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Sense of Place in Tourism and Leisure: the Case of Touring Skiers in Quebec

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ABSTRACT

The concept of sense of place has become central in understanding various modern phenomena in leisure. Tourism promoters in outdoor recreation now emphasize opportunities to bond with nature, with 'wild' landscapes or with the authentic value of a destination. However, studying this tourism and recreation issue from the standpoint of 'place', which draws upon notions of attendance, identification and social and individual meaning, is lacking in modern studies. This paper, based on a quantitative approach using a questionnaire survey administered to touring skiers in Quebec (n=829), thus aims to present the links between various practice settings and the perceived meaning and identification that skiers attach to their practice sites.

Keywords: Leisure; Tourism; Sense of place; Ski touring; Quebec

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Introduction and conceptual elements

Man has become 'hyper mobile' in both his private and professional spheres (Hibbert and al., 2013; Moser and Weiss, 2003). This increased mobility led to daily or at least regular consumption, usage and appropriation of new places, which de facto contributes to renewing certain theoretical and conceptual approaches regarding the links between people and their environment (Moser and Weiss, 2003). From this analytical perspective, studying places visited for leisure purposes became a core element in emerging reflections as they appear to be more than mere functional spaces used for a certain practice (Elkington and Gammon, 2014; Hibbert and al., 2013; Crouch, 2000). Furthermore and from a geographical standpoint, Bédard (2012) suggests that the increased marketing of urban, suburban and rural territories in recent years adds additional importance to landscaping as a way to express the identity of certain places. For this author and for Chartier (2013), we share a common planet and often use the same places or types of places, but we discern and perceive them through a unique frame of knowledge, values, ambitions and memories which lends every place a distinctive meaning. Despite this search for territorial sense, individually or collectively, consciously or unconsciously, landscaping currently resolves around bringing upfront regulated and standardized key places which mark and symbolize modernity with a worrying lack of significance and social anchoring as far as local communities and tourists are concerned (Bédard, 2012). Several authors thus suggest that the sense of place as common knowledge needs to be renewed, which entails studying the importance of the authentic cultural and social attributes of a destination, marked by the daily lives of its local inhabitants (Chartier, 2013; Bédard, 2012; Crouch, 2000).

Gieryn (2000) reminds us however that it is important to clearly define *place* and *space* as they both have different definitions and therefore lead to different interpretations. According to him, *place* refers to a hybrid object of study that draws upon geographical, physical, sociological and even psychological characteristics that are quite distinct from the more functional and static components to which *space* refers (Gieryn, 2000). Therefore and from a conceptual standpoint, these variations in meanings led several authors to study place as a core dimension in the ways we relate to each other (Moser and Weiss, 2003; Gieryn, 2000; Crouch, 2000). Place of power, place of socialization, gathering place as so many other expressions indicating that this term has become the epicentre of daily activities and citizen-based initiatives. According to Gieryn (2000), it is also fundamentally embedded in the pursuit of livelihood and hosts various forms of individually perceived resistance, transgression and control. Everyone thus gives a unique meaning to the place he sees, visits or wishes to visit. This individually built interpretation, paramount in understanding the forms of attachment and appropriation relating to living environments, ought to be doubly analyzed: from a cognitive perspective (acknowledgment of physical attributes and positioning on cartographic means) and from a more subjective psychological perspective as well (Moser and Weiss, 2003; Gieryn, 2000). Any analysis of a place is incomplete without this dual interpretation. Crouch (2000) shares the same views, but

also suggests that *place*, given its sociological underpinnings, focuses on local characteristics such as living environments, activities and experiences whereas *space* relates to more macro dimensions and geometries. In the light of the above considerations, authors such as Hibbert and al. (2013), Smith (2015), Crouch (2000) and Williams (2009) draw strong connexions between the sense of place and the field of tourism and leisure studies.

From a recreational standpoint, Smith (2015) suggests that place can be interpreted as “an amalgam of destination qualities, including landscape and architecture, history and heritage and social structures and relationships” (2015: 221). For several authors, connecting place and tourism involves an interpretation of the former as a socio-ecological construction where the real and tangible intertwine with perceived and imagined cultural and individual artifacts (Smith, 2015; Cohen and al., 2014; Hibbert and al., 2013; Gravari-Barbas, 2013). In terms of tourism, the sense of place is used to interpret the experience of tourists on recreational and tourism sites but also, and perhaps above all, to analyze their relationships with local communities (Smith, 2015; Gieryn, 2000). This element appears essential to Smith (2015) who sees the sense of place at the heart of a more authentic promotion and marketing of tourist destinations. As Smith (2015) and other authors believe, choosing place rather than space in tourism is the conceptual equivalent of bringing upfront local communities and their cultural legacies as opposed to icons and flagships that may be far out of line with the local social reality (Smith, 2015; Cohen and al., 2014; Bédard, 2012). Avoiding a broad questioning of expert actions from the fields of territorial planning, architecture and marketing, many authors nevertheless suggest to consider and promote recreational destinations as living environments attractive for their true social and natural landscape (Smith, 2015; Cohen and al., 2014; Gieryn, 2000).

For Cohen and al. (2014), identifying the social and structural dynamics of a tourism destination undeniably entails a thorough understanding of on-site behaviors from tourists and activity doers. This is achieved by taking a deeper look into these clienteles’ values, expectations, needs and, above all, motivations and satisfaction levels. Furthermore, Cohen and al. (2014) bring forward that several models were developed in the recent years in an attempt to identify the types of motivation linked to various tourism practices. These authors along with Smith (2015), Hibbert and al. (2013), Blackshaw (2010) and Soubrier (2000) suggest that these motivations are linked to tangible elements (physical and structural attributes in the destination, costs associated, etc.) and to immaterial and emotional elements which are essential in defining the tourism experience and whether it will be repeated in the future or not. Although many studies show evidence of the important role played by individual choices and decisions in tourism motivations, group influences, from relatives and friends notably, remain undeniable in this issue (Smith, 2015; Bridle and al., 2015; Cohen and al., 2014; Gibson, 2006). Concomitantly, Cohen and al. (2014) note that studies in tourism behaviour are too often limited to product or client analysis. For the latter authors and for Smith (2015), studying behaviours in tourism requires a comprehensive approach, notably in order to get specific and accurate information about degrees of satisfaction. The latest studies reveal that bonding with local

communities, with some of their foremost values and getting an authentic and 'real' representation of the cultural landscape bring tourists to further connect and identify with the places they visit (Smith, 2015; Karen and Washington, 2015; Cohen and al., 2014; Demers, 2007).

Therefore, the analysis detailed in this issue springs from these considerations. In the past few years and despite a notable interest for the sport¹, very little studies were conducted in Canada, and even fewer in Quebec, on touring skiers. More specifically, too little scientific attention has been invested in practice settings in ski touring and the bonds that touring skiers build with their environment. From this perspective, the present study is intended to document this issue linked to outdoor recreation based on the interpretation of data from the sense of place. This study thus targets two main objectives: 1) identify key practice settings and motivations linked to the amateur pursuit of ski touring in Quebec, and 2) identify the key environmental and tourism factors linked to ski touring destinations in terms of selection criteria and on-site practices, thereby shedding light on satisfaction levels as well. In this matter, we hypothesize that practice settings (frequency, intensity, experience level, etc.) and motivations have a considerable influence on the social and identity bonds created between skiers and their sports environment.

1. Method

First, it must be noted that the results presented in this issue are part of a wider study which goal was to produce a profile of touring skiers and snowshoers in Quebec. With presentation considerations in mind, we opted to keep the information about touring skiers only. This approach allows better distinctions between practice settings and evaluations regarding various aspects related to the practice sites.

From a methodological standpoint, this study uses a quantitative approach through a questionnaire-based survey. Data collection started January 1 and ended April 22, 2012. The web-based survey was administered to 829 people who needed to meet two main inclusion criteria, namely being 18 of age or older, and having done ski touring activities during the 2011-2012 season. Questionnaire was available in both French and English, required an estimated 20 minutes and was made of fifty closed-ended questions structured around five large sections: 1) sociodemographic profile, 2) general practice habits, 3) information regarding their last outing, 4) travel behaviors, and 5) possession and use of digital tools. In order to attain a geographical representativeness and a balance in the types of facilities studied, several key ski centers were targeted in five regions in Quebec, namely Laurentians, Lanaudière, Eastern Townships, Quebec and Outaouais. Several ski touring and snowshoeing facilities cooperated to constitute a sample for this data collection phase. It should be noted that two participation prizes were randomly awarded as a means to increase the response rate.

Regarding data analysis, an initial sorting phase per question through frequency distribution tables was conducted using SPSS software, followed by cross-tabulations with sociodemographic variables notably. A factor analysis of all data was then conducted in order to identify standard profiles of skiers.

2. Results²

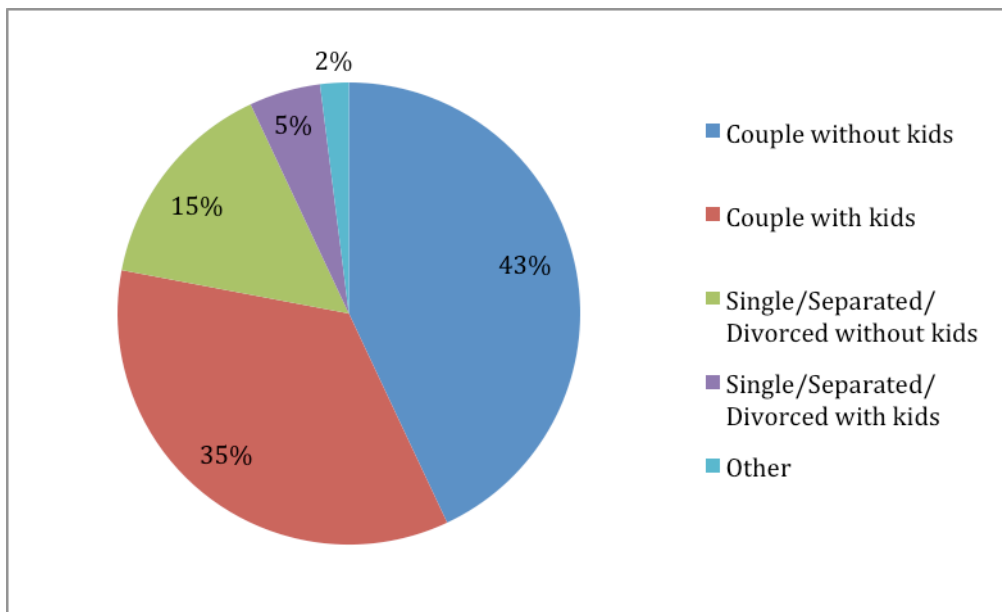
2.1 Respondents' profiles

Women are proportionally more numerous than men in cross-country skiing, averaging 55% compared to 45%. A majority of respondents (56% for women and 70% for men) were aged 45 and older. After the age of 55, a gap of 12% appears between genders as participation rates for women start to decrease while they keep increasing for men. This tendency is reversed in the 18 to 44 age group with women being more prevalent on ski trails than men. Young people aged 18 to 24 generally seem less interested in this activity. Cross-country skiers from the 55+ age group practice regularly (on mechanically groomed trails), some even reaching more than 20 sessions per season. Although skiers from the 18-24 age group are fewer, consistent practice is a common trait among them as 28% enjoy 20 or more ski days per year. Furthermore, 30% of this age group have been practicing this activity for two years or less, which suggests that 25-34 years old is when people usually start cross-country skiing.

With regard to education levels, cross-country skiers are generally highly educated with 69% having university degrees. This specific group contains more women than men (70% compared to 66%). Moreover, close to 40% of cross-country skiers are in the 50 000\$ to 99 999\$ bracket regarding annual household earnings. The wealthiest class is mostly represented by the 35-54 age group. Concomitantly, roughly 70% of all cross-country skiers are workers, aged for the most part (65%) between 35 and 54. These workers have high levels of education, 71% having university degrees. It should be noted that more than half of cross-country skiers (52%) have a full-time job. From the proportion in a stable employment situation, close to three out of five fall into the category of professionals.

Regarding their household situation, 78% of cross-country skiers are in a relationship. The proportion of childless couples gathers two cross-country skiers out of five (43%), although more than a third (35%) share their home with kids (see Figure 1). Among those who have children, 40% have at least one aged between 7 and 12, and the proportion is the same for the 13 to 17 age bracket. It is interesting to note that young families (0-6 years) are not very present on ski slopes (29%). With regard to place of residence, skiers mainly come from large urban centers: Quebec and the surrounding region (23%), Montreal and its suburbs (20%). In lesser proportions, cross-country skiers also come from the regions of Montérégie (13%), Laurentians (9%), Eastern Townships (7%) and Lanaudière (7%). Only 3% of respondents come from other provinces in Canada, and 2% from the United-States.

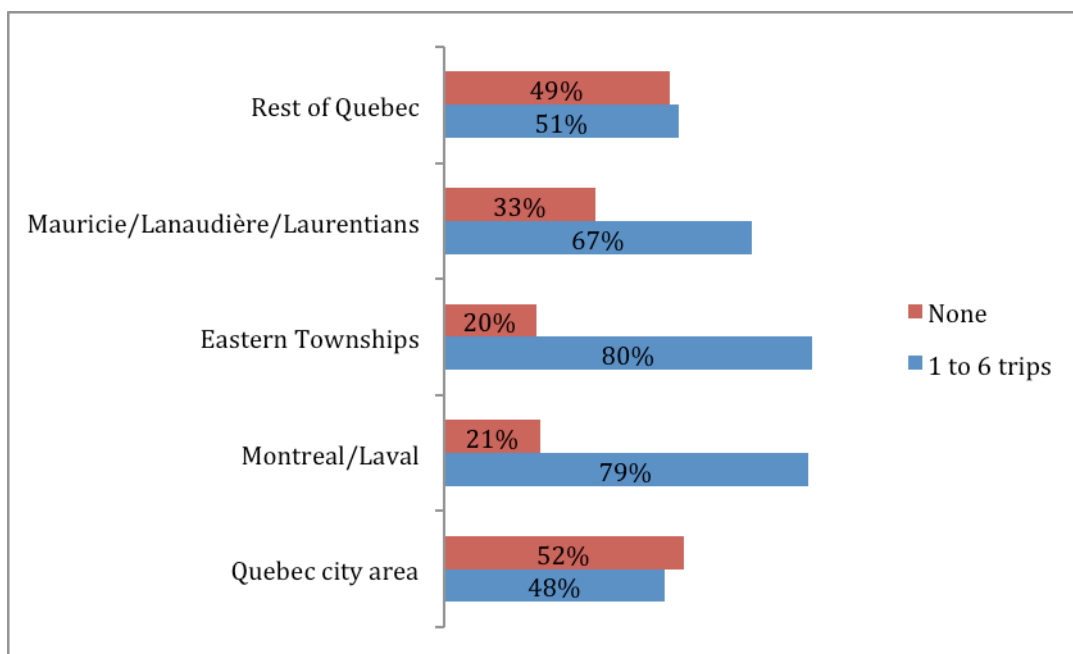
Figure 1: Distribution of respondents according to their family situation



Source : Transat Chair in Tourism

A rather large proportion (67%) of cross-country skiers travel, from once to six times a year, for reasons that include doing ski touring, snowshoeing or both activities. More than two-thirds are thus likely to seek lodging options, eat at restaurants and be interested in a variety of activities and services around the site. Moreover, people from Montreal and from the regions of Mauricie/Eastern Townships/Lanaudière/Laurentians travel more often than people from the region of Quebec (see Figure 2). This clientele may be interested in enjoying ski trails over extended periods of time since they are located further away from ski centers or confronted to poorer ski conditions.

Figure 2: Proportion of respondents who travel between 1 and 6 times, travel during which they will practice cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, or both, depending on their place of residence

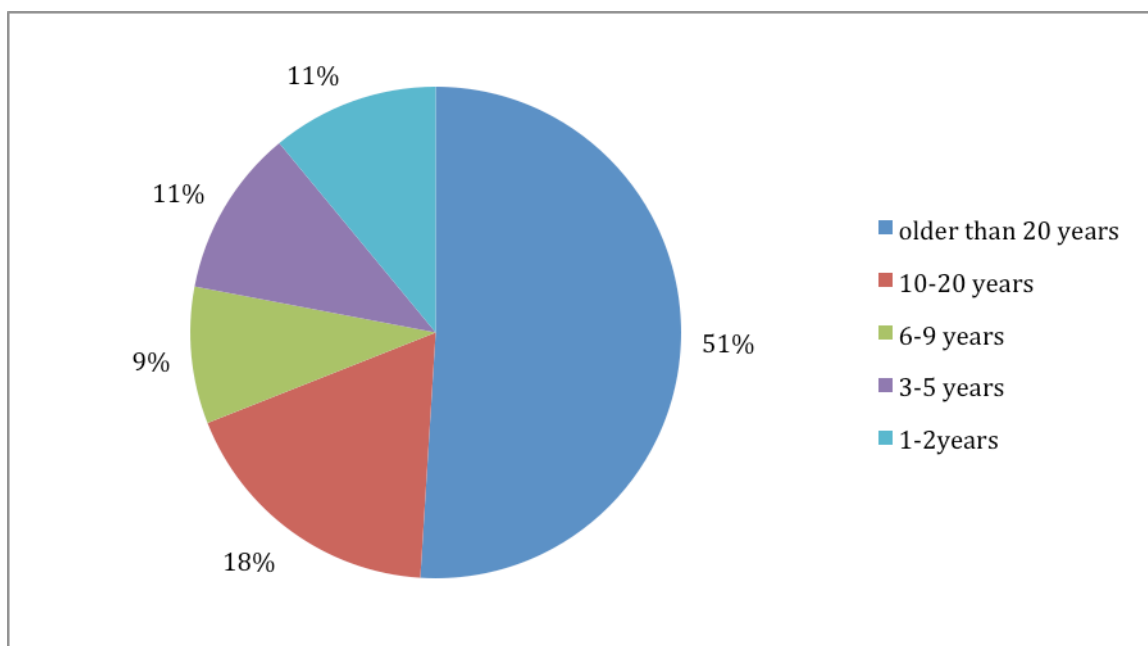


Source : Transat Chair in Tourism

2.2 Motivations and practice settings in ski touring

More than half (51%) of all skiers started over 20 years ago (see Figure 3). Although women (45%) and men (55%) are almost equally present over this 20 years of experience threshold, more women than men started skiing recently. A substantial proportion of respondents practice ski touring on a regular basis. In fact, 34% practice between 10 and 20 times a year, and 25% exceed that amount. Respondents who practice more than 20 times a year are naturally more willing than the others to pay for a ski pass, and many of them can be found in the region of Quebec (33%). Furthermore, they largely rate themselves as advanced (36%) and intermediate (42%) as opposed to beginner or expert. While women are numerous in the intermediate category (49%), the advanced one counts many men (40%).

Figure 3: Distribution of respondents according to their experience of ski touring



Source : Transat Chair in Tourism

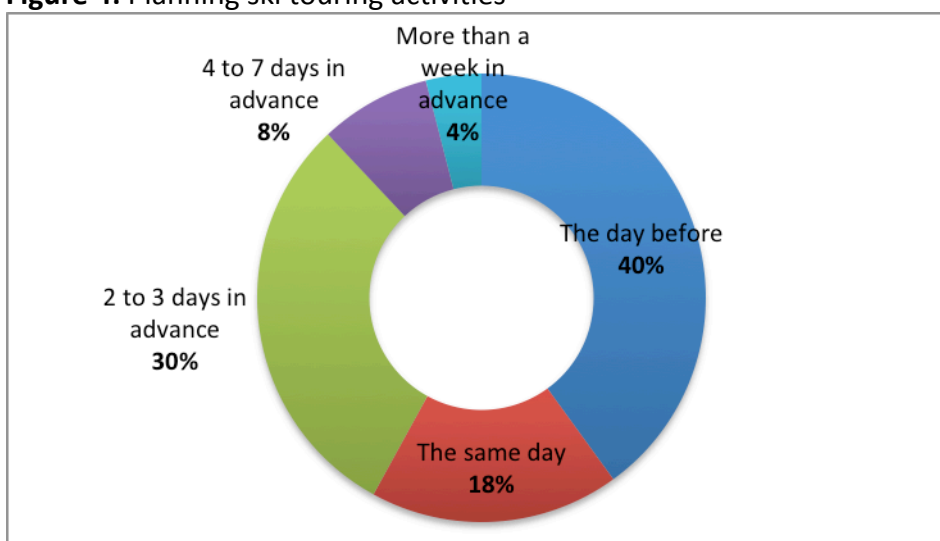
While cross-country skiers, winter walkers and snowshoers prefer exercising as a couple and with friends, skate skiers, on the other hand, are mostly solitary (55%). Nordic skiing stands out since it mostly attracts people eager to explore new regions in the company of friends. Furthermore, the proportion of cross-country skiers aged between 25 and 34 who prefer exercising as a couple is fairly high (67% of the latter would only practice in the presence of the loved one). Otherwise, outdoor enthusiasts who only ski as a couple are mostly in the 45+ age group. In fact, skiers likely to practice as a couple are mostly in the 25-34 age bracket, even in the case of skate skiing which is usually a solitary activity.

Regarding the main motivations behind the practice of ski touring, several key distinctions can be noted linked to the types of practice. Doing sports and staying fit are the prevalent goals for skate skiers and cross-country skiers, while other activities are more about connecting with nature and doing an outdoor activity. Training in order to master the intricate techniques of the sport appeals to skate skiers, who are also more willing to join races and competitions. As they practice alone, they exert themselves physically more than other skiers and do not require very large trails. This suggests that they will likely enjoy the challenge of facing a broad variety of ski destinations and trails. Natural views and landscapes are sought-after by all skiers for contemplation purposes, although it seems less important to skate skiers. The desire to explore new regions often brought forward by Nordic skiers, and the opportunity to enjoy diverse local landscapes and views are without a doubt key components in planning ski outings.

Among the key elements in planning ski touring activities, ski conditions deserve a fair share of attention. In fact, this factor is ranked of higher importance than temperature

and partners to ski with. This goes to show the importance of media in communicating weather forecasts and information related to ski conditions upon which skiers strongly base their decisions. Since it is a deciding factor for half of the respondents, particularly from Quebec and Montreal/Laval, promoters in rural areas should consider accurate communication through the media as a priority. As a matter of fact, planning ski touring activities is something two respondents out of five do one day ahead, and one out of five the very same day (see figure 4). This suggests that skiers generally hold their final decision until they can get a clear picture of the weather forecast, which highlights the importance for regions to promote favorable information when it applies (temperature, skiing conditions, etc.). It should be noted however that 30% of all respondents plan two or three days ahead of the activity and 12% take even longer to think it through (more than 4 days).

Figure 4: Planning ski touring activities



Source : Transat Chair in Tourism

2.3 Degrees of satisfaction and key attributes linked to practice destinations

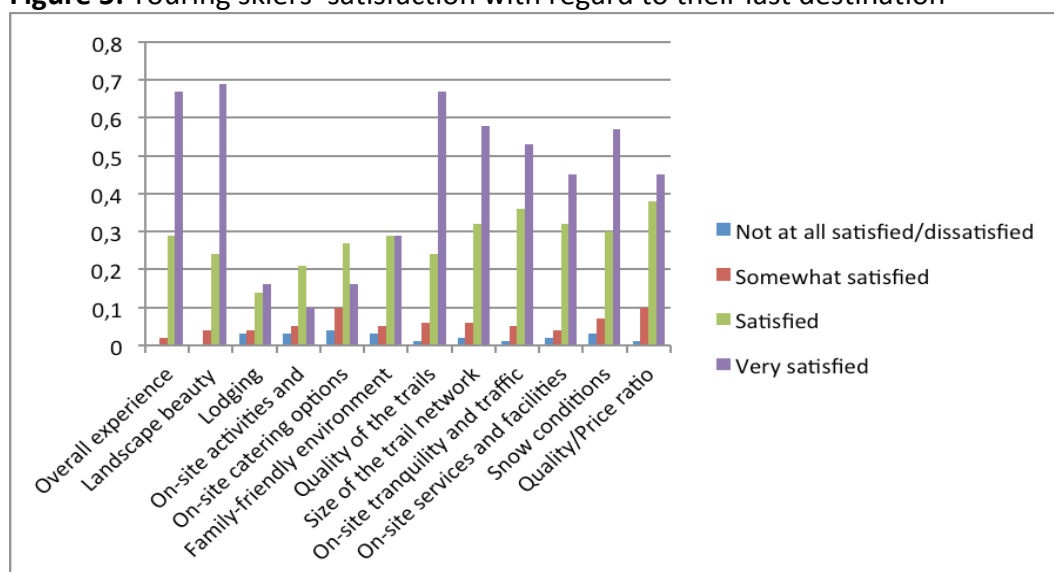
With regard to their last destination choice, it appears respondents base their decision on a wide range of aspects. They naturally highly value the network of mechanically groomed trails (60%), the quality of the tracks (57%) as well as their length (40%). Given their importance, these should be considered the three main factors that skiers consider when selecting ski destinations. More than 63% also value the degree of difficulty attached to the slopes (important to very important). This suggests that variety is well sought-after by touring skiers, allowing for different physical challenges depending on interests and experience levels. Beginners and experts alike should be able to find a suitable challenge in the trail network and progress on a variety of trail levels.

Other than trail-related aspects, which ensure positive skiing experiences and adequate physical challenges, close to 80% are sensitive to the beauty of on-site landscapes

while 57% seek tranquility around the site. Moreover, 64% were selective about getting a good quality/price ratio. As far as on-site services are concerned, 44% looked for equipment rentals, lockers and waxing rooms. Nearby lodging options were considered by 22% while getting a family-friendly environment was sought-after by 25%. Shelters and long hiking trips were considered by 23%. It is interesting to note that getting healthy food from quality catering services was rated important by 26%, bypassing basic catering services by 9%. Site location (distance from home, public transit availability) matters to 48%. Finally, minor factors as rated by touring skiers include: equipment rentals, on-site activities and entertainments and opportunities for off-piste skiing.

Satisfaction levels related to the site are usually very high according to the criteria that were suggested to the respondents (see figure 5). However, some elements could be improved, and in some case appear inadequate. From all the skiers who ate at an on-site restaurant or fast-food restaurant during their last outing (57%), close to one out of seven reported being unsatisfied or discontent. Moreover, satisfied respondents (27%) were more numerous than very satisfied ones (16%) on this catering issue. It should be noted that 26% were looking for a healthy, high-quality option when planning their activity. This suggests that there are some unmet needs in the current offer. Regarding on-site entertainments and activities, from 39% who took some time to enjoy them, 8% reported poor satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Here again, a more substantial proportion reported being satisfied (21%) rather than very satisfied (10%). However, it should be noted that this is not a very significant element of consideration during the planning phase according to our results. Among those who travelled during their last outing and therefore spent at least one night away (37%), the majority was very pleased with their experience, but 7% left with a mixed or negative opinion. This discontent could be linked to pricing, services, customer welcome standards, distance or even to the offer or experience as a whole.

Figure 5: Touring skiers' satisfaction with regard to their last destination³



Source : Transat Chair in Tourism

3. Discussion

As a result of the factor and cross analysis conducted in this study, it is possible to identify certain profiles among touring skiers and connect these findings to our literature review. First, it is interesting to note that 34% of our sample fall into the category of regular touring skiers who gather at least 20 years of experience with 10 to 20 annual outings. As it appears, the latter are very experienced and enjoy a certain 'routine' when selecting their practice sites. They view themselves as either intermediate or advanced and practice for the most part alone or with friends of similar experience. Most of them are retirees who practice for sporting purposes, to stay fit or to enjoy an outdoor activity. Essential factors to them include difficulty, variety and quality relating to the trails, as well as weather forecasts, which are highly valued when planning their winter activities. As a result, this profile typically chooses sites for practical purposes linked to individual motivations. In this case, the sense of place appears as a form of interpretation where the user seeks as much control over the environment as possible, and where the link between them is limited to functional purposes (Moser and Weiss, 2003; Gieryn, 2000). This rather individualistic and utilitarian interpretation of a place does not however mean that the experience provided by a given place and its inherent qualities are dismissed. These elements are indeed considered by the latter, but based on tangible considerations as suggested by Blackshaw (2010) and Soubrier (2000). In this profile, the search for territorial meaning as described by Bédard (2012) is real but attached to sports performance and physical implications as opposed to social and tourism aspects.

On another note, 19% of our sample practice ski touring in the context of a leisure trip. They see themselves as intermediate, prefer to do this activity as a couple and have over 20 years of experience. The vast majority of these respondents are 55 of age and older. On-site amenities and high-quality environments are particularly meaningful to them. Although they primarily practice in order to stay fit, other important motivations include: enjoying natural landscapes, visiting unexplored regions and observing wildlife. As for the site itself, these skiers are very selective about tourism and landscape attributes. Therefore, selecting the perfect destination is at the heart of planning their ski touring trip. These elements draw upon the search for authenticity as sought-after by certain tourists. They also connect with Cohen and al. (2014) and Smith's (2015) statements regarding the desire to bond with local values and to get an authentic and distinctive representation of a place. However, it is important to note a certain paradox here as these skiers are also interested in on-site amenities (lodging, catering, other services). This is consistent with Smith (2015), Cohen and al. (2014) and Bédard's (2012) conclusions regarding the hard task left to tourism promoters who need to find the right balance between maintaining the local natural and built heritage of a site and developing various modern amenities. This analytical finding shows that place connects with norms and regulations in these skiers' views, blending the natural and the implemented together.

Next, 17% of all respondents are ski skating enthusiasts who renew their ski pass every year. They rate themselves as advanced or expert, practice more than 10 times a year, either alone or with friends of similar experience, and are for the most part men aged between 35 and 54 in a relationship (with or without children). They are specifically selective regarding trail quality (mechanically groomed, marked, etc.), large trail networks, degrees of difficulty and advantageous pricing for their season pass. It appears that this group mainly, or even only seeks the sporting appeal in this activity. In fact, their four main motivations are staying fit, doing sports, practicing ski techniques and taking part in competitions or races. Unlike the first profile of skiers (regular touring skiers) there is in this case (17% of our sample) an individual and functional representation and appropriation of the place linked to sports performance. In this case, place allows more than personal growth, it opens the door to self-transcendence. This connects with Hibbert and al. (2013) and Soubrier (2000) on immaterial and tangible considerations which guide participants as they choose their destination. Tourism considerations are, however, absent from this decision-making process where cognitive characteristics are prevalent, as suggested by Moser and Weiss (2003) and Gieryn (2000). The only territorial symbols, as defined by Smith (2015) and Bédard (2012), that these skiers take into consideration are linked to the trail difficulty levels and their associated prestige, which draws upon sports tourism aspects as well (Gibson, 2006).

It should also be noted that 16% of our sample enjoy ski touring as a family activity on a less regular basis (less than 10 times a year). They travel to the nearest ski centers or trail networks in their region. From a sociodemographic point of view, these respondents are mostly aged between 25 and 44, are in a relationship and have children 15 years old or younger. They consider themselves as beginners or intermediate in the practice of ski touring. As far as sites are concerned, accessibility and family-friendly environments are highly valued along with the possibility to rent ski equipment from a nearby facility. Their main motivations are doing sports, connecting with nature and enjoying a low cost activity in a neighboring environment. For this profile, tourism aspects regarding their destination reveal a distinct interest for local surroundings. The idea here seems to unite with an environment propitious to discoveries and positive sporting experiences. While on-site amenities to conciliate family concerns are prevailing, the quality of the environment is still important. Drawing upon Blackshaw (2010) and Soubrier's (2000) considerations, the potential of the site to provide positive experiences is of utmost importance and will determine the choice of destination. In other words, families will opt for a place regulated and running on a daily basis with traditional landscapes featuring winter sports (Smith, 2015; Bédard, 2012; Demers, 2007). Such place is therefore still connected with its natural origin, with just enough man-made transformations to guarantee a positive and secure family experience (Gieryn, 2000).

Finally, 14% of our sample are adepts of Nordic skiing. They practice on a regular basis (6 to 20 times a year), see themselves as intermediate or advanced skiers and have up to 10 years of experience or more. They practice with friends or as a group during multi-day stays. Regarding sociodemographic data, they have between 18 and 34 years

of age and are either alone or childless couples. In terms of practice environment, they mainly look for landscape beauty, on-site tranquility, large trail networks, opportunities for multi-day excursions and lodging options. Their predominant motivations are being in nature, enjoying natural landscapes, exploring new regions and observing wildlife. Considering our sample as a whole, this profile has an unmistakably higher interest for pleasing natural landscapes. This analytical conclusion is similar to Chartier (2013), Bédard (2012) and Crouch's (2000) statements regarding practice environments being also living environments and therefore expressing local significance. For these skiers, selecting and visiting a destination brings the dimension of place authenticity. Tourism aspects thus become less significant whereas experiencing and bonding with a true cultural, physical and social landscape rises in importance (Smith, 2015; Hibbert and al., 2013; Moser and Weiss, 2003). What this suggests is less rules and regulations, but an environment propitious to physical freedom, recreational imagery and fantasy with an inclusive potential for positive experiences (Smith, 2015; Cohen and al., 2014; Gravari-Barbas, 2013).

Conclusion

These findings and their related analysis partly confirm our study hypothesis. Indeed, it appears that experience and intensity in ski touring both influence the types of bonds that skiers will create with their practice environment on both social and identity levels. However, this situation is more complex than just a black or white division between persistent and casual skiers with associated degrees of identification. According to our findings, although many people share the same places, each individual perceives and conceives them differently. This conclusion draws upon Chartier (2013), Bédard (2012) and Crouch's (2000) observations regarding the symbolism of place, and is of central value in this study. What this suggest is that beyond profiles, each individual bonds with his environment according to past events and experiences, all the while searching for authenticity and identification. As pointed out by Crouch (2000), sociological dimensions are also decisive in this matter. Indeed, selecting the fitting destination is based on elements of pleasure and distance as some skiers prefer local and accessible environments.

In the light of these findings, it appears that skiers naturally bond with the places in which they practice. This will not be prevented by switching types of practice in the range of ski touring activities, nor by changing the settings of the activity. People will identify differently according to their motivations. For some, tangible and functional considerations are prevalent while others are motivated by natural characteristics and landscape attributes. Although each link leads to varied degrees of affective investment, all of this illustrates the complex relationship that one builds with his environment (Smith, 2015; Cohen et al., 2014; Moser and Weiss, 2003). Various degrees of mobility are also connected to this issue based on aspects of frequency, sports tourism and group influence (Smith, 2015; Biddle and al., 2015; Gibson, 2006). This study does not highlight confronting perspectives, realities and relations between people and places, but rather a complex system of connections involving preferences in ski touring activities and human motivations. What this suggests is that we should go

beyond profile classifications, and of course beyond homogenization, when considering skiers and the way they perceive, select and relate to their environment. Furthermore, even though multiple profiles of touring-skiers might be observed, there is no single conception of this activity that seems to be more important than the other. One can assume that the heterogeneity of Quebec's offer, combined with the vastness of the practice sites facilitate the presence of the different types of skiers. However, this heterogeneity does not necessarily imply a mixed-use of the sites. Rather, our study shows the existence of some territorial specialisations that are accepted by the participants, which refers to the perceptible social boundaries of the recreational sites mentioned by Vieille-Marchiset (2007). Finally, from a more pragmatic point of view, this study suggests needs and territorial and economical expectations concerning tourist reception and service offering which might help the reinforcement of recreational and tourism activities.

Several methodological limits should be pointed out. First, due to ethical considerations linked to confidentiality as imposed by funders, the data presented in this study were collected in the beginning of 2012. Therefore, conducting another study on this specific issue based on today's situation could indeed lead to different results. On another note, this research is based on a self-administered survey which does not guarantee respondents' identity as well as their understanding of each question. Also, respondents living outside the province are under-represented in this study, which undeniably impacts some of the findings. Finally, this research exclusively uses a quantitative approach and is therefore unable to deepen the understanding about some key elements. The use of complementary qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews, focus groups, etc.) would indeed bring additional light on this issue.

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Footnotes

1. More than 1.38 million Canadians, 466 000 of which are from Quebec, practice ski touring according to a study conducted in 2012 by the Print Measurement Bureau (PMB). This amount is estimated at 3.2 million for the same year in the United-States.

2. It is important to note that the terms 'ski touring' were purposefully chosen to regroup the three following practices: cross-country skiing, ski-skating and Nordic skiing (off-piste skiing). There are many alternative terms worldwide, but these gather the largest consensus in North America.

3. In some cases, total amounts do not reach 100% due to the fact that participants were not always able to provide an evaluation for all criteria.