (Beccatini, 1989), Local Production Systems (Courlet, Pecqueur, 1991, Gilly, Grossetti, 1993, Courlet, 1994), Innovative Milieu (Maillat, Quévit, Senn, 1993, Camagni, Maillat, Matteaccioli, 2004), Cluster (Porter, 2000) – which, over and beyond their nuances, share a certain number of fundamentals, including systemic apprehension of productive firm conglomeration, relatively tight co-localisation generating positive externalities, and consideration of cooperative relations.
- 3 Conceived as a sociocultural construction resulting from the localised interactions of actors in the system, territory is placed at the heart of the functioning of the organisational modes of these productive forms. It thus offers a dialectic between geographical proximity and organisational proximity (Pecqueur, Zimmerman, 2004), which “fosters the existence and sustainability of social relations on the basis of which this cooperation may develop” (Grossetti, 2004). From this perspective, “territory, considered as a social system and not merely a spatial one, is obviously a favoured

supplier of these relational resources” (Veltz, 2002). Recognition of this is visible in the renewal of public town and country planning policies that today encourage localised grouping of a given sector’s economic and research activities: local production systems, competitive hubs, clustering, rural centres of excellence, regional innovation centres etc.

- 4 Although it will be necessary to support this observation, the Rhône-Alpes region is today acknowledged as featuring an exceptional concentration of sports organisations and as being the nationwide leader in the sub-sector of nature and mountain sports, as much in terms of its sports spaces, practice sites and itineraries, professional support, training and research skills, as of industry and specialised distribution, mass media etc. It may therefore be considered surprising that the concepts of proximity be put to the test here without yielding any conclusive results. The phenomenon would thus not appear to fall within the classic paradigms for analysing the territorialised interrelationships between actors in the fields of industry, research and training. On the academic side, it has not been possible, for example, to validate the hypothesis concerning the existence of an “innovative milieu” in the sporting goods industry in Rhône-Alpes (Aydalot, 1986; Hillairet et Richard, 2004 et 2005). On the more operational side, the delay in attempts at top-down structuring and management must be noted: negative assessment of the Sporaltec sport innovation cluster certified in 2005 (BCG and CMI, 2008), and the dispersion and nebulousness of the institutionalised forms of organised groupings (Sporaltec, *Industrie de la neige* and *Industries de la Montagne* clusters, *Sport et Loisirs Outdoor* cluster project, *Réseau Montagne* of Savoie’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Outdoor Sport Valley* business cluster, etc).
- 5 While strict application of regional science models does not appear to be conclusive in this particular case, the wish is to show that there exists, nevertheless, strong interaction between actors who are not only geographically, but also culturally close. Rather than seeking to verify (or not) the existence of the previously mentioned exemplary systemic forms, the more modest aim of this article is to endeavour to highlight both the existence and certain characteristics (geographical, relational) of a “mountain and nature sports tourism” commodity chain at the Rhône-Alpes level.
- 6 Among the various meanings of commodity chain (Sekkat, 1987), a fairly wide definition shall be adopted: a set of activities articulated (and sometimes integrated) vertically (upstream-downstream relationship), as well as horizontally (as a support or in complementarity), combining to enable final consumption of nature sports. It will therefore be necessary to take into account several permanently interacting subsystems: the classic value chain of production/distribution of sporting goods, that of production and valorisation of sports sites and spaces (design/manufacturing/promotion/management) which enable or develop use of the aforementioned goods, and all support functions (training/research/support). The advantage of the commodity chain notion is that it gives greater flexibility to the organisational and productive paradigm. Rather than being limited to certain types of organisation (following the example of the industry-research-training triptych of the innovative milieu), it makes it possible to take into consideration a great number of actors whose activities are interlinked (media and publishers, event organisers, clubs and sports movement) in order to produce spaces, goods, services and information relating to singular sports consumption. The systemic dimension is less marked and makes it possible to describe productive configurations: flexible articulations, network,

recombination by leaving open the coordination methods taken into account (market, contracts, rules, as well as non-formalised cooperation, donations etc).

- 7 On the basis of the results of a study cross-cutting geoeconomic and geocultural approaches (Bourdeau *et al.*, 2007),¹ this article will first show how the Rhône-Alpes region sustains a leading “mountain and nature sports tourism” commodity chain, by detailing its structural and territorial features, including broadened spatial scale, plurality of actors and interrelated functions. On the basis of a comprehensive approach founded on case analysis, an attempt will be made to show the existence of localised cooperation configurations based on the combination of several forms of proximity, which give them pertinence. Endeavours will likewise be made to show the necessity of taking into account the territorial and cultural substratum in order to understand functional relationships.

Structural and functional diagnosis of a “mountain and nature sports tourism” commodity chain in Rhône-Alpes

- 8 Nature and mountain sports tourism is one of the structuring elements of the Rhône-Alpes territory. Territory issues in their broadest sense (natural spaces, activities, planning, infrastructure, development, space use management, environmental and security management, governance, actors, representations and identities, etc.) become all the more acute in that territory constitutes the fundamental resource of attractiveness and recreational activity for both local leisure practices and tourism.
- 9 The Rhône-Alpes region constitutes a “flagship” region that is systematically positioned at the forefront of national supply in terms of nature sports activity spaces and sites for most mountain practices, from both a quantitative point of view and that of site quality.²

Table 1. Summer mountain and nature sports activity spaces

Activities	Position of the Rhône-Alpes region nationally	Number of sites where activity is practised in the Rhône-Alpes region	% share of sites in Rhône-Alpes compared with national supply
Rock climbing	1st	492	25 %
Via ferrata	1st	34	60 %
Canyoning	2nd	168	33 %
Alpinism	1st	260	-
Speleology	1st	541	30 %

- 10 Such wealth constitutes a factor of attractiveness for practising inhabitants³, sports tourism professionals (guides and instructors, services...) and, through synergy, for the

commodity chain. In classic models, analysis focuses on actors who appear to be the most directly involved in technical innovation, i.e. distribution industry and training-research services. Here, the choice has been made to widen the focus in order to encompass the economic and sports commodity chain in an extensive manner, by including industrialists and manufacturers, training centres, recreational space designers, consulting, expertise and engineering firms, wholesalers and retailers, publishers and press groups, trade unions and professional organisations, and specialised agencies. In 2006, this territorial cultural and productive fabric incorporated, *de facto* in Rhône-Alpes, over 370 socio-economic operators with national, not to say international visibility, and as diverse as they were complementary in the sector of leisure and mountain and nature sports tourism (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Functional and relational field of the "tourism and nature and mountain recreational sports" commodity chain in Rhône-Alpes

- 11 These actors are established throughout the region's territory with strong polarities around the cities and suburbs of Grenoble, Chambéry, Lyon, Annecy and, to a lesser extent, Chamonix. Over and beyond the well-known ski sector (Rossignol, Salomon etc.), reference may also be made to Eider in the Ain department, Lafuma in the Drôme, Francital and Rivory-Joanny in the Loire, Petzl, Entreprises and Béal in Isère, Frendo in Savoie, Millet, Simond, Quechua and Wedzee in Haute-Savoie, to name but a few. In a similar vein, the concentration in Rhône-Alpes of the main non-specialised and specialised mountain journals, from *Alpes Magazine* (Chambéry) to *L'Alpe* (Grenoble), and from *Vertical* to *Montagnes Magazine* should also be noted, as should that of most of the publishers positioned in the mountain niche (Arthaud, Glénat, Guérin, Alzieu, Editions de Belledonne, Ex Libris). Similarly, Rhône-Alpes is nationally the main residential and professional concentration of mountain sports professions, i.e. roughly 20,000

professionals, and thus logically the place for all their professional associations – in Chambéry, Montmélian and Meylan.

- 12 Finally, the national and international reputation of the specialised training and research centres should be mentioned, with ENSA/ENSM in Chamonix, ANENA, CEMAGREF and *Centre d'Études de la Neige* in Grenoble, not forgetting the university complexes of Chambéry (CISM, *Institut de la Montagne*) and Grenoble (*Institut de Géographie Alpine* with its centre in Ardèche, CERMOSEM, UFR STAPS, CERAT).

Map 1. Local distribution of economic actors per activity type in Rhône-Alpes in 2006

- 13 According to Map 1, it would appear that by being directly linked to mountain sports, the phenomena concerning tourist visits, local sports practice and industrial, professional, cultural and scientific know-how observed at regional level (Augustin, 2002), constitute a global socio-territorial supply that may be described as “an international stronghold of mountain sports” at European level. Such representation is both classic (“Chamonix, world capital of Alpinism”, “La Tarentaise, world capital of Alpine skiing”, etc.) and under-valorised from the perspective of the globality of the phenomena, which appears to constitute the identity of the Rhône-Alpes region. This phenomenon seems all the more significant since the geography of the nature sports commodity chain is organised as much according to the proximity of recreational sport spaces as of urban centralities (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Diagram schematising the spatial organisation of the nature and mountain sports commodity chain in the Rhône-Alpes region in 2006

A configuration of twofold geographical and organised proximity

- 14 As considered here, the "Rhône-Alpes nature and mountain sports" commodity chain distinguishes itself by a great diversity of activity types, scope for intervention and actors' competence, which all combine to produce or maintain a supply of sports and leisure activities and facilities. This observation reinforces the idea concerning the existence of a commodity chain, by suggesting a possible articulation or complementarity between activity sectors represented at regional level with centres organised around the metropolises of Rhône-Alpes. The hypothesis concerning the existence of a "territorial effect", based on proximities between recreational spaces, living spaces perceived as catchment areas producing followers, and production areas associated with consumer spaces may thus be put forward. Yet, over and beyond different forms of concentration, both horizontal and vertical, do the many economic agents observed benefit from positive effects linked to the effects of proximity?
- 15 Using the works of the *French School of Proximity* (Torre, 2008) as a base, it is possible to clarify the different forms of proximity (Bouba Olga and Grossetti, 2008). It has therefore been agreed to distinguish spatial proximity, comprehended in terms of localisation and physical distance⁴, and organised proximity, comprehended in terms of socio-economic contiguity⁵. The latter covers two forms: coordination proximity, pragmatically linked to systems (network, mediation) that structure or stimulate concrete interactions; resource proximity, linked to the sharing of material frameworks of reference (assets, social status, etc.) or of cognitive ones (knowledge, culture, norms, etc.), similar or compatible, which facilitate exchange and coordination. Mobilised in this way, these notions may help shed light on both co-

localisation and interaction between the actors of the Rhône-Alpes sports commodity chain.

Composite geographical proximity

- 16 Geographical proximity, which may be recognised by the co-localisation of those actors potentially in favour of liaison, should not mask the connection between a manufacturer and emblematic sites. “Annecy represents a very interesting crossroads. To start with, it is 60 kms from Grenoble, near Lyon, but likewise not far from the international side: Switzerland, Italy... It is convenient. Annecy also ‘condenses’ all mountains: winter and summer, high mountains, mid-altitude mountains and the low valley, performance, fun and leisure. Annecy is a concentrate of outdoor activities. The proof is that everyone can find what they’re looking for at Salomon. And most of all, we’re right next door to super symbolic places. I’m thinking, for instance, of the Mont Blanc and Chamonix. There’s history all around us. We can relate to all that. This is where we feel good. This is where we are creative. This is where we are visible” (J.Y. Couput, Salomon).
- 17 In this respect, there exists a proximity effect between recreational spaces (where the activities take place), practising sportspeople⁶ and production spaces for goods and services, as may be seen by the presence of Petzl (Crolles), Lafuma (Anneyron), Expé (Auberives-en-Royans) or more recently Raidlight (Saint-Pierre-de-Chartreuse). M. Béal, CEO of the world’s leading rope manufacturing company (for leisure activities and safety professionals) explains the decision to keep his company in Vienne (Isère) in terms of local externalities, including exchange facilitation, iteration and expertise. “After all, we are in an environment close to the mountains. Above all, we have a prime location here, since we’re not far from Chamonix, only two hours away. And it’s good we’re not too far from Chamonix because we’re always working with people over there, ENSA for instance. Also, the tests for our ropes are done in Grenoble – the main testing lab is APAVE, in a word one of the three labs worldwide doing these tests, in Fontaine to be more precise. It’s much more convenient to be close to them. This proximity, we could manage without it, but it is better this way: if there’s a problem with a test, a difference in interpretation of the norm or result, we’re there in an hour and can see how they’re doing it. We solve the problem straightaway. And the road to the south goes through here, that’s for sure, with all the major national climbing areas: Buoux, Cimaï, Calanques, Sainte Victoire. So, we have a particularly good location on the road of technical advisors and practisers.⁷ The place is an additional asset, even if it isn’t decisive” (M. Béal, Béal).
- 18 As an illustration of the process, the case of Chamonix is exemplary. On account of the strong identity of the place and its international reputation in mountain sports, many firms have been encouraged to set up there, wishing to link the image of the Mont Blanc to their production and, at the same time, take advantage of other actors and practising areas conveniently located nearby. By way of example, it is possible to mention, inter alia, equipment manufacturers Simond, Charlet-Moser and Grivel, the publishing company Guérin, ENSA for training and expertise, and a great number of wholesalers and specialised agencies, etc. The Quechua brand (Oxylane Group), whose head office for conception, design and market is located in Domancy (with the functional and symbolic proximity of Saint-Gervais Mont Blanc), has undergone

sprawling development in the Pays du Mont-Blanc (Chedde, Fayet, Passy, Magland), with the aim of forming a “vertical production chain” going from test design to field tests, via production, promotion and marketing. A Quechua showcase store was even opened in Chamonix in February 2012, representing a symbolic connection at the foot of the Mont Blanc. The recent creation of a *Mountain Lab*⁸ in Chamonix, as a technoscientific testing platform under real conditions for the outdoor industry, and intending to create a “Tested at the Mont Blanc” label, testifies to this territorial effect, as well as illustrating how proximity is linked to coordination or resource systems.

Formal and informal organised proximity

- 19 It is a fact that there exists strong interaction between geographical groupings and organised proximity in Rhône-Alpes, providing a clear illustration of how “the spatial proximity of organisations impacts the spatial proximity of individuals, in turn impacting individual relational proximity, which encourages groupings between organisations, providing they are complementary” (Bouba-Olga, Grossetti, 2009).
- 20 *Coordination* proximity is the first identifiable form, in particular in the gradual “embedding of relationships into locally constituted social or individual networks” (Bouba Olga *et al.*, 2009). These personal relationship chains were given great importance in the accounts received during the study, with real evidence that “at least partially non-commercial relations exist between the organisations of these systems, resulting, among other things, in the sharing, diffusion or mutual construction of technical and economic knowledge” (Grossetti, 2004).
- 21 E. Le Lann, Communications Manager at Petzl, described his relations with a brand that would progressively become his employer as lightly formalised exchange that included equipment donations (for high-level athletes) for communication purposes, spontaneous feedback (technical expertise, promotion), durable relations, and recruitment as technical advisor then manager. “The relationship I have today with Petzl [...] has built up gradually, as the years have passed, and for a long time, we didn’t really realise exactly what we had exchanged” (E. Le Lann, Petzl).
- 22 In fact, the activities of this high mountain guide make an emblematic link with a great number of the commodity chain’s clusters, between which direct or non direct relationships are being woven. He was, for example, member of a high-level federation team (FFME), graduated from ENSA (74), was member of a professional syndicate (SNGM, 73), event organiser (*Ice World Cup*) and, as a result, in contact with a large number of firms and authorities, he had a contract as technical advisor with several equipment manufacturers before being recruited by one of them as sponsorship and event manager (Petzl, 38), was a freelance journalist for the specialised press (Glénat, then Nivéales, Grenoble), and made mountain documentaries (Seven Doc, Grenoble), while continuing to work as an independent guide (due to an explicit desire to maintain a direct link with the reference markets). Based on durable and recurring relations, this network represented, when activated, what Torre (2010) referred to as a great “potential source of interaction or mutual actions”⁹.
- 23 It was indeed on the basis of slightly formalised personal relationships and ways that partnerships were initiated between a professional trade union and industrialists, with the aim of progressively disembedding the personal dimension. “It happened in a rather makeshift way at the beginning. One of us knows such-and-such a company well,

and from it, we could receive a small amount of support. The first definite collaboration, collectively bargained, was with Béal, who had already given us, 10-12 years earlier, equipment donations for our retraining [refresher training for guides carried out by the Syndicat national des guides de montagne (SNGM) (French National Union for Mountain Guides)]. As for us, we had top-level equipment, and Béal had preferential contact for presenting his products, his new things to intense users, who are also effective 'prescribers'. Retraining courses today are the opportunity for most of the major brands to support us. In exchange, they can take part in the exhibition we organise at each general assembly: that means between 300 and 400 guides, not to mention the media coverage" (B. Pellicier, President of the Syndicat national des guides de montagne).

- 24 Yet, coordination proximity may also be based on mediating institutions likely to bring into contact and facilitate the pairing of actors and resources. The many setups mentioned previously (SPL, clusters, etc) are from this field in a top-down structuring of coordination, supported by a patchwork of institutions (DATAR, MITRA, CIADT / RFIS, CCI, etc). There exist, nevertheless, further forms of mediating coordination (of the bottom-up type) through variable formalisation (institutionalisation, centralised decision-making) of cooperation: spin-off, extended enterprise, institutionalised network. Created in 1989, the company Dianeige has always been rooted in Rhône-Alpes. Based initially in Savoie, after being set up by Louis Guily, it moved, in 1996, to Grenoble where it employs 20 people. Focused on the field of tourism engineering, its activity simultaneously combines planning and development consulting and main contractor services in a sector –skiable area industry– that is relatively wide and covers both the indoors and outdoors. Needless to say, the extent of know-how necessary for project management is immense and has required the setting-up of a “club of experts [main contractor work in ski lift installation, environmental expertise, marketing] that we mobilise whenever necessary. At other times, we meet directly to respond to a call for tender and be stronger”. This extended way of working is indissociable from recognition, duration, trust and reciprocity. “As a result, it is very easy to work like that. We know exactly who we can count on. We also know each other personally. And it is true that at other times, we may, in turn, be called upon by some of our partners when they need are skills. It means we can be reactive and benefit easily from skills we don't have in-house”.
- 25 The “mountain sports tourism” commodity chain is likewise characterised by an important role of the organised proximity of *resources*. Alongside classic social proximity, of the social capital type for example, the “similarity or complementarity of values, “self-evidences”, projects, routines, conventions and referents, etc” (Bouba-Olga, Grossetti, 2008) facilitates the circulation of knowledge and sharing of trust, sometimes tacitly, as indicated explicitly by several actors in their descriptions of the Salon International de Grenoble (SIG) (Grenoble International Exhibition) as an affinity microcosm where, behind the functional dimensions (promotion, competitor observation), it is possible to see the whole commodity chain and “to a certain extent, this sharing of history, of values, [which] encourages collaborative work” (J.-M. Asselin, former editor in chief at Vertical).
- 26 There exists, therefore, a social framework conducive to exchange and cooperation where the feeling of belonging (personal relations between actors) and similitude (shared cultures and resources) are articulated. For Eric Bouchet, manager of a

consulting firm established in Montmélian, “the professional network, the partner network, is a community of opinions, interests and approaches, all at the same time”; “from the moment I find myself with people who have a vision of sustainable tourism in the form of a consensus. Which implies a certain approach, let’s say a certain ethic, as a result everything happens easily. In the network of people I work with, we know how and why we work. It’s essential. [...] Today, I only work with those people I share things with: what we’ve done together, but also what we want to do later on. For a start, it’s a damn sight more agreeable. But, what’s more, we work better, and the orderer and clients are happy”. (E. Bouchet, *Alterespaces*).

- 27 Highlighting the role of these shared values and referents implies, however, considering resource proximity in a more segmented manner (for example in terms of sub-commodity chains); in the case of professional cultures linked, for example, to activity sectors (industry, distribution, service provision, etc) and, more especially, sports cultures linked to activity families, as, for example, between vertical sports and white water sports.

Conclusion

- 28 As neither the solitary activity of actors, nor the system of heavily structured interaction observable elsewhere in some exceptional territories, the normal functioning of the Rhône-Alpes “mountain sports tourism” commodity chain is loosely based on potentiatable proximities around projects, and professional and (geo)cultural competence and identity profiles. In this sense, it constitutes a normal form of geographical and organised proximities, definable as a “potential [which] may be mobilisable or activable by the action and representations of the actors” (Torre, 2010, p. 412). The Rhône-Alpes region is therefore characterised by a wealth of proximities that are variably activated in localised coordination configurations. It is consequently less a question of presupposing determination by localness than making it a construct of actors’ interactions. In fact, it appears illusory to intend to systemise the different forms of interdependence woven together at regional level (Doloreux, Bitard, 2005).
- 29 On the contrary, it may be interesting to narrow the focus for a close-up observation of the actors within the complex modalities of their concrete liaisons. At this level, the consideration of proximities may draw heuristically on the descriptive tools offered by sociotechnical and associationist analysis (Akrich, Callon, Latour, 2006). Rather than postulating the effects (geographical, systemic), it would be more a question of describing, at ground level, the way in which networks are (re)configured and sometimes widened around shared projects. In this perspective, the creation of a product or invention of a new territory (Rech, Mounet, Briot, 2009) appears as the result of progressive and uncertain consolidation associating heterogeneous actors, as well as non-human elements (spaces, sites, equipment, etc). Such a description would, in doing so, be able to measure the influence of the proximities (recurrence relations favourable to network stabilisation) and the importance of material elements and localisations. In this sense, the exploratory work presented in this text is currently being continued¹⁰ in the form of sociotechnical tracking of the innovation trajectories of several sports industrialists in Rhône-Alpes.
- 30 However, from the sociology of translation, the radical recommendations on the neutralisation of the normative mediation of social linkage shall not be taken (Quéré,

1989) in the form of cultural sharing, for example. In fact, on a different level, analysis suggests that all actors recognise a common base which appears necessary for the functioning of the system. Considered from the perspective of sharing, living together and ethics, this fine but essential link refers *in fine* to what may be called cultural territorial intelligence (Bourdeau, Mao et Corneloup, 2008), still greatly undervalued in the plurality of its structural, interactional, organised and informal components. In a tourism and leisure sector that is dealing with climate, energy and economic uncertainty and challenges, this intelligence offers actors who share it greater adaptability, with the responsibility of reinforcing it thanks to more participative, instructive and reflexive mediation and management means directed, at the same time, towards creativity and action.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

AKRICH, M., CALLON, M., LATOUR, B., 2006.– *Sociologie de la traduction*, Paris, Presses de l'École des Mines.

AYDALOT P., 1986.– *Milieus innovateurs en Europe*, GREMI, Paris.

BECCATINI G., 1989.– « Les districts industriels en Italie », in Mariani M. *et al.*, *La Flexibilité en Italie*, MIRE-TEN, Paris, pp. 261-271

BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP ET CM INTERNATIONAL, 2008.– Synthèse du rapport d'évaluation.

BOUBA-OLGA O., GROSSETTI M., 2008.– « Socio-économie de proximité », *Revue d'Économie Régionale et Urbaine*, n°3, pp. 311-328.

BOURDEAU PH. *et al.*, 2007.– La filière touristique-sportive de montagne et de nature en Rhône-Alpes comme « Configuration culturelle et productive régionale », Programme Émergence, Région Rhône-Alpes.

BOURDEAU PH., MAO P., CORNELOUP J., 2008.– « Vers une intelligence territoriale du tourisme », *Montagnes méditerranéennes*, n°23, pp. 39-49.

CAMAGNI R., MAILLAT D., MATTEACCIOLI A., 2004.– *Ressources naturelles et culturelles, milieux et développement local*, éd. EDES, Neuchâtel.

COURLET C., 1994.– « Les systèmes productifs localisés, de quoi parle-t-on ? », in Courlet C., Soulage B., *Industrie, territoires et politiques publiques*, L'Harmattan.

COURLET C., PECQUEUR B., 1991.– « Systèmes locaux d'entreprises et externalités : un essai de typologie », *Revue d'Économie Régionale et Urbaine*, 3/4, pp. 391-406.

DOLOREUX D., BITARD P., 2005.– « Les systèmes régionaux d'innovation : discussion critique », *Géographie, Économie, Société*, 2005-1, vol. 7, pp. 21-36.

DURANTON G., MARTIN PH., MAYER TH., MAYNERIS F., 2008.– *Les Pôles de compétitivité, Que peut-on en attendre ?*, CEPREMAP.

GILLY J.-P., GROSSETTI M., 1993.– « Organisations, individus et territoires. Le cas des systèmes locaux d'innovation », *Revue d'Économie Régionale et Urbaine*, n°3, pp. 449-468.

- GROSSETTI M., 2004.- « Concentration d'entreprises et innovation : Esquisse d'une typologie des systèmes productifs locaux », *Géographie, économie, société*, vol. 6, n°2, pp. 163-177.
- HILLAIRET, D., RICHARD, G., 2004.- « Milieux innovateurs et filières sports-loisirs : essai d'application d'un paradigme technico-industriel du développement économique régional endogène », in Bouchet, P., Sobry, C. (dir.), *Management et marketing du sport : du local au global*, Édition Universitaire du Septentrion.
- HILLAIRET, D., RICHARD, G., 2005.- « Remise en cause du paradigme de milieux innovateurs en Rhône-Alpes. Méthodologie et premiers résultats empiriques dans la filière sports-loisirs », XLI^e colloque de l'ASRDLF, *Villes et territoires face aux défis de la mondialisation*, Dijon, 5-7 septembre.
- HURIOT J.-M., 1994.- in Von Thünen, *Économie et espaces*, Economica.
- MAILLAT D., QUEVIT M., SENN L., 1993.- « Introduction », in Maillat D., Quevit M., Senn L, *Réseaux d'innovation et milieux innovateurs : un pari pour le développement régional*, GREMI-IRER-EDES, Neuchâtel, pp. 3-12.
- PECQUEUR B., ZIMMERMANN J.-B., 2004. *Économie de proximités*, Lavoisier, Paris.
- PORTER M., 2000.- « Location clusters company strategy », in G.I. Clark, M.P. Feldman et M.S. Gertler, *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*, pp. 253-274.
- QUÉRÉ L., 1989.- « Les boîtes noires de Bruno Latour ou le lien social dans la machine », *Réseaux*, 36, p. 95-117.
- RECH Y., MOUNET J.P., BRIOT M., 2009.- « L'innovation dans les sports de nature : l'irruption de nouvelles activités dans une station de sports d'hiver », *Espaces & Sociétés*, 136-137, pp. 157-171.
- SEKKAT K., 1987.- « Filières de production : revue de la littérature et comparaison avec la théorie néo-classique », *L'actualité économique*, 63-1, pp. 118-142.
- TORRE A., 2008.- « Proximité géographique et pragmatique de l'action », *Revue d'Économie Régionale & Urbaine*, 3, pp. 329-332.
- TORRE A., 2010.- « Jalons pour une analyse dynamique des proximités », *Revue d'Économie Régionale & Urbaine*, 3, pp. 409-437.
- VELTZ P., 2002.- *Des lieux et des liens. Politiques du territoire à l'heure de la mondialisation*, Éditions de l'Aube, La Tour d'Aigues.

NOTES

1. This work is based, on the one hand, on the setting-up and processing of several specific databases created between 2002 and 2006 (*Espaces, Sites et Itinéraires (ESI)* (spaces, sites and itineraries), practisers, industrial, cultural and sports operators, sports service providers); and, on the other, on detailed interviews with 18 professionals (leaders, managers) representing the diversity of the organisation types in the commodity chain.
2. Chamonix and the Mont Blanc Massif for alpinism, Savoie (e.g. Gouffre Berger) for speleology, etc.
3. Mountain sports federations are undergoing strong development in terms of both member numbers and penetration rates which are significantly higher than national averages, e.g. 7 per 1000 inhabitants for the *Club Alpin Français (CAF)* (French Alpine Club). Indeed, for the CAF and *Fédération Française de la Montagne et de l'Escalade (FFME)* (French Mountain and Climbing

Federation), between 30 and 40% of French practising federation members are concentrated in the region.

4. The dimension is undoubtedly relative, having to take into account functional distance, travel and transport costs, infrastructures, as well as actors' perceptions.
5. "It concerns the different ways in which actors may be close, beyond geographical relationship, with the term 'organised' referring to the structured nature of human activities and not to the fact of belonging to a particular organisation" (Torre, 2010, p. 415).
6. Taking into account the fact that a large number of the people working in these companies are also themselves practising sportspeople, several leaders also consider localisation as an attractiveness factor for high-performing colleagues.
7. The same CEO, when listing the products for which the direct link with practising sportspeople had been decisive, explained to what extent this proximity was the "slow burning fuel" of innovation: "Contact with climbers, geographical proximity of some of the incomparable places in this evolution, all of that helped to understand the transformation in the relationship with falling, in mountain culture – you don't fall. A completely new way of thinking".
8. Responsible for coordinating expertise and research partners locally (Ifremmont, ENSA, etc.) and institutional partners (Compagnie du Mont-Blanc, *Outdoor Sport Valley*, etc).
9. This proximity is being (re)constructed on a permanent basis: "As Promotions Manager at Petzl, they particularly wanted a guide, and one who had strong experience in events and media. So, I could negotiate continuing to work as a guide alongside my job by taking unpaid holiday, as long as it didn't interfere with any events or important things. I pointed out to them that while doing promotional work and managing everything to do with mountains in the company, if you lose direct contact with the milieu and people's realities, you're like a journalist who never leaves his office. And, in any case, I need to be razor-sharp as I work with the research department" (id.).
10. As part of an ANR (Agence Nationale de la Recherche) (French National Research Agency) contract entitled TIMSA (Territoire, Innovations, Marchés et Sports dans les Alpes) (Territory, Innovations, Markets and Sports in the Alps).

RÉSUMÉS

While it is today acknowledged that the Rhône-Alpes region is characterised by a singular concentration of sport-related firms, specialising particularly in the mountain and nature sports sector, the phenomenon does not appear to fall within classic paradigms for analysing the territorialised interrelationships between actors in the fields of industry, research and training. Such observations do not imply the absence, in Rhône-Alpes, of strong interaction between geographically close actors, but rather prompt a more descriptive and measured approach in addressing the phenomenon. On the basis of the results of a study cross-cutting economic geography and cultural geography, this article will first show how the Rhône-Alpes region sustains a leading "mountain and nature sports tourism" commodity chain, by detailing its structural and territorial features, including broadened spatial scale, plurality of actors and interrelated functions. As part of a comprehensive approach, an attempt will then be made to show the existence of localised cooperation configurations, based on complementarity of geographical and socio-economic proximities. At a time when centralised public cluster policies are coming under question (Duranton *et al.*, 2008), it would seem legitimate to observe the

“spontaneous” dynamics between organisations, in order to gain a more realistic understanding of the link between the attractiveness of the region’s territories and the competitiveness of a commodity chain.

INDEX

Keywords : commodity chain, mountains, geographical proximity, socio-economic proximity, sport, tourism

AUTEURS

ERIC BOUTROY

Centre de Recherche et d’Innovation sur le Sport (CRIS, EA 647), University of Lyon
eric.boutroy@univ-lyon1.fr

PHILIPPE BOURDEAU

Département Territoire (UMR PACTE), University of Grenoble
philippe.bourdeau@ujf-grenoble.fr

PASCAL MAO

Département Territoire (UMR PACTE), University of Grenoble
pmao@ujf-grenoble.fr

NICOLAS SENIL

Département Territoire (UMR PACTE), University of Grenoblenicolas_senil@yahoo.fr