Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

100-3 | 2012

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

Foreword

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/2064>

DOI: 10.4000/rga.2064

ISSN: 1760-7426

This article is a translation of:

Préface - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/1918> [fr]

Publisher:

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

Electronic reference

Anne Dalmasso and Régis Boulat, "Foreword", *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [Online], 100-3 | 2012, Online since 17 October 2013, connection on 08 December 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/2064> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.2064>

This text was automatically generated on 8 December 2022.

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Foreword

Anne Dalmasso and Régis Boulat

- 1 This issue of the *Journal of Alpine Research* focuses on the emergence of the sports and leisure markets in the Alpine arc, bringing together a number of articles resulting from a research programme set up by historians interested in the economy and spatial or territorial relations on the one hand, and historians of sport on the other. The aim of this programme is to examine the relationship between economic activities and sports activities in the alpine region¹. The programme, known as TIMSA (Territoire, innovations, marchés, sports dans les Alpes), is supported by the French national research agency (ANR) and is aimed at achieving a better understanding of the dynamics of capitalism and consumer societies over the past two centuries. More specifically, it studies the way in which the commodification of sports, relationships with territory, and the creation of businesses are linked together in the context of mountain sports and leisure.
- 2 The alpine arc provides an ideal study area for the above programme. Numerous studies conducted over the past twenty years, and which have been regularly referred to in the *Journal of Alpine Research*, clearly demonstrate how these regions have come a long way from the situations depicted in old photographs when mountain areas were frequently zones of stagnation relying on subsistence economies. Such studies reveal how these areas have been, and continue to be, affected by numerous exchanges and movements, and how the ways in which their territorial resources are exploited have also evolved (Viazzo, 1990; Grange, 2002; Debarbieux, Price, 2008; Granet-Abisset, 2010). In this context, addressing the economic history of the Alps through sport and sports practices offers a fruitful field for reflection. It is true that this theme is linked to that of the boom in tourism, but it is far more than that. Historians of sport have established that “modern sport” can be treated as one of the social practices particular to the industrial societies that sprang up at the end of the 18th century and one of the traits of their culture (Arnaud, Attali, Saint-Martin, 2008). Nevertheless, modern sport takes on a wide variety of forms, and mountain sports are but one aspect (Terret, Riordan, Krüger, 2004). With sports ranging from mountaineering to speleology, from skiing and snow-shoeing to hiking and mountain biking, and from white-water sports to paragliding, it is clear that the sports practised in mountain areas, whether specific or

not to these areas, are numerous and varied and have undergone considerable changes over the past two centuries, changes that have accelerated in recent decades (Bourdeau, 2007). Not all sports have attracted equal attention, however, since skiing and mountaineering account for the lion's share of studies (Arnaud, Terret, 1996; Hoibian, Defrance, 2003). Studying sport from the perspective of its cultural, social and gender aspects, in terms of sociability or the relationship with the body and nature, is recognised as a fruitful approach, but this issue of the *Jar* focuses more on the economic aspects of sport, an approach that to date has received somewhat less attention ².

- 3 The call for papers for this issue encouraged proposals for studies on the different mechanisms of market creation provoked by the development of various sports in the Alpine arc from the end of the 19th century to the present day, whether these be relating to new products, services or events, or to the businesses that designed, produced and marketed these goods and services. The articles in this issue naturally reflect, in part, studies undertaken within the framework of the ANR TIMSA, but there are also some from other researchers working from different but related perspectives. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is one major regret: it was not possible to mobilise colleagues working on the alpine arc as a whole³. We hope that this issue will serve as a call to identify work in progress that has escaped us and to encourage new studies on these themes, which remain fairly wide-ranging.
- 4 The six contributions in this issue reveal a variety of types of relationship between sport and market creation. A first set of articles concerns the creation of sports and leisure equipment businesses by sports practitioners who have achieved a good or high level in their respective sports, and have capitalised on their skills to set up a business venture. Régis Boulat thus examines the history of the Jamet company, created in 1929 by André Jamet, a regional and national ski champion. The company was sold in 1975 to the SEB group (the brand still exists today as part of the Trigano group) and now specialises in camping equipment. Today it is situated at the interface between the sport that first provided André Jamet with modest business success and the expansion of the outdoor recreation market that fuelled the strong growth experienced during the “glorious thirties”. Based on a strategy combining technical innovation and marketing expertise, the path taken by the company, which was sold at a time that André Jamet rightly perceived as a turning point in the market, contrasts sharply with the path taken by Petzl, a company examined in the article by Pierre Olaf Schut. The initial business activity involving the small-scale development and production of alpine caving equipment was closely associated with the pioneering practices of Fernand Petzl, but the real creation of the company came later, when his son, Paul, became involved in the firm. While continuing to faithfully respect the spirit of craftsmanship fostered by his father, Paul developed the business on an industrial scale. Today, it continues to maintain strong links with sport, but has expanded into other markets thanks to the importance taken on by its current flagship product, the headlamp. In both companies, the link with the founder's status as a sportsman is essential but also problematic. Fernand Petzl, a craftsman in modelling and a pioneer in alpine speleology, could be qualified as an “innovative rather than entrepreneurial sportsman”, like Pierre Allain (Modica, 1999). Petzl was truly an innovative sportsman, committed to making available his new equipment to the community concerned. But the entrepreneurial dimension did not interest him. It is true that he produced and sold the equipment, but the objective was not to create a business. It was only to ensure the future of his sons that the activity became the basis for an entrepreneurial venture.

André Jamet, on the other hand, was first and foremost an entrepreneur: it was around sport that he created his activity, firstly commercial in nature, then production, which he developed and expanded until the moment came when he considered it time for him to retire from the business.

- 5 A second set of articles looks at the emergence of new sports and their gradual commodification. Antoine Marsac looks at white-water sports with a case study from the Ubaye valley that enables the identification of different phases related to those of the development of tourism. In a first phase, from the 1930s to the 1960s, the sport was practised by a few club-based pioneers (here, the TCF) who defined the context of the activity that led to the identification of the territory as a zone for practising sport. To begin with there were only a few enthusiasts operating autonomously, and the economic impact remained limited to a modest development of the local hotel infrastructure. In a second phase, the baton was taken up by associations, which made it possible for enthusiasts to be accompanied and thus enlarged the circle of potential participants. The progressive commodification of this accompaniment, which was closely linked to the introduction of safety standards, led to a professionalisation which allowed a small number of expert practitioners of the sport to create their own activity. Finally, in a third phase, the development of an activity less demanding from a sporting point of view opened up the valley to a wider tourism clientele. A market was thus created based on businesses providing services for sports tourism and proposing standardised products that widened the range of activities offered to visitors to the Ubaye valley. This structural development (enthusiasts practising the sport autonomously or in a club, its extension via associations that develop non-commercial activities, then commodification thanks to standardisation and the introduction of safety regulations) is found in a number of cases and may serve as a framework to facilitate general understanding of the economic development of sport (Bourg, 2004), but it is not exclusive. The introduction of mountain biking as a sport to attract visitors to alpine ski resorts, as Thierry Terret, Jean Saint Martin and Jean Savre explain, is part of a different structure in which three factors are involved: the transfer of ideas from the USA, the commitment of an individual seeking to promote a new sport while at the same time creating his own activity, and the crisis of the model that served as a basis for the development of ski resorts in the middle of the 1980s⁴. In terms of markets, however, the boom that occurred was not so much due to the practice of a mountain sport as to an extension of urban uses, which shows that the relationship between innovation in sports and market creation is far from being direct or straightforward.
- 6 A final group of articles addresses the question at another level, that is, the methods of management and economic structuring of sports activities and their relationship with the local area or territory.
- 7 Emmanuelle George-Marcelpoil and Hugues François examine the changes in the types of intervention by public authorities and private groups in the development of the resorts of the Tarentaise region of the Alps. They remind us that although the unfortunately named “snow plan” was the local expression of a national policy, the policy itself was largely drawn up by local actors or, more precisely, by actors (public as well as private) who were operating at two levels. Far from excluding themselves, the different types of actors designed a first form of association focused on promoting the local area from a development point of view. This configuration then became obsolete and gave way to another, involving actors who, though not all new, at least functioned

in a different way. The three actors examined in this issue illustrate these changes well. Labellemontagne is a family-run private group that has acquired considerable importance in the management of mid-altitude resorts. The Compagnie des Alpes is a limited company in which the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignation has a 40% stake and which now operates in two sectors, the management of ski areas and leisure parks. The third actor, the Conseil Général de Savoie, has a long-standing involvement in tourism and now participates through a financial holding company, Savoie Station Participation (SSP). All these actors are developing a new relationship with the local areas of the resorts. For the investment groups, they are considered as assets worth developing, not only through investment but also by their resale since there is a market, at least in Europe, for the management of ski lifts and even resorts. Furthermore, any income generated is likely to be transferred, either from one resort to another, or from one activity to another, which is a radical change from the logic underlying earlier territorial policies. In the case of the SSP, the problem is a little different, since it involves combining the development and profitability of resorts with a view to making the most effective use of increasingly rare public funding. The requirements of sectors or groups thus take precedence over (or are even substituted for) territorial priorities, which brings us back to the questions concerning the relationship with territory or the local area of all the actors in the “nature and mountain sports tourism” sector in the Rhone-Alpes region. The article by Éric Boutroy, Philippe Bourdeau, Pascal Mao and Nicolas Senil points out that although the Rhone-Alpes region has a particularly high density of businesses related to sport, especially mountain and outdoor recreational sports, it nevertheless cannot be described in terms of typical configurations of districts, local systems of production, innovative environments, etc. The fact that the concepts generally used to analyse the forms of proximity do not really apply may seem surprising, but this is confirmed by other studies. The authors prefer to use the notion of subsidiary here, and to examine these proximity or neighbourhood effects in another way. They see these effects as being less related to any special territorial effect than to constructed proximities, proximities of coordination and resources, which function at different scales and can be mobilised according to needs and projects. The link with sport, through the sharing of different activities and the areas used to practice these activities, and the sharing of know-how and values, is a strong element of these constructed proximities but it is obviously not exclusive of others of a more technical and economic nature.

- 8 Finally, it is worth emphasizing the complexity of the links between sport, mountain territories and economic activities, on which this issue is focussed. The fact that the existence of deterministic links between the three terms is related to a “quasi territorial illusion” (Hillaret, Richard, 2004) is evident, but it does not throw any light on the reality of the mechanisms of interaction and non-interaction that are actually in play. A few exploratory paths may be suggested to remedy this situation. We have seen that there are many different types of links between sporting activity and commodification: complementary activity (the case of Fernand Petzl when he began his business), individual activity, activity of a commercial nature (case of André Jamet in the 1930s), one that is associative then professional (case of white-water sports in the 1960s), a promotional type of activity, or an industrial activity with or without the creation of a business (case of Jamet and Petzl at different dates). If we accept the distinction between monetarisation and commodification (Perret, 1999), the passage to a market situation, in the sense of an economic relationship between a large number of

suppliers and purchasers with the price as the main variable, is in no way obligatory, and in many cases is not even possible. Whether it is desirable is another question, which is undoubtedly legitimate, with regard to the diversity of other forms of economic activity that sports activities, like many others, allow. It requires that a standardised offer be available, that a solvent demand exists, and that information enables their coming together. “Sportivisation”, which in itself is the normalisation of physical practices and leisure activities, may play a role in favouring the creation of a market, by standardising supply and demand, or alternatively in raising the level of the sport and reducing its participants to a number that is too small.

- 9 The relationship with alpine territories is no simpler. Even in the case of ski resorts, a good example of a localised tourist system, the link with territory is neither clear nor stable. Certainly, slopes and snowfall are pre-requisites, at least for downhill skiing, but the investments that have built these tourism sports areas are just as important. The creation of supply, like that of demand, calls for the intervention of flexible management methods capable of mobilising links between local and external actors that historically have varied considerably, even though the relevance of this distinction needs to be questioned. Similarly, it is expected that the strong concentration of industrial actors and others in the sector will be correlated with proximity effects, though it will be difficult to identify them. As is often the case, the territorial approach leads one to think in terms of networks, and one can only subscribe to the proposal by Éric Boutroy, Philippe Bourdeau, Pascal Mao and Nicolas Senil to explore the possibilities of adapting the tools of sociotechnical and associationist analysis to a “close-to-the-ground” approach, linking up with the methods of the historians of *microstoria* in an approach that is both pragmatic and global.

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NOTES

1. This programme brings together historians and sports historians from the Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône Alpes (LARHRA) and the Sports innovation and research centre (Centre de recherche et d'innovation sur le sport (CRIS)).
2. The economics and the marketing of sport are well-established fields of study. Regarding the economic history of mountain sports, the economic impact of the Olympic Games is one of the rare subjects to have been well covered.
3. Some contributions in this field may be found in Thomas Busset and Marco Marcacci (2006) - *Pour une histoire des sports d'hiver-Zur Geschichte des Wintersports*, CIES, Neuchâtel, in Tissot L., Jaccoud Ch., Pedrazzini Y. (2000) *Sports en Suisse. Traditions, transitions et transformations*, Antipodes, Lausanne, and in studies resulting from the programme of the Fonds National Suisse "Système touristique et cultures techniques de l'arc lémanique: acteurs, réseaux sociaux et synergies" conducted by Cédric Humair and Laurent Tissot from 2008 to 2011.
4. The role of the Grenoble bicycle and motorcycle manufacturer, Liberia, in the early development of mountain biking in France is worthy of more detailed study.

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