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The microadventure: a new or renewed kind of sports tourism?

La microaventura: ¿una forma de turismo deportivo nueva o renovada?

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Abstract

This article examines microadventuring in light of existing sports tourism research. The methodology used was qualitative, and ten semi-structured interviews were conducted. Results show the microadventure to be a marketing concept in sync with the changes currently happening to nature sports in today's society, a fluidity that means it cannot be considered a new phenomenon. It is part of the changing relationship that humans have with nature, and how they use it for sporting purposes, and is rather an updating or revisiting of older forms of leisure in a contemporary context. Microadventurers have an idealised vision of nature, seeing it as a training ground filled with positive values, thus perpetuating representations. The self-organisation aspect and participant stances on ecology and image reflect how microadventuring aligns with the values and motivations of the most affluent sectors of the population.

Keywords: tourism; microadventure; sports tourism; eco-leisure.

Resumen

Este artículo examina la microaventura a la luz de la investigación existente sobre turismo deportivo. La metodología empleada fue cualitativa y se realizaron diez entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los resultados muestran que la microaventura es un concepto de marketing en sintonía con los cambios que experimentan los deportes de naturaleza en la sociedad actual y que impiden, por tanto, considerarla como un fenómeno nuevo. Forma parte de la relación cambiante que los humanos tienen con la naturaleza y de cómo la utilizan con fines deportivos, y es más bien una actualización o reinterpretación de antiguas formas de ocio en un contexto contemporáneo. Los "microaventureros" tienen una visión idealizada de la naturaleza, viéndola como un campo de entrenamiento lleno de valores positivos, lo que perpetúa sus representaciones e imaginarios. El aspecto de autoorganización y las motivaciones de los

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participantes en relación con la ecología y la imagen personal reflejan cómo la microaventura se alinea con los valores y motivaciones de los sectores más pudientes de la población.

Palabras clave: turismo; microaventura; turismo deportivo; ecoocio.

1. Introduction

When an emergent neologism moves from research field to mainstream and becomes relatively successful from a marketing and media perspective, it is important to deepen the scientific research conducted around it. In the period from 2017 to 2022, we identified various references to “microadventure” in well-known media outlets in France such as *Le Monde*, *Géo*, *Causette*, and *Le Figaro*. We also observed that more and more generalist tourism professionals were starting to use this terminology in their offers, and that a number of companies have specialised in this field. These factors suggest that the Euromonitor 2016 Global Trends Report was on point when it presented the microadventure as one of the most eagerly awaited consumer trends, especially since the activity has been further strengthened by the Covid crisis (Mackenzie and Goodnow, 2022). In the aforementioned *Figaro* article, the microadventure is also portrayed as a solution to the mobility restrictions generated by the health and climate crises. “How to get away from it all in times of Covid? Rediscover the joys of wild camping and local adventure”. We now know that the health crisis had a major impact on sports and tourism, prompting industry professionals to revisit and rethink their model (Marcotte et al., 2020). However, before making the microadventure the alpha and omega of a post-Covid world, we must first take the time to analyse the situation and try to comprehend the extent to which this “marketing” concept, that seems innovative on the surface, could actually be part of a wider trend or the more general developments observed in the world of tourism and/or nature sports.

“Microadventure” is a word that appears in the general and/or specialist press, and the brochures produced by companies in the sector.⁸ The term was popularised by Humphreys, a well-known professional adventurer who reported on his series of microadventures in the UK in 2012. At its core, this activity is based on a relatively simple idea, that of exploring one’s immediate environment to quench one’s thirst for adventure. Journalistic and entrepreneurial circles use the term “emic” to describe this. As such, the microadventure is a trip that is close to home, short-term (2 or 3 days maximum), easy to organise, and affordable. It is also presented as an environmentally-friendly activity and always involves some form of mostly outdoor physical activity such as walking, cycling, paddleboarding, and kayaking. These are all modes of soft mobility that can be easily combined with wild camping. According to Chilowé – one of the leading companies in the sector – its major advantage is its compatibility with the lives of today’s young urbanites. “The philosophy behind the microadventure is simple: leading a life in which fast-paced urban living and time out to disconnect in the natural world can co-exist. Ideal for recharging your batteries before going back to work on Monday morning”.

Certain microadventure features mentioned above have been conceptualised and analysed in the recent scientific literature on the topic. Firstly, wild camping plays an important role because, as its name implies, participants sleep away from home. This means that microadventures have been included in the UN Tourism definition of tourism activities. For Hélène Michel, Marielle Salvador and Dominique Kreziak (2022), it therefore corresponds to a type of local tourism, and more specifically, the touristification of every-day life (Bourdeau, 2012). Far from being a “counter holiday” (Périer, 2020), the microadventure is an intentional choice that disrupts the norms and customs of the affluent groups of the French population (Urbain, 2002), whose aim is no longer to go far and often, but to fit leisure time into the interstices of an increasingly busy work schedule. This way of experiencing one’s local area

means replacing tourism of the elsewhere with tourism of the here. Moreover, sport (when defined in its broadest form as including non-competitive forms of physical activity) is at the heart of the microadventure, that can, *a priori*, be classified under the umbrella term of sports tourism. Although the latter has been extensively studied, it lacks a universally recognised definition (Riffaud et al., 2021). We build on the work of our predecessors at the University of Montpellier, based on the premise that sports tourism begins at the point where the sporting experience structures the tourism experience. “Integration of the sports object forms the basis of the tourism project and is not merely a simple element or adjunct” (Pigeassou, 2006, p. 47).

We see microadventures as a continuation of the trends identified in tourism and sports tourism research. Firstly, sport-tourism boundaries are becoming more fluid. Secondly, the microadventure appears to be a renewed form of adventure tourism. Microadventurers are, as the name suggests, adventurous, i.e., they voluntarily and periodically experience uncertainty (Jankelevitch, 1963). For this latter author, even a fleeting adventure expresses a desire to grapple with the enigmatic nature of the future (*ibid*). As in adventure tourism, microadventurers are motivated by the quest for a spatial and temporal elsewhere (Bourdeau, 2012), albeit one that is relatively close to home and that usually involves limited risk-taking. Thirdly, the primary objective seems to be to build an intimate sensorial relationship with nature, in a similar spirit to the Scouting approach (Fuchs, 2008) or the excursionism of the French Alpine Club (Hoibian, 2016).

More broadly speaking, we can therefore examine how the specific characteristics of the microadventure make it an activity that fits into the field of sports tourism. While several of its features are similar to the transmodern form described by Corneloup (2011), it does not appear to be a genuinely new development.¹¹ Bearing this in mind, we hypothesise that it is a kind of re-appropriation of older nature sports activities in which certain trends are recombined and accentuated, bringing to light several contradictions.

We developed a four-point plan: the first section introduces our methodology, the second examines the relationship between microadventures and nature, the third focuses on the importance of doing and empowerment in this activity, and the fourth analyses the microadventurer’s relationship to image and self-organisation.

2. Methodology

The results presented in this article are based on qualitative research. We conducted 10 semi-structured interviews; the average interview duration was 60 minutes (see Table 1). All interviewees go on microadventures and are sufficiently interested in the subject to have signed up to dedicated Facebook groups (Chilowé Occitanie – La SOME, and Chilowé Paris – La SPEM). Participants came forward spontaneously following an announcement of the research project in April 2020. We believe that these private groups were relevant as they were linked to the activities of the most well-known company in the sector and are all about microadventures. Our results would have been less robust had we chosen more generalist groups (hiking, bicycle tourism, etc.). We focused on these two regions because at the time there were no other regional groups in France, and because some administrators would not give us access. This methodology, however, has a number of limitations. The regions concerned are urbanised, which no doubt explains the over-representation of city dwellers in our sample. The oldest group member was 39 years old and the youngest 25. And out of the 10 people questioned, 5 reported their gender as women and 5 as men. In general, respondents are

university graduates (3 doctors), from urban areas and belong to the most affluent socio-professional categories (PCS). Given the lack of quantitative microadventure research, we decided to adopt a microsocial framework and compile a network sample. The objective was not to be representative of a previously unknown population, but to provide an in-depth profile of this milieu (Pires, 1997).

Table 1. Presentation of the interviewees

First name	Gender	Age	Occupation
Marc	M	32	Entrepreneur
Emma	F	33	Sales Representative
Tom	M	25	Student
David	M	34	Developer
Frédérique	F	39	Lecturer-Researcher
Léa	F	33	Post-Doctoral Researcher
Julien	M	38	Data Analyst
Matteo	M	27	Sales Representative
Julie	F	28	Interior Designer
Marine	F	35	Instructor

The semi-directive interviews were conducted using a five-part guide. The first part consisted of questions to find out more information about the respondent (age, gender, socio-professional category (PCS), level and frequency of activity, etc.). The second focused on the account of their latest microadventure. The third, fourth and fifth looked at their relationship with nature, politics, and image. These themes, chosen in relation to our research question, were intended to improve our understanding of any novelty in people's behaviours and reasons for acting. Interviews were conducted via Skype because they took place during the first Covid lockdown between March and April 2020, and meeting interviewees in person was nearly impossible. Even though we are more used to face-to-face interviews, we discovered the value of Skype during this study. This tool offers greater flexibility in terms of time management, for researchers, but above all for interviewees (Iacono *et al.*, 2012). It also made it much easier to arrange appointments because our respondents often had a busy schedule. Each interview was relatively long (over an hour) and we believe that the Skype tool was a factor in the duration. There are some limitations to this tool, but to a certain extent these can be overcome. It was sometimes difficult to establish the optimum level of trust. For example, in our experience, for people who are shy, their shyness lasted longer when using this tool versus face-to-face interviews. This is why we agree with Seitz (2016), that it is necessary to have several written exchanges (email, Messenger, WhatsApp) before starting a Skype discussion. The other difficulty lies in collecting non-verbal data, however, unlike telephone interviews, we were able to observe facial expressions and shoulder positions (Bayles, 2012). Furthermore, the videoconference interviews allowed us to observe the respondents in their own homes, with the decor, books and posters in the background providing valuable information about their living

environment and living standards. Above all, this tool enabled respondents to share information with the researcher almost instantaneously. Some participants showed us photos of their various trips, objects and/or equipment. These exchanges, which would be impossible at a café terrace or in an anonymous face-to-face office, greatly enriched our interviews.

3. Body and political ecology

Nature is at the heart of microadventuring. It represents the elsewhere that is in contrast to the urban environment in which most of the interviewed microadventurers live. But it is also experienced and presented as a utopian landscape brimming with virtues. Microadventure enthusiasts take a Rousseauist view of things. “Nature as good and the city as evil; nature as beneficial, calming, and the embodiment of true values as opposed to the city as a place of corruption, deceit and stimulation of the senses” (Bourillon, 2011). As we can see from the verbatim statements below, microadventurers portray nature as a place of well-being.

We find similarities in our data to what Sirost (2002) observed in his research on camping. Nature-based leisure activities help to make the city more bearable, reassuring city-dwellers about their urban lifestyle. “Here, the idea of nature is used as a reference of a nostalgia for an original and universal order of things, a bygone golden age that stands in contrast to today’s urban disorder. In this sense, nature is an aesthetic and philosophical model that can be applied to any space devoid of urban or industrial human activity. As a consequence, it also acts as a hostile and unproductive space that it is today assigned a paradoxical function as a recreation and adventure space for urban societies” (Bourdeau, 1994, p. 7). These representations are old, but they have endured. For instance, they were already central to Scouting, which aimed to bring young people back to a form of authenticity that had been undermined by industrial societies (Fuchs, 2008). These representations can still be found in the microadventure, and like sports tourism, passively enjoying nature is not an option. Bessy (2005) has clearly shown how physical activity makes people feel like they enjoy it more, however, the physical effort involved is only moderate and the actual danger is often very limited. The objective is not to push oneself beyond one’s limits, but rather to have an experience that is sufficiently exotic to create the sensation of exploring these limits. Some of our interviewee experiences include paddleboarding down the River Seine and stopping halfway to camp out on an island; walking from Montpellier to the coast then camping out on the beach; and night hiking in the Forest of Fontainebleau. This is not to deny the physical effort required, but in this context “adventure is now potentially within everyone’s grasp” (Ehrenberg, 1991, p. 25).

The microadventure seems to reflect the growing demand for eco-leisure activities associated with the transmodern era (Corneloup, 2011). The microadventurers interviewed are striving to build a more empathetic and sensory relationship with nature, seeking immersive experiences synonymous with a personal reappropriation of the environment. They implement what Bernard Andrieu and Olivier Sirost (2014) call a body ecology, i.e. exploring the inner self by reconnecting with nature. It is an approach motivated and justified by ideological and political arguments. In fact, microadventure is an activity that promotes a new kind of travel philosophy, comprises a critical dimension, and reflects the emergence of new frameworks for thinking and acting. The statements collected show that its advocates are trying to adapt their leisure activities to be more respectful of the environment. The verbatim statements below are representative of what all our respondents said. They are clearly concerned about the ecological issue:

“There is obviously an ecological reason behind all this...I’ve travelled all over the world...but what actually happens is that you destroy the very thing you’re looking for...you want untouched landscapes but once you’ve been there they’re no longer untouched...I’m only too aware of the negative impact of tourism...there’s no point going halfway around the world, I don’t want to contaminate the earth even further...” Frédérique

Criticism of aeroplanes is a recurrent theme among the statements collected. Additionally, destinations are not chosen at random: the local nature of the microadventure is linked to time constraints and the desire to rediscover one’s living environment, but above all, it is driven by the desire to limit air travel. Flight shame or flygskam in Swedish, is a common thread running through all of our interviews. “‘Travelling local’, like ‘eating local’, addresses people’s concerns about preserving the environment” (Dissart, 2020) and we know that this is now valued socially (Boulin, 2020). It is important to note that the people questioned as part of this research were mainly from more affluent socio-professional categories and this evidently has an influence on the results.

“When I travel by plane it’s only to go to places that are really far away; the microadventure (MA) lets you reduce your carbon footprint. But that doesn’t mean I’m going to stop flying though, I’m just being careful about it. And ecologically speaking, at the moment I’m eating organic food and using organic products and consuming less in general. Less clothes, less waste. I’m not quite there yet, but at least I’m trying. The MA is part of this too, it’s me doing my small part for the planet”. Emma

“We’re always hearing that we need to cut down on our plane journeys...So you could say that what’s good about the microadventure is that it can minimise your impact in a way that isn’t too restrictive”. Matteo

This last statement is important for understanding the microadventure. It is a form of sports tourism that appeals to a public looking for a new compromise: continuing to travel while participating in a physical activity and reducing its environmental footprint as much as possible. All the interviews conducted suggest that microadventurers have gone beyond the awareness stage and have started to change their habits and prepare and organise their activities from this perspective. The amount of waste produced is minimised, and there is a preference for recyclable material, with disposable equipment being all but banned. Microadventuring appears to be correlated with a broader shift in lifestyle changes, and several individuals reported that this activity is connected to a turning point in their lives (Bessin et al., 2009). Négroni (2010) identifies this as a latent process, a moment of hesitation, indecision and uncertainty. It is a phase that involves reflecting on the past, looking to the future, and suspending decisions. The interplay between past factors and present opportunities causes individuals to vacillate. Several respondents associated the microadventure with a more specific biographical event (break-ups, encounters, job changes, etc.) which is essentially a turning point (Leclerc-Olive, 2010). This (non)linear turning point process defines new directions in different areas of the respondents’ lives, of which the organisation of leisure activities is an integral part. Microadventures are often correlated with certain ways of working, travelling, eating and consuming.

However, to avoid caricature, it is important to add that most of the people we met were at an ideological turning point in their lives. These travellers are building a new relationship with the natural world, with many respondents calling it a work in progress, and the microadventure is an activity helping them to pursue their adventures while trying to stay true

to their values. We will return to this point in the second part. This state of transition often implies feelings of guilt about their past practices. Several of our respondents said that they had travelled extensively without considering the ecological impact of their actions, so although the microadventure is a more acceptable compromise for these people, they also acknowledge that the activity itself is full of contradictions and cannot therefore set an example themselves.

“You’ve got to be honest, there’s something a bit fake about microadventures...despite all the talk, a lot of us are firmly anchored in a capitalist society that’s ruining the planet”. Julien

We can therefore observe a political, or rather micro-political, dimension to microadventuring. Such an approach to sports tourism deconstructs the norms that have been built up over time, but actual practices are fairly moderate ecology-wise. Without making any generalisations, the microadventurers interviewed cannot be described as militants and most of them are not members of an association or a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). Some even told us that they do not vote for EELV (France’s Green party) because they find their ideas “a bit extreme”. As such, the microadventure seems to fall under the heading of light green ecology, which is far from radical ecology on the political spectrum. For Bess (2011), our society has become light green through the paradoxical situation of nature encroaching on society and society encroaching on nature. Light green ecology is the result of a long process of hybridisation between opposing trends and the selection of various proposals, which began in the 1960s. “Through a long process of improvisation and concession [industrial societies] have patched together a new kind of social order in which ecologist ideas and environmental pressures overlap and intertwine with the consumerist system inherited from the middle of the previous century” (ibid, p. 316). For this historian, it is a phenomenon that transcends the political sphere and therefore must also be analysed as a broader cultural change: “The reinvention of nature as a finite and fragile space, in need of protection and proper nurturing by humans” (2011, p. 80). The microadventure signals the emergence of a new social order in which nature has gradually assumed a more important role. However, as with the consumption of organic produce and human beings’ relationship with the animal world, this practice highlights the mechanisms of selective integration. Some actions are implemented while others are deemed too radical or too costly. In the case of microadventures, this can mean voluntarily cutting down on car journeys but being unwilling to follow designated footpaths, even if this has an impact on the flora and fauna of the areas visited. We can also observe a commitment to reducing the use of plastics that is paradoxically associated with an over-consumption of technical equipment.

“We’re very environmentally conscious...But we’ve all got our own contradictions...Personally, we really like the gear and technology”. Léa

The relationship to technology is, for Bess (2011), a central issue. Light green society is simply not ready to accept the change and move on. This appetite for equipment and technology is apparent in the world of microadventure. In our sample, 6 out of 10 interviewees recognised that they were over equipped and could not even imagine setting out on an adventure without numerous digital tools and connectable tech (mobile phone with different applications, GPS watch, GoPro, camera, etc). Consumption of these objects was an issue that often arose in our discussions, and some people admitted that they were struggling to make the necessary efforts in this regard, thus expressing a form of guilt. This is the great paradox of the light green society, which for micro-adventurers means that while they seek a simpler lifestyle and disconnection, they cannot completely break with consumerism and technophilia. This is one

of the reasons why we believe that the activity has more to do with environmentalism than ecologism. According to the political scientist Dobson (2003), ecologism is an ideology positing that only radical social change can avert catastrophe. Environmentalism, on the other hand, posits that environmental problems can be resolved by marginal adjustments that do not fundamentally challenge the social order. Microadventure is one such action that represents a happy medium, an acceptable compromise, or a first step. It is therefore a form of sports tourism with a political dimension. It reflects not only the mainstreaming aspect of ecology (Dobson, 2003), but also that nature is still, and perhaps more than ever, a major cultural and ideological reference point for urban civilisations.

5. A culture of “doing” and empowerment

In the 1990s, pioneering work on adventure tourism taught us that pursuing the extreme meant that anyone could create an image of excellence and construct a performative mode of production for their own life (Bessy, 2021). The microadventure does not contradict this. As we surmised in the introduction, it has all the hallmarks of an “extreme mass” which, according to Paul Yonnet (1998), is motivated not only by the discovery of a particular space, but also by the discovery of one’s own capabilities. An analysis of the statements collected suggests that the microadventure, as does the Scout movement, advocates independence and learning (Fuchs, 2008). Empowerment (Jouve, 2006), understood as a process whereby an individual acquires the competence to act in their environment, is highly valued. In microadventures, the aim is to persuade yourself, and sometimes to convince others, that you are perfectly capable of being organised even when leaving behind the comfort of the city. Nature itself lets us “*step outside ourselves*” (Sirost, 2002). In fact, the microadventure is presented as a particularly formative space. Itinerancy, which is almost always present, involves being introduced to new skills (making a fire, setting up a tent in the wild, learning about plants, etc.). The aim is to foster resourcefulness by taking on the small challenges that arise when exploring the natural environment. This is another similarity with the Scout movement. “*Since nature revolves around the idea of itinerancy, for the Scout movement it is a powerful training ground. Above all, it provides an environment in which scouts can test themselves in a bid to develop their observation, reflection and action skills – in short, to develop their own resources*” (Fuchs, 2008, p. 30). Our interviews are full of similar stances.

“I’ve always done DIY, I garden, I love using my hands...it’s also a way of being more independent. That’s the whole point of the microadventure, doing things yourself...you learn how to filter water, start a fire, build a shelter, make a rope...know what you can and can’t eat...”. Tom

“Microadventures mean that you have to push yourself...not necessarily physically...but you find yourself in situations and you have to do things you wouldn’t have done otherwise. It develops your skills, you become more resourceful, and that’s quite satisfying...it actually makes you a better person...dealing with uncertainty and the unknown”. David

However, this rarely involves learning how to survive without recourse to the tools that civilisation has to offer. In this respect, microadventures should be distinguished from survival courses which are also developing in France (Vidal, 2018). We are dealing here with city dwellers who appreciate microadventures because it gives them the “doing” aspect that Lallement (2015) was so fond of. In his view, we are living in an age where people are trying to remake things with their own hands. The success of DIY, gardening, sewing and handicrafts

can be largely explained by this phenomenon. All of these handicraft activities are chosen out of a desire, sometimes a need, but often a conviction, and making things with your hands brings meaning to everyday life (Crawford, 2017). This trend, often referred to by the acronym DIY (Do It Yourself), is now spreading to many areas of social life. Knobel and Lankshear (2010) date its emergence to the 1950s. Of course, human beings have been able to hand-make things for much longer, but the main idea behind DIY is to dispense with the often restrictive and expensive specialists we tend to call on in modern society. Punk bands were the pioneers of this philosophy (Riffaud, 2018), using it to create their fanzines and record their albums. They saw in this an opportunity to gain independence from the music industry, which they felt was stealing from artists (Hein, 2012). For our part, we have already seen how this phenomenon impacts the world of sport (Riffaud, 2018). So it comes as no surprise to see a resurgence of this appetite for ‘doing’ in the context of the microadventure.

“We’ve got a lot of equipment, but then we like to make things ourselves, it’s what makes this so satisfying; for example, we made our own paddles which is cool because we built them to suit our needs exactly, it’s a perfect fit for our morphology for example and it’s cheaper as well”. Frédérique

Thus, in the world of microadventures, as elsewhere, increased accessibility of tools and knowledge has facilitated a kind of self-training. Our results highlight the relatively traditional ways in which knowledge is passed on in nature-based leisure activities. Indeed, in these activities, the classes, reading of specialised journals, word-of-mouth and the buddy system act as vectors of knowledge and know-how (Schut, 2007). This is also the case for the microadventure. However, our interviews show that the YouTube, Facebook and Instagram tutorials have now taken on a central role because they give microadventurers the ability to manage and navigate their own training. They are highly resource-efficient people and combine formal and informal systems to achieve their objectives (Nagels and Carré, 2016). Some companies have analysed this demand and have developed a corresponding offer. As well as offering a range of microadventures for users to try out, they also provide articles and tutorials to generate traffic on their website. It involves learning new skills such as how to read French IGN ordnance survey maps, filter water, pack a bag properly, choose a good spot for wild camping, and stalk a deer. In this sense, the microadventuring ethos is one of idealism of action and effort. Although humour is often used to talk about these subjects, this must not be mistaken for passivity or idleness. Microadventurers do not understand and sometimes make fun of people who have lie-ins and “binge-watch” Netflix. In microadventures, there is a determination to show that pleasure is not necessarily found where some may expect. Most of the interviewees said they were trying to convince their friends and/or children of the benefits of microadventures. It is also worth noting that companies in the sector are also targeting the children’s market. This is because of the high proportion of people in their thirties who are looking for family outings, and also by this public’s varying degrees of willingness to play an educational role. A new parallel can therefore be made with the Scout movement and Baden-Powell’s “woodcraft”. In other words, once again in the history of leisure, nature is considered to be a model for a more active and autonomous population who are more in touch with nature

6. A self-organised activity and the role of image

In the previous two sections we drew several parallels between the microadventure and other forms of nature-based leisure or sports tourism. Physical activities are always influenced by the period of time in which they become a social phenomenon. For example, the Scout movement of the 20th century and the microadventure of the 21st century have very different

characteristics. This final part will focus on the self-organisation aspect of this activity and the omnipresence of the image. These features will help us to extend our analysis.

Firstly, the microadventure is an integral part of the pursuit of autonomy by sportspeople and tourists. Researchers have been observing this since the 1970s and it continues to grow to this day (Riffaud and Lapeyronie, 2023). It is a physical and touristic activity that has no governing institution because it is mainly self-organised (Michel *et al.*, 2022). Social networks and some private companies can make it easier for people to take the first step, but most of the time people will be their own all-in-one organiser and guide (Bessy, 2021). In microadventuring, the “*Where I want and when I can*” mindset prevails. Such organisational flexibility is one of the key factors to this activity’s success. The microadventurers studied were members of Facebook groups. It may not be a general rule, but our respondents frequently used social networks because they could easily find useful information there, such as technical advice on optimising self-training, and training for beginners. In the context of our research, social networks were also used to find suggestions for outings. Microadventures are most often experienced among friends, but also with people who have never met before. These forms of sociability, varying in their ephemerality and flexibility, are the opposite of those found in some of the nature-based leisure activities mentioned above. For instance, “*from the outset, scouting was a highly organised activity: initially designed for 12–16 year olds, it was structured around basic units called patrols comprising five to eight scouts and an older leader*” (Fuchs, 2008, p. 31). Codes of conduct and discipline are set by the (religious or otherwise) organising institution and must be respected. Microadventures are far less structured, and as they are self-organised activities, participants have greater freedom and responsiveness. Less structure also means that participants can also enjoy a wide range of experiences without committing themselves, which means that they can venture off the beaten track.

“*The great thing about microadventures is that there’s so much choice...kayaking, paddle boarding, cycling, walking...it’s a different experience each time...there’s loads to choose from, it’s amazing*”. Julien.

“*I post on the Facebook group. I’ll set the activity and location, and then anybody interested is welcome to join me...and it works...13km of paddleboard with a bloke I’d never met before on the River Seine, and an outing to Fontainebleau – in the end there were around 11 of us and nobody knew each other before*”. Frédérique

Microadventures are often said to be a reflection of the times, closely linked to the issue of image and the use of social networks. As previously mentioned, the term microadventure was popularised by Humphreys via Twitter. We know from Jankelevitch (1963) that adventure may have an aesthetic aspect to it. “*It is often this anticipation that gives amateur mountaineers the courage they need for their expeditions: they imagine their glorious return in advance and can already see themselves recounting their exploits to amazed listeners*” (1963, p. 29). More recently, Hoibian (1997) and Schut (2007) observed the same phenomenon. The microadventurers we met all explained that their traditional or action camera (Go-Pro or Insta360 type) was always part of their kit. However, these devices are not particularly useful during the outing, and some of them even admitted that they could also be cumbersome. Nevertheless, they are essential for collecting memories and documenting the experience on social networks. There is often a certain uneasiness about this. One explanation for this may be that most of our respondents were from more well-off socio-professional backgrounds and people in this category generally find it harder to publish things on social networks. This discomfort is further intensified by an awareness of the contradiction in seeking to reconnect

with nature while refusing to stop using social networks. Our interviewees appear to be in the grip of the image, incapable of disconnecting themselves from its pull.

“After all, technology is a double edged sword, it can prevent you from living things to the full, from being in the present moment, from thinking about the future...for example, choosing the prettiest spot to pitch your tent rather than the most practical one... ”. Julie

“Tech wise, I’ve got all the gear. Mobile phone, charger, power bank, GoPro...but you’ve got to be careful not to let the image take over and make sure you still live in the moment... ”. Tom

This discomfort explains why sharing images on social networks is often justified by the desire to convert friends to microadventuring. Microadventurers therefore try to persuade others and deliberately use the power and performativity of images. They have incorporated influencer marketing techniques and strategies, and are using them to promote a kind of activism via social network posts.

“When I share the photos, it’s not to say ‘look at my life it’s so cool’, it’s more of a way of motivating people to do what I do... ”. Emma

“What’s also cool about the networks is that you can broaden the minds of your friends that aren’t very adventurous...one of my mates said it looked cool and they’d also like to try it...and then you’re influencing people, I like that...it’s like Chilowé say “Get everyone outside! ”. Léa

However, it would be a mistake not to see these photographs also as a means of flattering the ego and of confirming, through taking photographs, one’s capabilities for finding spatial and temporal elsewhere. On this last point, the microadventure is once again markedly different from scouting because the aim is not to establish a collective narrative perpetuated over time, but to create a form of representation that is often individual and sometimes even self-serving. For Jankelevitch (1963), the adventurer is part artist because during their excursions, they essentially live an aesthetic experience. The microadventurers we met said that they go looking for what they considered beautiful. It does not matter if this corresponds to the most archetypal forms of nature because it will help people to have a memorable experience to portray it through photographic images.

“When you take a good photo, it’s the cherry on the cake...I must admit that I like coming back with something that I can share on Facebook and Insta ”. Léa

“And microadventures give you something to talk about...it makes you proud...it’s crazy; whenever you’re out in nature, you’re always proud of what you’ve done...even if it’s not the most amazing thing ever...like mushroom foraging...when you’re a city dweller, you’re proud... ”. Julie

6. Conclusion

In this article, we examined a tourism and sports phenomenon that is on the rise in France: the microadventure. To do so, we interviewed microadventurers who were members of a Facebook group about this activity. The methodological choice has certainly influenced our results, not least because we know that within these virtual communities, discourse tends to become homogenised (Lukasik, 2021).

However, we can say that “microadventure” is a recent word in the tourist vocabulary, both for actors of the sector and researchers. This activity involves a short trip (2 or 3 days maximum) that is close to home, relatively easy to organise, affordable, an environmentally-friendly activity that often includes moderate physical effort, and one that helps to re-enchant everyday life and the surrounding area (Michel *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, it is a new form of sports tourism, but it would be premature to present it as a genuine novelty. In fact, our research suggests rather that the microadventure has various similarities with older forms of nature-based leisure and sports tourism. Like scouting, camping and hiking, microadventuring meets the need for fulfilment in close contact with nature. It is a fun adventure (Jankelevitch, 2017) in which playfulness is more important than seriousness because the actual danger is very limited. Microadventures are part of the “mass extreme” (Yonnet, 1998), in which the questions of empowerment and doing are central. As with other sports and tourism activities, participants’ motivations always stem from an idealised vision of nature, the exploration of which would help them to become more autonomous and to enjoy memorable experiences. Here, nature is seen as a formative space charged with positive values. Furthermore, our research shows that the microadventure is correlated with a strong concern for the environment. Even if this is not a form of ecotourism (Honey, 1999), microadventurers are trying to limit their impact on the environment while simultaneously seeking meaningful experiences in nature. The microadventure is therefore presented as an acceptable compromise. Until now, ecotourism and adventure tourism have often been pitted against each other. “*Ultimately, these two forms of tourism are looking for a quality environment, but for different reasons: one for observing nature and the other for capturing it*” (Lequin, 2001, p. 13). Our results reveal that the microadventure is at the intersection of these two concepts. Finally, all the features we have just described can sometimes be identified in other forms of practice. Some kayakers, mountaineers and surfers have similar convictions to microadventurers, but these activities have more historical depth, which makes them less susceptible to change. The microadventure’s success can be explained by its timeliness. It is a form of self-organised eco-leisure (Lebreton *et al.*, 2020), giving participants a great deal of flexibility and the chance to accumulate a variety of experiences. Furthermore, it is an activity that is highly compatible with social networks in which images play a central role. As a result, the activity has its contradictions between all of these innovative attributes (respect for the environment, creativity, proximity and localness) and behaviours that are in sync with the capitalist economic system (accumulation/collection of experience, constant connection, supremacy of appearance). The microadventure is therefore in line with some societal concerns, that are themselves sometimes contradictory.

All this leads us to conclude that the microadventure is not a genuine novelty in the field of tourism. It is simply a renewed form of sports tourism in which we have observed a recombination and intensification of trends found in other tourist practices. “*Leisure status and practice are changing and being reshaped against a backdrop of cultural change and climate, energy, economic and security uncertainties. Although some traditional forms of tourism appear to be intangible [...], other forms are emerging that (implicitly or explicitly) explore models with unprecedented relationships with time periods, places and uses of the elsewhere*” (Bourdeau, 2012, p.31). Nevertheless, our survey shows that the microadventure is not just a big marketing push. Whilst acknowledging the impact that some companies have had on how it is carried out, our results suggest that this activity is part of what some authors call the post-tourism era (Bourdeau, 2012). This finding suggests that the present research should be continued in order to contribute to the debate on the management of natural areas close to major urban centres. Microadventures have led to an increase in the number of visitors to certain sites, which has raised the alarm among nature park professionals. The Covid 19 epidemic further reinforced this trend. “*The pandemic may have brought a sudden halt to long-distance*

departures ('border closures' and repeated lockdowns), but tourism practices have been restructured, without really being scaled back, to offer diversity in local tourism experiences, thereby modifying visitor flows on the outskirts of major cities" (Perera and Le Roux, 2021). The features of the microadventure make it difficult for tourism or nature management institutions to regulate this activity. Sanctuaries (Meur-Férec, 2007) and the implementation of stricter access controls may be potential solutions, but they already seem inadequate given the scale of the phenomenon observed (Decoupigny, 2022).

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