



Panel report:

La montagne : un territoire naturel, moderne et sportif ? Les acteurs de la modernité « touristico-sportive » du territoire alpin

Geneva, June 30th, 2022, 6th Swiss Congress of Historical Sciences

Organizers: Claude Hauser, Grégory Quin

Participants: Kurt Gritsch, Cédric Humair, Dorothée Fournier, Malek Bouhaouala

Comments by Jon Mathieu

Report by: Lucia Leoni, University of Fribourg

Over the course of the 20th century, the alpine natural landscapes were marked by various processes, including the development of tourism and of modern sports. This can be observed in the multiplication of ski lifts, hotels, and entire holiday resorts, as well as in the creation of new sport disciplines. The organizers of this panel aimed to deepen the understanding of the professional, environmental, and economic development of the alpine space by focusing on some of the emblematic actors of the modern mountain environment: ski instructors, tourist managers, and mountain railways.

The panel started with a presentation by **KURT GRITSCH** (Luzern), which focused on his research on the interactions between tourism and migration in the Grisons, Vorarlberg, and South Tyrol from the middle of the 19th century to the end of the First World War. Gritsch's thesis focuses on demonstrating that an increase of tourism led to an increase of migration, since there was a higher demand for labour in the hotel industry. The case study focuses on St. Moritz, Lech am Arlberg, and Merano, where initial investigations show that all three relied heavily on migrant labour. Skilled trades were often practiced by transnational migrants who moved across Europe working seasonal jobs. Instead, lower ranking employees mostly came from the region. Gritsch showed interesting statistics related to music professionals in the hotel industry and migration. Orchestra musicians and directors (*Kapellmeisters*) often did not have stable positions and required to be very mobile. Luciano Capelli was a *Kapellmeister* at the *Grandhotel Waldhaus* from 1900 to 1901, then became the orchestra director at the *Grand Hotel Pallanza* on the Lago Maggiore. This example shows just how much tourism and migration were linked during the Belle Epoque and how the growth of hotel industry influenced transnational interaction.

CEDRIC HUMAIR (Lausanne) continued the panel with a paper on mountain railway companies and their role in the development of tourism and sport. Thanks to the introduction of the rack railway and the funicular (and later of the electric traction of both technologies), from 1870 onward, the Swiss mountains became more and more accessible in terms of transportation, and thus to an increasing number of tourists. Between 1871 and 1913, forty-eight funiculars and sixteen rack railways were opened in Switzerland. In the presentation, Humair showcased Montreux and five mountain railways constructed in that period: the Territet-Montreux-Glion-Caux Funicular (1881-1897), the Territet-Glion Funicular (1897), the rack railway Glion-Rochers de Naye (1890), the



rack railway Montreux–Glion (1909), the funicular Territet–Mont–Fleuri (1908), and the funicular Les Avants–Sonloup (1910). With the help of a documentary clip from 1910, the audience was able to see how the first railway companies put their technologies at disposal of winter sports (skiing, sledging, bobsledding, etc.) at the instigation of hoteliers. Based on the database [Biolemano](#)¹, which contains biographical information on nearly 1800 stakeholders in the tourism sector of the area around Lake Geneva from 1762 to 1914, Humair showed how highly interconnected local politics, the hotel industry and railway companies were at the time, based on the individuals in these networks. The paper ended with an overview on the tension between technological development and the notion of nature at the beginning of the 20th century. Several touristic-technical projects were opposed with the idea to preserve the natural landscape of the Alps, such as a funicular to reach the summit of the Matterhorn.

A time jump brought us to the last contribution where **DOROTHEE FOURNIER** (Grenoble) presented a paper written with **MALEK BOUHAOUALA** (Grenoble) on the transformations of the role of ski instructors in the 21st century in France. The role of ski instructor appeared during the early 20th century, and the *Syndicat National des Moniteurs de Ski Français* (SNMSF)² was founded in 1946. Since then, the profession has changed due to various influences: the massification of tourism in the 1960s, the arrival of new disciplines (e.g., snowboarding in the 1980s), and climate change starting with the 2000s. This contribution is part of the [Dynamo](#) project which focuses on the capacity of the ski instructor profession to evolve and adapt when faced with changes and crises. The Dynamo project is part of the Labex [ITTEM](#) (Innovations and Territorial Transitions in Mountain Regions), a consortium that brings together researchers in the humanities and social sciences. The results presented during the presentation were based on a questionnaire survey sent to the almost 17.000 ski instructors belonging to the SNMSF during the winter season 2021–2022. The questions varied from their relationship to nature to in what ways they see the profession evolving. A few of the main conclusions of the survey (which received a 20% answer rate) are that 65% of instructors have no other qualifications, 24% feel concerned by climate change, and a high percentage believe that their profession will survive, but will have to adapt to new conditions, for example by skiing at a higher altitude or by having shorter winter seasons.

MATHIEU JON (Luzern) concluded the panel by giving a brief commentary on the three presentations. The panel was generally very original and clear, the title was coherent to the subject of the contributions. Jon pointed out how usually the local population did not oppose the 'invasion' of the mountains, since it was good for the economy and brought wealth to everyone involved. The concern of sustainability and environmentalism came at a much later stage and often from the outside. To conclude, it may be said with confidence that an undeniable tightknit relation exists between sports, tourism, and the hospitality industry in the alpine context from the end of the 19th century until today.

Lucia Leoni
Lucia.leoni@unifr.ch

¹ Biographical database BIOLEMANO, UNIL/FNS, <https://www.unil.ch/hist/Biolemano>

² National Union of French Ski Instructors.



Panel overview:

Gritsch, Kurt: Migration und Tourismus. St. Moritz, Lech am Arlberg und Meran von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs

Humair, Cédric: Les compagnies de chemin de fer de montagne, un acteur central du développement touristique-sportif en altitude

Fournier, Dorothée ; Malek, Bouhaouala: Dynamique de professionnalisation des moniteurs de ski et enjeux de transitions en montagne

This report is part of the infoclio.ch documentation of the 6th Swiss Congress of Historical Sciences: <https://infoclio.ch/fr/geschichtstage2022>

Citation: Mondoux, Leoni, Lucia: Panel: La montagne : un territoire naturel, moderne et sportif ? Les acteurs de la modernité « touristique-sportive » du territoire alpin, infoclio.ch-Tagungsberichte, 04.08.2022. Online: <https://www.doi.org/10.13098/infoclio.ch-tb-0274>.