

Submitted Abstract

ID IMC22-FSAbstr- 361

First Author First Name Last Name	Anna-Maria Walter
Submitting Author First Name Last Name	Anna-Maria Walter
Correspondence	Anna-Maria.Walter@oulu.fi
Co-Authors >> E-Mails will be not listed	
Organisations	University of Oulu, Germany
Country	Finland
Region	Western Europe
Title	To Ski Or Not To Ski: Navigating The Dilemma Of Love For The Mountains Versus Their Overuse.
Keywords	Skiing, Alps, Winter, Tourism, Sports
Type	List Of Focus Session
Focus Session ID	11

Abstract

In recent decades, fans of the great outdoors have had to cope with warmer winters, unreliable weather patterns, and temporal shifts in the ski season from Christmas to Easter. This scenario is intensified in lower mountain regions, such as the Bavarian Alps, where ski resorts readily experience the economic effects of uncertain winter snowfalls. In the face of climate change, some environmental activists call to discourage tourism altogether, mainly to preserve the mountain landscape and cut emissions. Meanwhile, national and transnational groups such as the Alpenverein (Alpine Club) and local tourism initiatives promote less intrusive forms of skiing, snowboarding, and snowshoeing. The growing trend of ski mountaineering is often championed as one way forward. Yet, the increasing number of ski tourers (often day trippers) disturbs previously quiet mountains and sensitive forest areas, pressures only accelerated by shuttered or limited-access resorts over the past pandemic winters. How do ski mountaineers who perceive their sport as sustainable leisure activity cope with this dilemma?

While much tourism research concentrates on built infrastructure and economic stakeholders, this paper, based on ethnographic data collection, shifts the focus onto the tourists themselves - a sport-oriented and 'nature'-loving clientele that engages individualistically with mountain spaces, often remaining independent of local commerce. Since many see themselves as carefully attuned to issues of environmental change, they are a group that holds creative potential for the development of future strategies for sustainable winter tourism, both bringing in their own ideas and expectations as well as finding ways to generate revenue. By exploring experiences, views, and practices of ski mountaineers towards the mountains' ecosystem, this research contributes to emerging debates in human geography and the environmental humanities, and urges the need for on-the-ground, off-the-piste research in mountain spaces threatened with rapid socio-environmental change.