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Specialised Centralities of Outdoor Sports: Global Hotspots, Modest Tourist Developments

Valérian Geffroy

- 1 Sport activities play an important part in tourism practices in rural and mountainous regions (Équipe MIT, 2005; Higham and Hinch, 2018), and are often perceived as a driver for the development or renewal of the territory (Debarbieux *et al.*, 2014). The phenomenon is therefore closely studied by territorial economy (Gumuchian and Pecqueur, 2007), and the public and professional debate is largely focused on the ways of turning these sport activities into a source of income and employment for territories (Derioz *et al.*, 2012; Perrin-Malterre, 2016). However, contemporary changes affecting tourism are reshaping the territories, weakening some organisational logics and generating others (Tuppen and Langenbach, 2021).
- 2 The aim of this article is to refine the understanding of the territorial settlement of outdoor sports as a tourist activity, by showing how these specialised activities single out places and develop them. In particular, the article proposes the notion of “specialised centrality” to designate those places that attract a tourist frequentation organised around a specific and niche sport activity. The article shows how these places can constitute (very) small autonomous clusters, but also how they can be integrated into more “generalist” or diversified tourist spaces, thus forming secondary centralities with their own spatialities.
- 3 Indeed, outdoor sport tourism creates various territorial configurations (Corneloup *et al.*, 2001; Mao, Corneloup and Bourdeau, 2003). The major sites, in terms of tourism volumes, are those that are structured by commercial offers targeted at a broad audience, in “nature” areas that are highly equipped and secured (Langenbach, 2016). Other centralities are more discreet; they can be described as “specialised” in that they are organised around sites of a particular sport, and are frequented specifically by the community of regular participants in this sport. Finally, in some other places, outdoor sport tourism is just one activity among others within diversified presential economies.

The article proposes to situate specialised centralities within these various territorial forms, in order to grasp more clearly the specific contribution of outdoor sport tourism to the territorial and economic construction of tourist space. The article suggests that this contribution is often modest in terms of presential economy; however, analysing these specialised practices, in their material as well as ideal or symbolic dimensions, gives keys to understand the powerful values attributed to certain places and spaces by certain practices, and the concrete, local effects of this valorisation.

Tourism Spaces of Outdoor Sports: State of the Research

Sites and Grounds of Outdoor Sports

- 4 Outdoor sports are first and foremost localised by their sites. The latter are even a defining element: outdoor sports are those practised outside, in non-standardised, little transformed environments, and therefore environments perceived and valued as “natural” (Boutroy, 2007; Fletcher, 2014; Brookes, 2001). The site is “the basic spatial reference”, “defined essentially by physical, hydrographic and climatic features that determine its suitability as a support for sport practice” (Bourdeau, 2003, p. 60). The various practices or modes of practice create sites with very different geometries and dimensions (Figure 1). Some sites are “point-like”, of very small dimensions, such as the climbing site; other sites are rather linear, such as mountain rivers suitable for kayak navigation; finally, in some rare practices, the sites cover vast areas, up to regional dimensions, more or less structured by itineraries—cross country flying is a case where the potential space of practice is particularly unconstrained.

Are Outdoor Sport Sites Tourism Destinations?

- 5 Outdoor sports are involved in tourism in two main ways: as a one-off activity for non-experts, i.e. people who do engage in the sport in a self-sufficient manner; and as the main or sole object of the stay of regular and self-sufficient sport enthusiasts. Here I will distinguish between these two types of tourism by talking about “general public” and “specialised” sport tourism. The relationships between the sites and the spatialities of the tourists are very different in these two cases. For general public tourism, outdoor sports are one of the attractions in the choice of a tourist “destination”, i.e. a place or region to which one goes and which one visits during a stay. Sport sites are therefore not destinations in themselves. On the other hand, specialised sport tourism is the result of a precise selection and hierarchy of different sites by outdoor sports: some, considered particularly beautiful or interesting, attract people who come to stay in the area specifically to practise their sport in these sites.
- 6 The question of outdoor sports sites as tourist destinations can be first approached through a pragmatic lens, i.e. based on practices, in both their material and immaterial dimensions (Stock, 2015; Everts, Lahr-Kurten and Watson, 2011). In this perspective, the site is, roughly speaking, the terrain practised during the day, or between two motorised trips; it is the place in which one settles, or which one moves across, for a period of at least a few hours. The destination, or “sport-tourism place”, can also be defined by a material, concrete characteristic: it includes all sites that can be reached

within one day from the base of the stay, usually the accommodation. Such a definition may cover vast areas, for example the Haute-Durance basin for kayaking (Figure 1). However, a destination, and in particular a “*haut lieu*” (Debarbieux, 1993) or “hotspot” of outdoor sport tourism, is also distinguished by its powerful appeal, rooted in ideas and myths specific to the community of practice (Ponting and McDonald, 2013; Moularde and Weaver, 2016; Mao and Corneloup, 2005). It is only by understanding the particular way in which each sport practice values places and “plays with space” (Geffroy, 2017) that the attraction power of outdoor sport tourism destinations can be understood.

Territorial Configurations of Outdoor Sport Tourism

- 7 To understand the territorial materialisation of outdoor sport tourism, it is essential to distinguish between general public tourism and specialised tourism, between sport sites and sport tourism destinations. The issue of territorial development has been a major focus of social science research on outdoor sports, particularly in geography. Bourdeau (2003; 1995) notes that outdoor sports do not fit into the “model of the resort [...] as the [...] legitimate way of locating and organising tourism”, and that outdoor sport tourism develops in a dispersed manner (Bourdeau, 1995), thus giving little ground to proactive territorial development policies. Various forms of “territorialisation” (Mao, Corneloup and Bourdeau, 2003) are nevertheless implemented, depending on the interests involved, the power relationships and conventions between local stakeholders, and the cultural valuations of places and practices (Corneloup *et al.*, 2001); these lead to various degrees of exploitation of the “territorial resources” identified by sport practices (Langenbach, 2016). These sport communities are often characterised by cultural codes and practices that value marginality, or avoidance of commercial practices (wild camping, self-sufficient practice rather than being guided, etc.) and therefore limit the economic profit that can be made from them, even if this culture of marginality has tended to fade since the 1990s at least, gradually integrating these forms of tourism into the commercial tourist offer (Rickly-Boyd, 2016; Bourdeau, 2003; Corneloup *et al.*, 2001). Langenbach (2016) shows that there is still a territorial decoupling between general public and specialised sport tourism, and identifies in Ardèche “tourist centralities”, where the commercial offer is concentrated, distinct from “outdoor sport peripheries”, with numerous sport sites but a limited tourist economy. He identifies government intervention as the main factor in the development of tourist centralities, whereas peripheries are rather “self-regulated”, i.e. the outdoor sport spaces are mainly “invented” by their regular users.
- 8 Research on outdoor sport tourism still lacks a detailed exploration of the relationship between the practices of sport communities, which value certain places to the point of making them major destinations of specialised sport tourism, and the territorial impact of this attractiveness. It is this gap that this article seeks to fill.

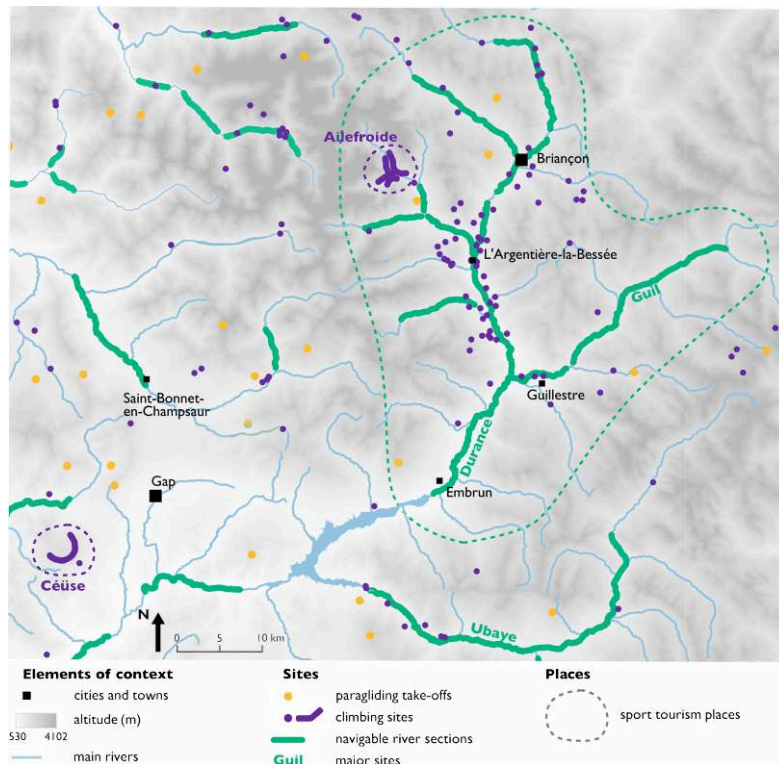
Methods

- 9 The article is based on empirical material collected during field research carried out in several major hotspots of outdoor sport tourism (Geffroy, 2020). These are some of the most famous and attractive places for three different sports: whitewater kayaking

(upper Durance basin, France), paragliding (Lake Annecy and Saint-André-les-Alpes, France) and sport climbing (Verdon, France, and Kalymnos, Greece). The analyses in this article are based on all these case studies; however, for the sake of synthesis, the discussion here is mainly illustrated by one of the areas studied, the Haute-Durance basin (Figure 1). A major destination for kayak tourism, but also suitable to the practice of a wide range of other sport activities, the Haute-Durance is a major centre of outdoor sport tourism on a European scale—and is more generally a highly tourism-oriented territory (Direction départementale des territoires des Hautes-Alpes, 2011). This diversity is reflected in the spatial and territorial forms of tourism, from winter sports resorts to remote hamlets and small urban centres. The network of outdoor sport sites is also dense and diverse, with small sites of local interest as well as world-class sites, and major centres for commercial, general public outdoor sport activity. The case of the Haute-Durance shows various types of outdoor sport tourism specialised centralities, and various forms of territorial integration of these centralities.

- 10 The description and analysis of the tourism territories are based on various field surveys and observations carried out in 2017 and 2018, completed and updated in 2022 by consulting databases and tourist information sources. However, most of the empirical work consisted of a campaign of interviews and participant observation conducted in 2017 and 2018. In the major hotspots indicated above, I targeted people who stayed there on a tourism trip expressly dedicated to the practice of sport, and I met them on the sport sites or in the accommodation close to these sites. I conducted 76 semi-structured interviews, about 15 per study site, sometimes with several people, for a total of 120 people interviewed. The questions focused on the relationship to the practice sites and their valorisation, as well as on the patterns of mobility and action in this form of tourism. The interview thus allowed for a detailed understanding of the way in which the places and environments of outdoor sport tourism are practised. Drawing from a sum of individual experiences, this approach allows viewing sport tourism places through the practices that define them. Quotes from these interviews will give some insights into these practices.
- 11 In the following section, the analysis of major hotspots of outdoor sport tourism through the notion of *centrality* will allow exploring the factors of attraction to such places, while highlighting the particularities—and limitations—of the tourist territories formed around these sites.

Figure 1: The Haute-Durance, a multi-sports region that hosts several global centralities of outdoor sport tourism



BDALTI-IGN, BDCARTHAGE-IGN, , ODbL, paraglidingearth.com, , field surveys. Adapted from Geffroy, 2020.

Specialised Centralities and Tourism Isolates

Specialised Centralities and Outdoor Sport Tourism *Hauts Lieux* (Major Hotspots)

- 12 The centrality of a place for the practice of outdoor sports, which at the highest degree (the “haut lieu”, or major hotspot) attracts tourists on a global scale, is based on several features, several place “qualities”.
- 13 Firstly, the “substratum” of the quality of a site for an outdoor sport is the suitability of the terrain for the said sport, which may be based on topography, hydrology or weather conditions—i.e. a precise combination of biophysical features. There are therefore primary conditions: a river and sufficient water for kayaking, a rock face for climbing, an elevation drop and areas suitable for take-off and landing for paragliding, for instance. But outdoor sport sites are also distinguished by many other more precise, sometimes subtle, material criteria, which lead to a hierarchy in terms of interest and aesthetics. This explains that these communities, especially in the specialised media, produce lists of the “most beautiful sites” (Geffroy, 2020, p. 174), which partly overlap with the most frequented hotspots. These criteria are, for example: for kayaking, the quantity of water but also its colour, the length of the navigable sections, the steepness and the apparent “wildness” of the river; for climbing, the solidity and purity of the rock, the verticality, the colours of the cliff. Many of these criteria play a role both in

terms of their suitability for the material aspects of the sport (fluidity, safety, sport difficulty, originality of movements, sensations, etc.) and in terms of landscape values (some of which are widely shared with the general public, others which are fairly specific to the sport community). The suitability of a place is also assessed in terms of the potential for the specific sport activity, i.e. the number of sites or routes that can be practised within a limited area. This is one of the arguments regularly put forward to praise the Haute-Durance, as in the case of Antonin who is ecstatic about the abundance of rivers that can be run in a kayak: “It’s immense, it’s huge, there are mountains everywhere, there’s an immense valley with lots of little valleys that go everywhere. It’s a paradise.”

- 14 A sport tourism global hotspot is also distinguished by its reputation, its symbolic or mythical value—this is a central element of the definition of the *haut lieu* (Debarbieux, 1993), which refers to the religious domain. The terms “myth”, “mythical” or “Mecca” are regularly used in the discourse of the interviewees explaining why they came to these places (Geffroy, 2020, p. 187). This status is linked to the frequentation by members of the community of practice and (social) media coverage, and to the attribution of positive values and to circulation of these values within the community (Ponting and McDonald, 2013). Attraction is therefore not only practical, but also refers to the values that are attached to places. The mythical places of outdoor sports remain of course materially adequate places for the practice of sport, but their reputation also has to do with the historical dimension, in particular for the places associated with the “birth” of the practice; the fame can also relate to contemporary sport performances, figures or events. Their reputation is largely maintained by the community (Woermann, 2012), as well as by the specialised media; sports hotspots are rarely the subject of real tourism marketing strategies.
- 15 These different factors of centrality lead to another: the capacity of these hotspots to bring together the sport community. The community “materialises” in such places, it physically exists there. The sociability of sport tourism hotspots is nourished by “entre-soi” and mutual recognition, but also by encounters and cosmopolitanism (Thorpe, 2014, chapter 7). Such social interactions are almost invariably cited as one of the major factors of attraction, complementary to, or even as important as, the sport qualities of the sites (Geffroy, 2020, p. 192). Sport communities can also materially mark territories, particularly those where they are dominant: kayakers in L’Argentière-la-Bessée, or the climbing community in La Palud-sur-Verdon, make up the bulk of the clientele of certain accommodation and food venues. These places are therefore commonly identified as establishments “for” the community, and sometimes go so far as to display it, with names or decorations referring to the practice of sport. The capacity of places to bring the community together is also linked, on a practical level, to their relative proximity to population centres and transport infrastructures, but also to other tourist infrastructures and centres. Some sites may be mythical, particularly beautiful or particularly abundant in sport potential, and yet constitute very limited centralities due to their remoteness, or their distance from the main countries or regions of the sport community—outdoor sport tourism still remains overwhelmingly an activity of the wealthy Western world. On the contrary, kayaking in the Haute-Durance benefits from its location relatively close to the main European origin countries of sport tourism participants, from the presence of several towns and cities (Briançon, L’Argentière-la-Bessée, Guillestre), and from a fairly well-developed and diversified tourist infrastructure. Valleys such as the Gyrone and the Guisane thus find in

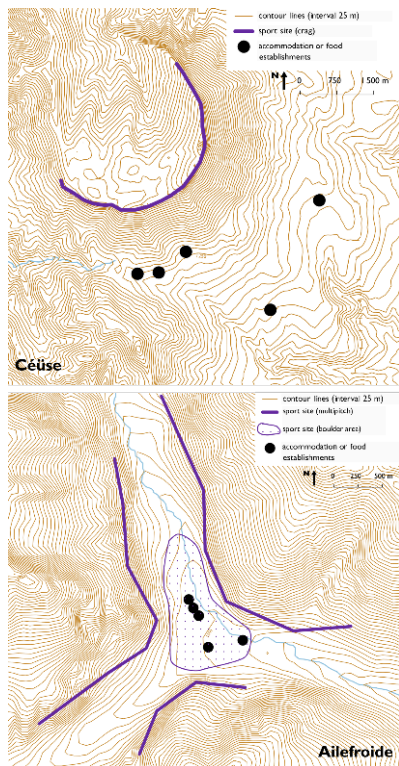
kayaking one of the relays, in spring and summer, of the winter sports activity, which was the source of the main tourist developments—such as the resorts of Serre-Chevalier and Puy-Saint-Vincent.

- 16 These components of centrality combine to attract, for example, Virginia and Pablo, a Uruguayan paragliding couple, to the shores of Lake Annecy (Geffroy, 2020, pp. 189 ff). Pablo describes the place as the “roots of paragliding” and a “free flight paradise”. Coming from a country where the sport is little developed, he says he has “dreamed all his life” of coming to fly in Annecy. Virginia is also delighted to find the sport community and its friendly atmosphere, comparing it to a “family”. Their example thus testifies to Annecy’s status as an international free flight centrality, which is evident within the community.

Isolated Centralities and their Modest Economic Impact

- 17 However, the status of major centrality that such places have within the sport community does not necessarily translate into a major tourist centrality; indeed, the communities in question remain small in relation to tourist activity in general, as their sports remain niche activities. Thus, hotspots of outdoor sports often only have a modest impact on the territory and its economic activities. This conclusion is supported in particular by the study of “isolated” sport tourism centralities. Such places are located away from other tourist centres, and their tourist economy is essentially dependent on a specific sport site and a specific sport community. As the community consists mainly of self-sufficient sport participants, there is little to no demand for supervision, and thus the economy is mostly limited to a handful of accommodation and food establishments, i.e. basic tourist services. Areas around the climbing sites of Céüse (municipality of Sigoyer) and Ailefroide (municipality of Vallouise-Pelvoux) are examples of isolated sport tourism centralities. The maps (Figure 2) show that in both cases a campsite provides most of the accommodation, supplemented by 2 to 3 guest houses and/or hotels; as for eating facilities, there is only a recently opened pizzeria in Céüse and a fast-food stand in Ailefroide. Despite their overall attractiveness—Céüse in particular is widely recognised within the climbing community as one of the most beautiful cliffs in the world, and therefore one of the most desirable climbing destinations—these isolated centralities remain very modest tourist centres.

Figure 2: Céüse and Ailefroide, two global climbing centralities of modest tourist dimensions



OpenDEM ODbL, SRTM, Office de Tourisme des Hautes-Alpes. Production: Geffroy

- 18 There are few counter-examples, i.e. places where the number of visitors coming for a specific sport is sufficiently high to develop a substantial tourist offer, of the order of several dozen accommodation and food establishments. For sport climbing, Kalymnos, in Greece, is one of the rare places in the world where an actual “climbing resort” has developed around a plethora of sites accessible to a wide variety of skill levels—a decisive, though not sufficient, characteristic to attract substantial tourist numbers. Nowhere in France, despite the presence of many of the world’s most renowned climbing sites, is there a centre on the scale of Kalymnos. Indeed, this degree of development is generally only achieved by multi-sport tourist centres, the canonical example of which would be Chamonix, a major centre for mountaineering, skiing, but also climbing, paragliding or even trail running. Specialised centralities of outdoor sports can indeed constitute autonomous centres, but their development remains generally very limited. On the other hand, as explained in the following section, they can be integrated into “generalist” tourist territory, while maintaining their own spatialities and specialised activities.

Tourism Territories and Integration of Specialised Centralities

- 19 For the most part, the economy of outdoor sport tourism is based on the general public activity, and consists in particular of professional guiding activities. The largest part of the income of paragliding schools is generated by tandem flights (Perrin-Malterre, 2007), and the largest part of the activity of white-water instructors consists of rafting, canorrafting or hydrospeed tours (Marsac, 2012)—all activities accessible to a large public. Although we have noted above that there is a certain decoupling between the

general public and specialised sport tourism sites, this is not always the case: some specialised sport tourism hotspots are also major spots for the general public, such as the Ubaye river (Figure 1) for kayaking and rafting, or the paragliding take-offs of Talloires and Montmin above Lake Annecy; there, it is mainly to this second category of practice that the tourist economic activity is due, and not to the status of *hauts lieux* that they have within the passionate sport community.

- 20 When specialised centralities are so integrated in a generalist or multi-sport tourist area, they may appear to lose their relevance in terms of territorial organisation. For example, the town of Guillestre is a small tourist centre which benefits from a variety of activities: holiday residence, hiking, heritage visits and a variety of mountain sports. Kayakers are present there in fairly large numbers, but their share in the clientele of the many accommodation and restaurant establishments is hard to assess. However, specialised centralities remain decisive in the spatial and temporal organisation of outdoor sport tourism practices, which remain polarised by the sport sites and leave little room for other activities in the tourist stay. In Guillestre, for instance, the presence of kayakers is due in particular to the proximity of the navigable sections of the Guil river. Asking the participants of outdoor sport tourism allows to estimate their propensity to engage in activities other than their sport during their stay (Geffroy, 2020, p. 338 ff.). Most of the participants state that their stay is centred on the sport and its locations, and that other activities have only a secondary role, confined to “rest” days or days of poor conditions, when they are not completely ignored. Georgia and Wilma, English kayakers interviewed in L’Argentière-la-Bessée, explain that they need to “make the travelling worthwhile”, which means paddling as much as possible during the week of their stay, and that they only stop when their arms are “hanging off” or when they are “too tired”. Even among those who say they engage in non-sport activities, these are generally clearly subject to the imperative of not interfering with the main sport. However, the insertion of *hauts lieux* in important tourist centres increases the propensity to engage in other tourist practices. The oldest among the participants, or those accompanied by their families who do not practise the sport, favour places that offer a wide range of activities, as in the case of Agatha in Kalymnos, who appreciates the “combination of climbing and non-climbing activities for the rest of [her] family”.

Tourism, Territories and centralities: Refining the Approach

- 21 The notion of *specialised centrality* complements the concepts and typologies of tourism spaces (Équipe MIT, 2002) by combining criteria of territorial forms and practices of places. As a spatial concentration of built facilities and of the sporting community, mainly around accommodation, specialised centrality is distinct from *dispersed tourism* (Bourdeau, 1995). Outdoor sports sites are certainly dispersed and largely independent of land planning efforts, and can, of course, accommodate itinerant or ‘day-tripper’ tourism. But some of them, mainly the *hauts lieux*, form sport tourism destinations and small centres of activity—these are the specialised centralities. They differ from *tourist resorts*, although they share a specialisation in one activity, in that they only attract a niche activity, and not a tourist practice which is widespread in the general population, such as beach holidays or winter sports. The specialised centrality is therefore

generally smaller, both spatially and economically, than the resort. However, like the resort, it comprises permanent built facilities, which distinguishes it from the *tourist spot* (Stock, Coëffé and Violier, 2017, p. 397), a place identified by a specific group for a specific practice, but without permanent establishment. The specialised centrality may be isolated, forming in this case a clearly distinct tourist place; or inserted in a tourist resort or even in an urban centre. In this second case, the specialised centrality does not constitute a distinct territorial form, but remains a secondary centrality with specific spatialities, in relation to the site or sites of practice on which it depends.

- 22 Stock (2017) calls for the application of the concept of centrality, derived from urban theory, to the field of tourism. He argues that it allows to free the analysis from the structuralist model of urban central places, and to consider that places are central according to the way in which they are inhabited—through residence and daily work, or through temporary accommodation and leisure, etc. If considering tourist centralities allows us to de-centre the analysis from the organisation of the territory by urban centres, considering specialised tourist centralities allows us to de-centre from the organisation of the tourist territory by main centres (urban centres, towns, resorts). In both cases, the reading of space is refined by differentiating practices, and by admitting that different practices construct different places; in this case, each sport practice defines its own perimeters and its own spatialities. Specialised tourist centralities also invite us to understand attractiveness at different scales and according to different audiences: outdoor sport tourism can indeed create centralities of global attraction for a specific community of practice, but of little importance within the urban network or the regional tourism space.
- 23 Specialised centralities allow us to observe one of the ways in which tourism participates in the presential economy (Pecqueur and Talandier, 2011). This economic sphere depends essentially on the attractiveness of territories, both for residents and tourists. Taking into account specialised centralities makes it possible to grasp the precise qualities of places that attract particular, more or less temporary, more or less concentrated presences. Of course, places do not attract tourists without a certain amount of valorisation work by local actors, which may be called *development* or *territorialisation* (Mao and Corneloup, 2005; Mao, Corneloup and Bourdeau, 2003); but thinking in terms of the presential economy makes it possible to grasp the challenge of valuing presences that are due to a territorial resource, rather than focusing on the means of *developing* an activity. In the perspective of the sustainability of the presential economy, specialised centralities have the benefit of being relatively autonomous in their valorisation by a community and a specific practice, and can rely on a certain loyalty linked to the consubstantial relationship between the community, the practice and the resource. On the other hand, specialised centralities have the disadvantage of a limited potential for the development of alternative tourist activities—unless, of course, they succeed in attracting other practices, and thus diversifying the tourist centrality. The specialised centrality evokes a model of tourism economy that is intermediate between the resort and dispersed tourism, relying on an archipelago of modest centralities and diverse activities, rather than on large-scale land development projects; and a model of tourism economy based on existing resources and a fine-tuned understanding of diverse leisure and travel practices.

Conclusion

- 24 The study of the specialised centralities of outdoor sport tourism thus contributes to the understanding of territorial forms of tourism, by highlighting how certain niche activities can maintain highly attractive, yet little developed, tourism isolates; and by showing how they can be inserted into more general tourist centralities while maintaining their own spatialities. The article demonstrates the value, for the geography of tourism and for territorial economy, to regard specialised centralities as a type of tourist place, autonomous or inserted, but always presenting specific spatialities and a specific frequentation. The concept encourages to ground the analysis in the practices of tourists in and with places, in order to grasp precisely the sources of the attractiveness of places, and the spatialities that result from the specialised practices of places, in this case outdoor sport tourism. In this way, the major importance and the global centrality of certain hotspots for specific communities can be grasped, whereas the perspective of territorial and tourist development at first sight only sees small centres with very limited activity and little influence on the tourist economy, or niche activities in a diversified tourist offer.
- 25 While large-scale tourism development programmes, fuelled by the resort model, have shown their limits and have produced a number of destinations that are now weakened (Tuppen and Langenbach, 2021; Blázquez-Salom *et al.*, 2019), territorial tourism models are being reinvented. Rural areas in particular turn towards more modest and locally rooted forms of development, based on a diversity of place-based practices, as a privileged path towards the resilience of territories (Broegaard, 2022). According to Weed (2021, § 20), the destinations that succeed in developing “a specific interaction between activity, people and place that cannot be found elsewhere” are best positioned to sustain their activity while facing contemporary global transitions. Outdoor sport tourism, as a practice deeply rooted in unique places, generating *hauts lieux* and specialised tourist centres, can contribute to this multi-faceted valuation of territories.

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ABSTRACTS

The article introduces the notion of “specialised centrality” to denote places where tourist activity is based on a specific activity – outdoor sports in the case under study here. This notion offers a complement to territorial models of tourism, as it identifies small clusters that do not fit into either the category of tourist resorts or that of dispersed tourism. The notion takes into account both the spatial characteristics of these places and the way in which they are practised. This paper is based on field research carried out in major hotspots of outdoor sport tourism, and is illustrated in particular with the case of the Haute-Durance basin.

The different dimensions of specialised centralities are outlined: material qualities, symbolic values and community co-presence. Examples of particularly isolated specialised centralities are presented in order to emphasise their modest dimensions in terms of territorialisation and economic activity. However, the different ways in which specialised centralities are integrated in the tourist fabric and the territory are also evoked.

The article concludes by discussing how the perspective of centralities helps to refine the understanding of the relationship between tourist practices and territorial developments, and how the study of specialised centralities consolidates the analyses of the “presential” economy of tourist territories.

L'article propose la notion de « centralité spécialisée » pour désigner les lieux dont la fréquentation et l'activité touristique tiennent à une activité spécifique, ici les sports de nature. Cette notion vient compléter les modèles territoriaux du tourisme en qualifiant des petits pôles qui ne relèvent ni de la station touristique, ni du tourisme diffus. La notion tient compte à la fois des caractéristiques spatiales de ces lieux et de la façon dont ils sont pratiqués. Le propos s'appuie sur un ensemble d'enquêtes de terrain dans des hauts lieux du tourisme sportif de nature, et en particulier sur l'exemple du bassin de la Haute-Durance.

Les différentes dimensions des centralités spécialisées sont exposées : qualités matérielles, valeurs symboliques et co-présence communautaire. Des exemples de centralités spécialisées particulièrement isolées sont présentées, pour insister sur leurs dimensions modestes en termes d'implantation territoriale et d'activité économique. Mais leurs différentes modalités d'insertion dans le tissu touristique et dans le territoire sont également évoquées.

L'article conclut en montrant comment l'approche par les centralités permet d'affiner la compréhension de la relation entre pratiques touristiques et développements territoriaux, et comment l'étude des centralités spécialisées vient renforcer les analyses de l'économie présentielle des territoires touristiques.

INDEX

Keywords: specialised centrality, outdoor sport tourism, territory, presential economy

Mots-clés: centralité spécialisée, tourisme sportif de nature, territoires, économie présentielle

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