

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

The tourism model of development in the Alps, mainly based on snow and ski resorts since the middle of the 20th century, has been at a turning point since the 2000s. It is characterized by a progressive restructuration and diversification, both in summer and winter. In this evolution, mountain sports (ski touring, mountaineering, hiking, etc.) play an important role. However, the evolution of these sport practices is the subject of a major knowledge gap, especially on the frequentation of the "poorly developed" mountain areas, i.e. outside the urban centers that constitute the ski resorts.

In mountain areas there is a specific data which is the frequentation of mountain huts. Because of their role of shelter and stopover for mountain sports practitioners, they are important places in the structuration of those sports and the number and socio-professional profile of the people who frequent them are crucial information for the study of the frequentation and evolution of mountain sports in "poorly developed" mountains. However, this data is not always easily accessible, especially over a long period of time, and it presents several biases and limits.

In this communication, we propose to discuss the interests and the limits of mountain hut frequentation data in Switzerland and in France to study the frequentation of "poorly developed" mountain areas and more particularly the evolution of mountain sports taking place there. Then, an example of analysis for a sample of huts in the Valais Alps (Switzerland) will be presented. This analysis allowed us to confirm (i) the generalized decrease in the frequentation of high mountain areas by mountaineers in summer, with a decrease of 11 % in the number of overnight stays between 1995-98 and 2016-19 in the 8 huts studied, (ii) the concentration of practitioners on technically easy and/or emblematic and/or quickly accessible routes and (iii) the development of ski touring, with an increase of 6 % in the number of overnight stays in spring between 1995-98 and 2016-19.