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# Ski Touring and Snowshoeing in the Hautes-Bauges (Savoie, France): a Study of Various Sports Practices and Ways of Experiencing Nature

Clémence Perrin-Malterre and Laine Chanteloup

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- 1 Over the last fifty years, the percentage of people practicing a sport has strongly increased in France to reach approximately 89% today. (Lefèvre and Thiéry, 2011). This penetration of sports in society has also been accompanied by a diversification of the activities and types of practice. Indeed, since the 1980s we have observed a “transformation of sports into leisure” (Augustin, 2011; Bessy, 2008; Suchet and Tuppen, 2014). Conviviality, pleasure and hedonism are the values that are more widely shared among practitioners, ahead of the quest for performance (Loret, 1995).
- 2 Yet the most distinctive trend today is the enthusiasm for sports activities practiced in natural areas, which appears to be part of the “contemporary worship of nature” (Kalaora, 2001). A survey performed in 2010 (Lefèvre and Thiéry, 2015) on physical and sports activities (APS) in France<sup>1</sup> revealed that outdoor sports are the most popular and the most frequently practiced physical and sports activities in France. When all types of practices are combined, institutional or not, this represents a total of nearly 25 million people who declared an activity that could be considered an outdoor sport, with hiking and cycling the most often mentioned (Thiéry, 2013). The contact with nature appears to be one of the practitioners' main motivations. This “ecologization of practices” (Pociello, 1995) is linked to an enthusiasm for activities that go beyond simple institutional frameworks, and are practiced in self-organized forms in multiple locations, in particular in natural environments (qualified as such when they are perceived to have a low degree of artificiality).

- 3 This process is accompanied by a spatial dissemination of sports practices encouraging the current “multi-territoriality” of outdoor sports practitioners, which is due to “the multipolarity of territorial scales and the diversity of relationships to places and spaces” (Augustin, 2002). Individuals no longer create their sports practice spaces in reference to a place or to a sports activity, but through a combination of the places visited, itineraries traveled and outdoor sports engaged in throughout the seasons. Therefore, “we observe a multiplication of spatial references inscribed in networks of places and non-places, and the proliferation of disparate visits acting as regulators for social and spatial relationships” (Augustin, 2007: 10). Moreover, these outdoor sports practices participate in the construction of territories (Mao, 2003; Bourdeau, 2003; Augustin, 2007; Lefèvre, 2004), in particular by reorganizing the spaces of daily life and city-mountain relationships (Bourdeau, Mao, Corneloup, 2011). For example, in the northern French Alps, the proximity of the Natural Regional Parks (PNR) to large conurbations such as Grenoble, Chambéry and Annecy provides easier access for the development of these practices.
- 4 Indeed the French Natural Regional Parks (PNR), which are predominantly rural territories<sup>2</sup>, have “a very powerful attraction for tourists or athletes, who consider them as a special terrain for original practices and new sensations” (Peseux *et al.*, 1999, p. 5). The managers of these spaces are key actors in the territorial system: they aim to preserve the environment while at the same time encouraging local economic development. They are therefore led to develop logics of actions taking into account the increase in sports activities and their integration into the natural environment (Mounet, 2007). This is a preoccupation of the managers of the Massif des Bauges Natural Regional Park (PNRMB). The location of this massif in the heart of an area containing several dynamic urban hubs, and its topography marked by nearly fourteen peaks above 2000 meters in elevation, make it a central natural area ideal for the development of sports activities organized for a day<sup>3</sup>. Faced with increasing recreational and tourism pressure, the managers' objective is not to limit practitioners' access to the massif, but rather to continue to develop sports activities while at the same time attenuating their negative impacts on the natural environment. In 2013, the managers launched a campaign entitled “Respecting is Protecting” to promote behavior respectful of the natural environment among winter sports practitioners. The PNRMB is one of the first French Alpine sites to launch this type of action, and is therefore interested in acquiring more in-depth knowledge of these winter sports practitioners' practices and representations.
- 5 This study, developed in partnership with the PNR, aims to acquire better knowledge of those practicing winter sports (ski touring and snowshoeing). To this end, the study aims to define practitioner profiles according to socio-demographic characteristics and types of winter sports practices, but also to their perception of and relationship with the natural environment.

## Understanding the space of sports: from the profile of a practice to the sports experience

- 6 The research conducted in sports sociology in the 1980s allowed us to construct, with a structuralist perspective, a sports space enabling us to identify the homological links between the field of sports activities and the space of social positions (Pociello, 1981).

- 7 The choices of practices can then be explained by the logic of distinction (Bourdieu, 1979). Although today's massive consumption of sports practices refutes the idea that the choice of a sport is almost exclusively made in the sense of social differentiation, there are still differences linked to social categories in mountain sports. Thus skiing and hiking in the mountains remain distinctive activities and are significantly more attractive for the higher social categories (Lefèvre and Ohl, 2012). Moreover, the differences linked to social categories also influence the number of activities practiced, as well as the choice of locations and the styles of practice (Ohl and Taks, 2008). Therefore, certain researchers have focused on the different types of practice within a same activity, enabling the construction of a space of styles of practice. For the outdoor sports sector, studies have focused on summer activities in the mountains (Corneloup, 2003; Mao et Bourdeau, 2008; Mao, Hautbois, Langenbach, 2009; Mao, Corneloup et Bourdeau, 2003) and high mountains (Lefèvre, 2004), and canyoneering (Suchet and Jorand, 2009). Thus, while summer practices have been investigated, data concerning winter practices in non-built up mountain areas is scarce.
- 8 Moreover, this structuralist approach to types of practice can be enriched with an interpretation of the ways of experiencing nature in recreational activities. A study by Corneloup (2003) notably made it possible to identify the links between the types of practice in the mountains and these ways of experiencing nature. This author establishes a typology of practitioners. The “hedo-mountain practitioners” are mainly attracted by “a beautiful walk in a natural setting and (by) the discovery of the beauties of the mountains,” and physical activity enables “this encounter with a welcoming environment.” (p. 151). Conversely, the “performers” can be grouped together around the dimensions of confrontation, performance, speed, technique and competition. At the interface between these two groups, mountain “adventurers” appear to be strongly attracted by one of the dimensions of the outdoor practices: “testing yourself”. Finally, the last group of actors identified are the mountain “tourists”. They are above all beginners and non-practitioners with very little knowledge of the mountains.
- 9 In the context of this study, we have chosen to combine a structuralist perspective with a comprehensive and cultural perspective of the sports practices that cannot be disconnected from the places chosen and visited by the practitioners. The first enables us to define practitioner profiles that are differentiated according to the characteristics of their practice and to sociodemographic variables. The second perspective makes it possible to better understand the way in which individuals construct their sports trajectory, their types of practice and the links with the places visited (Retaillé, 2000; Maupertuis, Berque and Bernard-Léoni, 2014). It therefore seems important to take into account the way the territory is experienced by each category of practitioner (Di Méo, 1991, 1998). This perspective also enables us to analyze the practitioners' perception of the mountain environment and the way they relate to their space of practice.
- 10 Our survey of practitioners (ski tourers and snowshoers) was conducted in the Hautes Bauges during the winter and spring of 2014. The methodology used combines a quantitative method based on a survey questionnaire with a qualitative method based on semi-directive interviews. The questionnaire comprised three sections: the types of practice of the sports activity, the perception of the natural environment and the wild fauna, and the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The questionnaires were filled out face to face, on the two main parking lots at the start of the hiking trail in the Nature Preserve. This took place from January to March, two

days during the week and one day on the weekend, every week, during and outside of school holidays. For the sampling, all of the practitioners present on the site were approached, without taking into account their sociodemographic characteristics nor the activities practiced. The refusal rate encountered was low. The sample of 174 questionnaires collected can therefore be considered representative of the site users during the survey period. The interviews were conducted after the questionnaire survey, with certain practitioners who had been selected according to their answers on the questionnaire and who accepted to meet with us again. The interview guide asks questions to the outdoor sports practitioners concerning their practice of the sports activity, their relationship with the natural environment and their opinions concerning mountain management (from the development of infrastructures to the implementation of protective measures). 23 interviews were thus conducted with practitioners who had diversified profiles in terms of types of practice, selected based on the profiles established using the questionnaires.

## Sociodemographic profiles of the winter sports practitioners in the Massif des Hautes-Bauges

- 11 The results of the practitioners' survey made it possible to define a dominant profile for the winter hikers in the Hautes-Bauges. Most of them were men, over 46 years old, with a higher education (over 50% had at least 3 years of higher education after the Baccalauréat), and an income above 2000 euros net per month. Tradesmen, shop owners and company managers were over-represented among the practitioners (11.6% of the sample versus 6.3% of the French population), along with executives and the higher intellectual professions<sup>4</sup> (30.1% versus 17.1%). Conversely, workers were under-represented<sup>5</sup> (2.9% versus 20.5%). These results are in line with the study conducted by Lefèvre and Ohl (2012), which shows that despite the massive increase in sports practices, nine activities (out of the 270 listed<sup>6</sup>) are practiced significantly more by the upper social categories, and among them, skiing and hiking in the mountains.
- 12 In the Hautes-Bauges, the activity practiced the most is ski touring (85%). The frequency and level of practice are both high: 75% of the people interviewed practiced the sport at least once a week, and 85% of them had an advanced or expert level. The main motivation for their practice was the contact with nature.
- 13 An analysis of these interviews enabled us to identify three main reasons for choosing the activity. For some, it was hiking in the summer that led them to snowshoeing or ski touring:  

"I started ski touring due to the pleasure that I had with simple hiking. At one point I asked myself what was the best way to continue to progress in the mountains in the winter, with the constraints of the snow. And the best solution I found was ski touring. What really interests me is to be able to circulate in the mountains on snow-covered terrain, more than the actual skiing itself." (A. M. <sup>7</sup>)
- 14 This first reason for choosing the activity is also the one evoked by those who practiced several mountain sports, not only ski touring. The second reason for choosing the activity concerns those who were already Alpine skiers in resorts and who began to prefer ski touring in particular to escape from the resorts:

"I used to do a lot of Alpine skiing. And then after Alpine skiing you start to want to do something else than just wait in line for the ski lifts, and to go a bit further away, where there are less people." (B. R.).

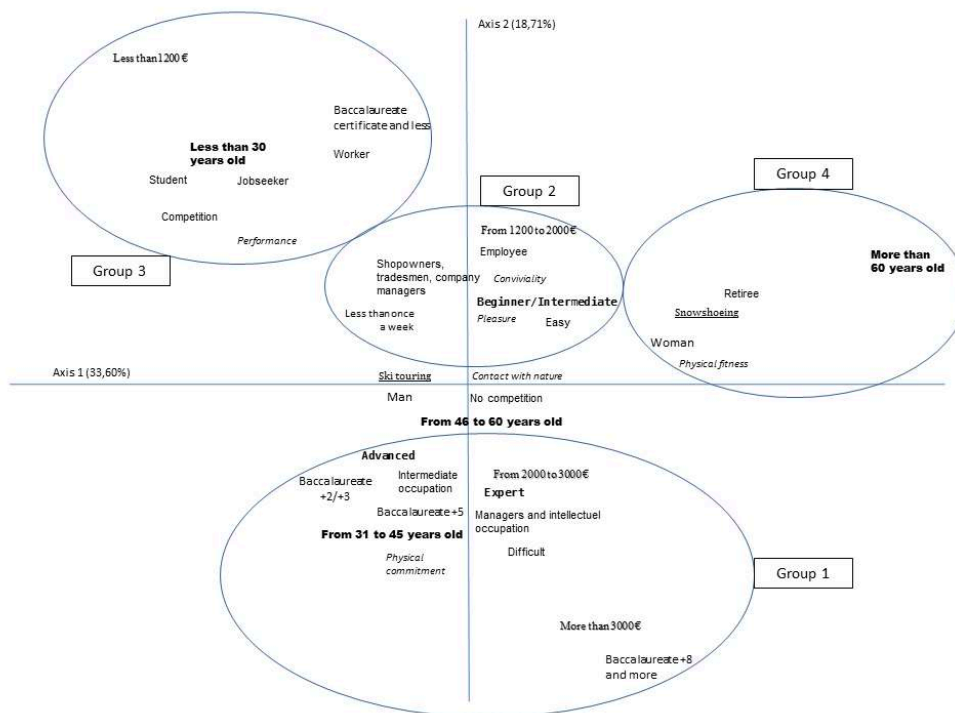
"Ski touring is mainly due to my disgust with ski resorts." (M. G.)

- 15 Finally, the third reason for choosing the activity can be found among the practitioners who didn't engage in mountain sports previously, but started the activity when they moved to the Alps:

"I already did a lot of sports in Paris. When I moved to Savoie I naturally turned to the mountains. And because I like sports, I chose ski touring in the winter and mountain biking in the summer." (J. H.).

- 16 Beyond the reasons for choosing the practice, there are also different types of practice. A Multiple Factor Analysis (MFA)<sup>8</sup> makes it possible to identify four practitioner profiles.

Figure 1: Profiles of winter sports practitioners in the Hautes-Bauges



Realization: Perrin-Malterre et Chanteloup, 2017.

- 17 Axis 1 of the MFA makes it possible to distinguish two initial groups, according to their level and frequency of practice. The members of the first group practice intensively, and have an advanced or even expert level. Physical exertion is one motivation evoked for the practice. The difficulty of the itineraries is also an objective.

"I focus on performance, but linked more to the mountaineering than the speed.

I'm mainly motivated by the quest for technical challenges." (J. B.)

- 18 This quest for difficult itineraries leads them to explore new spaces, such as the De Profundis couloir on the north face of Le Pécloz, a route covered for the first time in 2004. Thus, as for the surfers on the Atlantic coast, the territorialities of these practitioners are both new and "vague" (Augustin, 2007, p. 108), since they are located at the edge of the stable social territorialities that established themselves starting from

the winter sports resorts. These territorialities are based on representations of the difficulty of the itineraries chosen. Thus, succeeding in skiing the De Profundis route represents a challenge for these ski tourers. The members of this first group of practitioners can be considered as mountain “adventurers” attracted by the idea of a putting themselves to the test (Corneloup, 2003). In terms of social recruitment, they are similar to Lefèvre's classic mountaineers (2004), showing a high percentage of executives and higher intellectual professions.

- 19 The members of the second group have a decent level of practice, but do not consider themselves as experts. They practice less frequently and they search for easier itineraries. This leads them to choose “classic” itineraries giving them access to peaks from which they can observe the landscapes, because they are looking for “*more for the beauty of the outing than the athletic feat.*” (B. R). Pleasure is also another reason they evoke for the practice, along with conviviality. This group corresponds to the “hedo-mountaineers” identified by Corneloup (2003), but also to the “hedonistic enthusiasts” of Suchet and Jorand (2009), in particular in terms of social recruitment, with a high prevalence of shop owners and company managers, but also employees.
- 20 Axis 2 of the MFA makes it possible to distinguish two other groups of practitioners (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> group), in the minority within the sample studied.
- 21 The third group consists of younger practitioners (under 30) who practice their activity with a performance objective. Some are ski mountaineering competitors, such as one practitioner who started competing after three years of practice, with the aim to win races:  
“I do it mainly to try and place among the top racers or even to win.” (R. L.).
- 22 This quest for performance leads them to visit ski resorts in order to train, thereby creating multiple territorialities for the practice of their activity. As does Corneloup (2003), it is possible to qualify them as performers, since the energetic and Promethean dimensions appear here. In terms of social recruitment, they correspond to purist mountain (Lefèvre, 2004) and canyoneering (Suchet and Jorand, 2009) practitioners, categories with less capital (in particular economic) than the previous ones.
- 23 The last group concerns mainly women and retirees over 60. Their main reasons for practicing are physical fitness, health, and the well-being generated by the sports activity:  
“I know that when I go out and I'm feeling tired, when I come home I'm full of energy to start my week. So it's really something that gives me a great sensation of well-being.” (C. P.).
- 24 This last group corresponds to Lefèvre's “female hiker” in the Mont Blanc Massif (2004) who practices different forms of hiking, preferably at medium altitudes. As shown by Lefèvre (2004), a specific territorialization (Di Méo, 1998) therefore does exist for this group of practitioners, who prefer easy middle mountain itineraries as opposed to high altitude ones, a territory preferred by mountain adventurers.
- 25 Among the winter sports practitioners interviewed, none of them could be considered “mountain tourists” (Corneloup, 2003), i.e. beginner users or non-practitioners, with little experience of the mountains, who do not have the opportunity to visit these regions often. On the contrary, among the practitioners interviewed, 86.8% live in Savoie or Haute-Savoie and 9.8% in the neighboring *départements* of the Rhône-Alpes Region. They therefore visit the Massif des Bauges for the day. The 6 people



interviewed who lived outside of the Region live near the Pyrenees. Moreover, there were very few beginners among the people interviewed (two practitioners). Finally, contrary to “mountain tourists”, who are far removed from the athletic vision of the mountains and prefer rest and relaxation, all of the users interviewed came with the objective of practicing a sports activity rather than resting.

- 26 There are three explanations for this low number of “mountain tourists” visiting the Hautes-Bauges. First of all, even if the Massif des Bauges offers a variety of itineraries of every athletic level, the marked topography of the massif, with over 14 peaks above 2000 meters in elevation, creates slopes in this medium altitude massif that are equivalent to those of a high altitude environment. This limits its access to beginners or non-connoisseurs in the winter, due to the dangers linked to avalanches. Therefore, the biophysical environment and its accessibility partially determine the type of practitioner who can enjoy this part of the massif in the winter season. Secondly, the Massif des Bauges receives much less media coverage than other more well-known massifs in the region, which therefore potentially receive more tourist visits. Indeed, the Massif des Bauges contains no major second- or third-generation ski resorts that could have made the massif more well-known. Furthermore, in terms of protected areas, it is protected by a National Hunting and Wild Fauna Preserve (RNCFS), a protective measure that is less well-known than the National Parks. Finally, the field survey performed was concentrated on the Hautes-Bauges. The tourism offer (activities, accommodation) available in this space is limited. Therefore, other parts of the Massif des Bauges, such as the ski resorts of Les Aillons or the La Féclaz plateau, attract and channel this category of users, especially during the winter season.
- 27 Whatever the types of practice, the choice of these winter activities is strongly linked to the fact that they are performed in a natural environment. The contact with this environment is indeed an integral part of the practice:
- “We benefit from the environment, not just the activity.” (P. G.).
- 28 We will now examine the way the practitioners perceive and relate to the mountain environment.

## The practitioners' perception and usages of the natural environment

- 29 Half of the practitioners consider the mountain environment above all as a place to recharge one's batteries. 84.5% of the respondents declare that the mountain environment must be preserved; but there are also 76.4% who want to be able to discover it and circulate throughout it. More specifically, the Massif des Bauges is perceived as a wild, preserved and authentic area. It is also a middle mountain massif with the specific feature of being Alpine:
- “You rapidly get the impression that you're plunged into the heart of the mountains, at unbelievable altitudes, although you're actually only between 1500 and 2200 (meters in altitude).” (A. M.)
- 30 It is also perceived as being less visited than other massifs, and tranquility is one of its characteristics:
- “You're really not far at all, and yet you truly have the impression that you're in another world.” (R. L.)



- 31 The natural environment is an essential dimension for the practitioners, whatever their profile and their reason for choosing the activity:

“What interests me (in ski touring) is to continue to be able to approach the environment.” (A. M.)

- 32 These survey results for the skiers are similar to those of other studies conducted on water sports (Féménias *et al.*, 2011), and they show that this attention paid to the environmental elements is linked to the intrinsic logic of outdoor sports, which require compromising with the natural environment. The winter ski tourers, like the skiers in Quebec, have an “active relationship” with their environment of practice (Roult *et al.*, 2017). Several elements are sought by the winter sports practitioners when they visit this natural space. First of all the beauty of the landscapes:

“Snow-covered and high mountain landscapes have always fascinated me.” (P. G.)

- 33 This beauty of the landscapes encourages a contemplative activity. The mountain environment therefore has an esthetic value that is revealed by the contemplation of the landscapes, as well as by the sensations of pleasure that this contemplation procures (Marcotte *et al.*, 2005). This “esthetic experience” of the landscape (Féménias *et al.*, 2011) can explain the desire to escape from developed sites such as winter sports resorts:

“I avoid the resorts because they're ugly.” (A. R.);

- 34 and a position opposed to the excessive development of the mountains:

“It's time to stop developing the large resorts and the others. It's time for people to realize just a little to what extent they're demolishing and massacring the mountains.” (C. and M. C.).

- 35 The practitioners are also looking for calm and tranquility:

“The less people there are, the happier I am.” (P. B.).

- 36 Very few practice their activity in large groups. Indeed, only 10% of the practitioners participate in group outings organized by associations. The majority (70%) practice in groups of friends with less than five members. And 20% of them practice alone. This quest for peace and quiet is linked with the search for the replenishment of the spirit provided by the natural environment:

“The mountain environment gives me great peace of mind..” (A. M.)

- 37 As Marcotte *et al.* (2005) observed concerning holidays in forest areas, the value of freedom also appears to play an important role for winter sports practitioners. This value is linked to the search to break away from daily life: “in natural sites, individuals can free themselves from social encounters and constraints; they remove themselves from the requirements of urban civility” (p. 309). Avoiding developed areas thus also means avoiding places with too many visitors:

“I avoid the places that are too crowded.” (C. P)

- 38 Finally, for some individuals, the places where they live and where they enjoy their leisure activities are the same. This corresponds to a societal evolution leading to an increasing degree of continuity of practices between daily life, tourism, culture and leisure (Viard, 2015; Bourdeau, Mao, Corneloup, 2011). These practitioners have consciously chosen to live in middle mountain areas, in particular because of the quality of life that the mountain environment can offer:

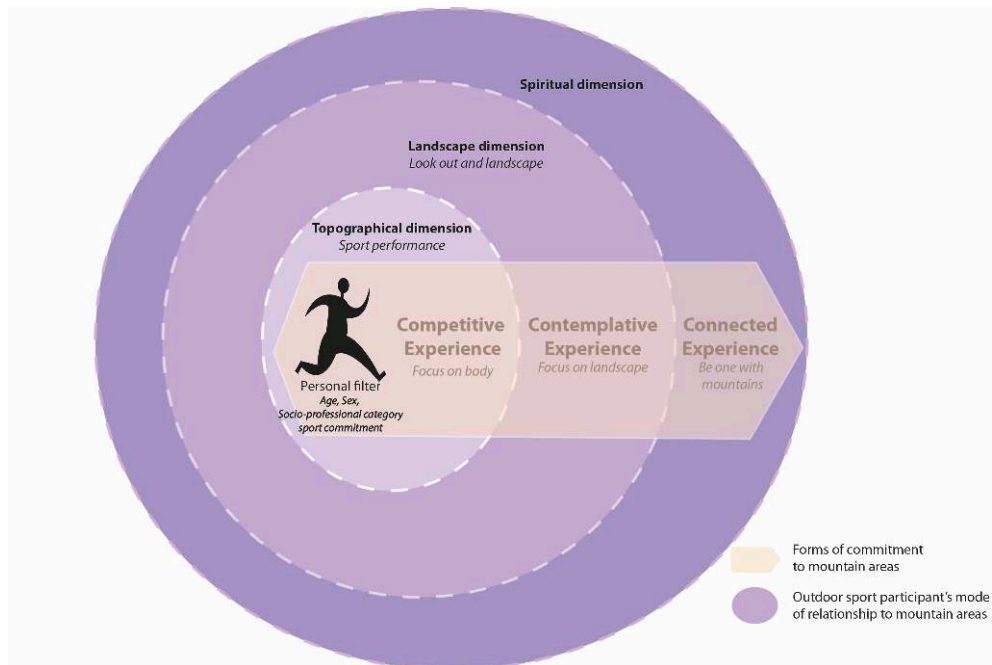
“I chose to live in the Bauges in order to live in the mountains. Living in a city would no longer be possible for me.” (J. P.)

- 39 We are situated here in a perspective of migration for pleasure, when the quality of life plays a central role among the reasons evoked in favor of moving to middle mountain areas (Cognard, 2012).
- 40 In their responses, it is possible to observe a certain awareness of the natural environment among winter sports practitioners. Indeed, in the context of their sports practices, they declare that they respect this environment:
- “I think it's really important to arrive a little bit on tiptoes and say to yourself 'I don't live here, I'm just passing through. I don't want to bother or annoy anyone.' Respect for the environment is important.” (A. M.).
- 41 However, the practitioners do not necessarily have any precise knowledge of the protection classifications of the natural environment in which they are practicing. Indeed, while 78% know that they are in a Natural Regional Park, only 44% know that they are in an RNCFS, and only 35% are aware of the existence of fauna quiet zones<sup>9</sup>, even though the boundaries of the reserve and these zones are indicated at the parking areas where the trails begin.
- 42 Overall, the practitioners have the feeling that they comply with the regulations when they are informed. However, certain opinions and attitudes are more mixed. For example, some fear that excessive protection could lead to a total prohibition to access the natural environment and thus restrict their freedom of circulation:
- “I have a hard time with some of these regulations. Because it should be above all an area of freedom. After all, it's one of the last places where we can still do a little bit whatever we want; even place our lives in danger, quote/unquote, if we want to. It's a free space.” (J. B.)
- 43 These practitioners are in favor of trusting users to be responsible when using the natural environment. Thus, as for other recreational activities, “the rejection of prohibition also expresses the rejection of constraints, or at least a demand for their relaxation, in favor of individual responsibility, and preferring incentives over obligations.” (Evrard *et al.*, 2011). Others, who live and sometimes also work in the Massif des Bauges, consider these regulations as an intrusion by outsiders in their space, and therefore do not necessarily comply with them:
- “It's really the park wardens alone who chose and decided on these zones. There are a lot of people, in the Bauges at least, who more or less act as though they didn't exist.” (L. P.)
- 44 Most of the practitioners interviewed appeared to be aware and respectful of the environment in which they practice. However, different types of mountain practices reveal specific usages and familiarity with the mountain space.

## From competition to connection, or different ways of entering into a relationship with the mountain environment

- 45 A sensitivity gradient<sup>10</sup> for the practitioners in natural spaces can be established according to the type of practice, one's trajectory in the activity and the objective set for the day. This gradient shows that outdoor sports practitioners do not all adopt the same behaviors, nor do they pay the same degree of attention to the different constitutive elements of the mountain environment in which they practice.

Figure 2: A continuum of types of relationships with the mountain environment



Realization: Chanteloup et Perrin-Malterre, 2017.

- 46 The attention of the outdoor sports practitioner can be mainly focused on his/her own body, without much importance given to the spaces traveled through. In this case, the choice of the mountain environment is mainly made due to its topographical characteristics. It is mainly the practices linked with ski mountaineering that represent this type of relationship. The practitioners in this category have a specific type of usage of the mountain space, given that the environment is staked out and secured for the races, and can be compared to a standardized stadium:

“(The race) is in a sense the transposition of a track and field course in the mountains.” (E. D.)

- 47 In this case, the “natural” difficulties of the mountain environment appear to be erased to a certain extent. It would seem that the competitors are less aware of their surrounding environment, as confirmed by certain non-competing practitioners:

“When they're racing, their objective is to achieve a performance, and I don't have the impression that they enjoy the environment the way I do.” (P. A.).

- 48 Moreover, the comments of one of the racers interviewed do not contradict these opinions:

“I climb up with my nose to the ground. I still enjoy stopping at the top for 5 minutes to enjoy the view, but I'm not going to stay up there contemplating for hours.” (P. B.)

- 49 The selection of an itinerary is mainly based on its topography, since the goal is to “rack up” kilometers and/or cumulative altitude difference. Like running, ski mountaineering competition requires “focusing more on the body than on the natural environment to boost efficiency. You can't let yourself get distracted from it.” (Niel and Sirost, 2008, p. 195). This relational process with respect to their environment of practice has a functional nature, as Roult *et al.* (2017) were able to highlight for skating-style cross-country skiers in Quebec. This type of usage that transforms the mountain

environment into a standardized sports terrain is therefore negatively perceived by non-competing practitioners:

“I worry that this will lead to a simple consumption of the mountains. This is what strikes me when I see these guys go by in their little pink leggings and their 1500-euro shoes.” (A. M.)

- 50 However, these opinions must be considered with care, since few actual competitors were present in the sample, and for those who were, competition is not their only type of practice:

“My current practice is a combination of competition skiing and pleasure skiing via classic ski touring, on big skis so that I can tackle more interesting slopes.” (R. L.).

- 51 These comments reinforce the results of the surveys of the sports practices of the French population (Lefèvre and Thiéry, 2015), which show that the concept of multiple practice, whether in terms of diverse activities or types of practices, is widespread among the general population, but even more so among outdoor sports practitioners who come largely from the most privileged social categories (Lefèvre and Ohl, 2012). Furthermore, the licensed competitors are those who have the richest multiple practice (Augustini *et al.*, 1996).

- 52 At the opposite extreme, we can observe a spiritual dimension sometimes sought through mountain practices. The relationship is no longer established with the mountain environment through athletic performance, but rather through the sensation of union between one's own corporeality and the natural environment, of becoming one. This is related to the search for a strong relationship with the natural environment:

“This connection means that at any moment when you're circulating in the mountains, you should consciously be aware of what you're doing, who you are, and what surrounds you... (...) This openness and attention, whether it is auditory, visual, or even physical, is what makes me say that I'm connected with the environment.” (A.M.)

- 53 This attitude is linked to a “romantic desire for 'polysensoriality', expressed by the wish to experience nature, not only with the eyes, but with all of the senses, and to become one with nature.” (Kalaora, 2001, p. 4). This connection, link or “unity” with nature is related to a spiritual experience expressed as such by many outdoor sports practitioners, whether in the marine environment (Humberstone, 2011) or in the mountains (Brymer and Gray, 2009). For some, ski touring or snowshoeing enables them to reach a sort of spiritual awakening, and is a method to reach a transcendental state, a “sort of walking meditation” (Ralston, 2005). In this context, it is not the conquest of the natural environment that is sought after, but rather a “partnership with it” (Brymer and Gray, 2009).

- 54 Between these two extremes, and for the majority of practitioners interviewed, a more esthetic practice of the mountain environment is preferred. Just like the Nordic skiers in Quebec (Roult *et al.*, 2017), most of these practitioners (snowshoers and ski tourers) are situated in a relational process with their environment of practice that has a contemplative nature. Indeed, practicing sports offers a very specific type of landscape mediation with the environment, since the latter is appreciated through the body and the mobilization of the different senses (Niel and Sirost, 2008). The practice of a recreational activity becomes an opportunity to have a “sensory experience of nature” (Cosgriff *et al.*, 2010).

- 55 This mobilization of the senses is particularly active when outdoor sports practitioners combine their sport with other passions such as the observation of wild fauna. Thus, snowshoers who belong to the LPO (League for the Protection of Birds) explain:

“We are slightly more vigilant in terms of our outlook. When I'm snowshoeing, I'm more receptive to the colors, the atmosphere, to everything. I'm more on the alert, wondering to myself 'What am I going to see next?' ” (C. and M. C.)

- 56 The possibility to spot animals adds value to the contemplation of the landscape and the perception of the outdoor sports experience (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999; Curtin, 2005). It also encourages a stimulation of the senses, making it possible to fully appreciate the natural environment in which one is practicing.

- 57 However, the different types of entry and perception of the mountain space should not be placed in opposition, since according to the itinerary chosen, the expectations for the day, and one's previous experience with the activity, it is possible to mobilize one or the other of the relationship types. This is the case with the move from a competitive practice to a contemplative one:

“When you're young, you have things you want to prove to yourself. You focus more on the challenge, and on performance. Later on, you focus more on contemplation, or on discovering new massifs, and then on trying to better understand the environment you're traveling through.” (E.D.).

- 58 But the opposite is also possible, i.e. a switch from a contemplative practice to the desire to surpass yourself:

“Today I'm looking more for the difficulty, be it exertion during a hike that will take 4-5 hours, or an altitude difference of over 1000 meters.” (C.P.).

- 59 These different practices can also be combined by the same person at different times, as mentioned above. This combination of practices is part of the transmodern form of recreational practices, related to a diversified approach to the different cultural dimensions of outdoor practices, and to “the rejection of a sports monoculture that reduces the relationship with nature to performance, feats, fun or challenge” (Corneloup, 2011, p. 6).

## Conclusion

- 60 Often considered as a quest for freedom, a search for peace or for adventure, outdoor sports are perceived as a specific and very contemporary way to experience nature (Niel and Sirost, 2008). Nature exerts an attraction, since it represents “an imaginary medium for freedom and a source considered inexhaustible of spaces to explore, environments to conquer and sources of energy to be tapped” (Pociello, 1995, 261).

- 61 This paper, although it is limited to the activities practiced in the Massif des Hautes-Bauges in winter, makes it possible to contribute additional knowledge concerning the socio-demographics and types of practices of the winter users of non-built-up mountain areas, and in particular ski tourers, for whom very little data exists today. It also sheds light on the perception of the mountain environment by the practitioners and the way in which they relate to their area of practice. Most of the winter sports practitioners showed a certain awareness of the nature that they wished to see preserved. This majority can be found in the center of a continuum that ranges from competitor-practitioners more focused on their own bodies at one end, to users searching for a spiritual awakening, through a strong relationship with nature via the

mobilization of all of their senses at the other end. In addition, something which may appear contradictory is that a large majority of the practitioners feel entitled to the possibility to access this natural environment, which for them remains above all a space for leisure activities. This is similar to the results of the survey conducted on the users of a peri-urban forest in the Toulouse conurbation (Julhe and Haschar-Noé, 2010), where the athletes tended to consider the forest both as a place whose naturalness must be preserved, or even developed, but also as a place where the presence of human beings is entirely justified. In this respect, the forest is experienced as a playground that must be preserved in order to maintain or enrich one's practice. Thus, for winter sports practitioners, although the natural elements of the mountain environment are one of the essential and necessary components of their sports activity in the mountains, these elements are mainly perceived through the prism of their physical experience.

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## NOTES

1. This survey, ordered by the *Centre National pour le Développement du Sport* (CNDS) and the French Ministry in charge of sports, was conducted by the *Mission des Etudes, de l'Observation et des Statistiques* (MEOS) under the authority of the French Ministry of Education nationale, Youth and

Associations, and the *Institut National du Sport, de l'Expertise et de la Performance* (INSEP) who ensured its organization

2. According to the French National Parks Federation, built-up areas cover only 1.9% of the territories of the PNRs
  3. A study conducted on the number of tourist visits to the National Hunting and Wild Fauna Reserve, the location where the surveys presented in this study were carried out, shows that 73% of the visitors to the Reserve had traveled for less than an hour to reach the site (ONF, 2008).
  4. According to the chi2 adjustment test (ddl=9; n=174; khi2=0.013; p<0.05)
  5. According to the chi2 adjustment test (ddl=9; n=174; khi2=0.013; p<0.05)
  6. By the respondents to the 2000 survey concerning the sports practices of the French population conducted by the Ministry in charge of sports
  7. To preserve the anonymity of the people interviewed, we indicate only their initials.
  8. The variables used to create the MFA were: level of, frequency of, and reasons for practice; competitive participation; difficulty of the itineraries followed; socio-professional category; income; education; gender and age.
  9. Additional protection classification applied to certain areas within the RNCFS of Les Bauges.
  10. The sensitivity to the natural environment is linked here to the use of the different senses (sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste) and to the esthetics (Sansot, 1995) mobilized by practitioners to better understand their emotions, and *in fine* the usages that they develop regarding this environment that they inhabit through their practice.
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## ABSTRACTS

This article deals with winter outdoor recreation and the use of mountain wilderness areas in the Hautes-Bauges massif. The study aims to define outdoor recreation profiles of users of the areas according to socio-demographic data, recreational practices, and perceptions of the wilderness environment. The results show four (4) different recreation profiles. For all of them bonding with the natural environment is really important. Most users want to conserve and protect the wilderness areas. Nevertheless, this majority also claims the right to have access to this natural environment preferring above all that it remains a place for recreation. Thus, even if the natural setting of the mountains is the main component of their outdoor activities, these elements are mainly apprehended to the prism of their bodily experience.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** mountains sociology, backcountry skiing, landscape sensibility, Regional natural park of Bauges

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