

# Nature sports and environmental impacts : what do participants think?

*Thierry Michot, Université de Bretagne Occidentale Laboratoire Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherches en Sociologie (EA 3149), France*

*Julien Fuchs, Université de Bretagne Occidentale Laboratoire, Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique (CRBC, EA 4451 / UMS 3554), France*

---

## Introduction

Nature sports category (Audinet, Guibert, Sebileau, 2017) corresponds to a real practice of the French people, not necessarily dominant, but widely diffused, although in an unequal way. The 2016 Sports and Nature Recreation Barometer shows that 76% of French people aged 15 to 70 report having practiced such activity in the 12 months preceding the survey. These practices, whose evolution goes hand in hand with that of tourism (Thomasset, 2017), have an environmental impact cited by many authors (notably Bessy and All., 2008). But what do the participants themselves think? What activities do they identify as sports and nature recreation? What opinions do they have about the effects of the practice on the environment? Our presentation will report on a survey to better understand it (2016).

## Method

An online questionnaire survey was conducted as part of a work with master students, teaching support on the theme "sport and sustainable development" (November 2016). This survey was constructed on the basis of respondents' actual sports practices, their opinions of their relationship to the environment, their perception of a few practices considered as « nature », and 5 motivations that pushed them to practice. The diffusion was carried out over a period of 3 weeks.

## Results and discussion

The survey received 1179 usable responses. From these, a panel of 600 respondents was selected, to create 6 groups of 100 respondents (50% women and men, 100 practitioners with less than 3 hours of sport per week, 100 between 3 hours and 6 hours, and 100 to over 6 hours per week). The method used here is to compare at equal sizes the average volumes of weekly sports practice and gender, mirroring the responses obtained. This survey is not intended to be representative of a population, but compared to reconstructed samples.

### *Hierarchy of representations on the environment*

Studied by Lykert's scaled responses (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), the opinions tested show a consensus that "An outdoor sports participants must be environmentally friendly in which he practices "(average of 4.77 out of 5 possible), and a disagreement on the fact that" nature sports practitioners abuse natural areas "(2.20). For most opinions, gender and sport participation rates appear to have relatively moderate effects on the 18 opinions offered.

### *Hierarchy of practices perceived as nature sports recreation*

18 sporting activities (trail, sailing, climbing, running, ...) were proposed to the people surveyed, with the question "In your opinion, are the following sporting practices, nature sports ? » The answers are again proposed in Lykert scale. The hierarchy is not significantly different according to gender and rate of sport, which suggests that the images of these sports of nature are quite divided.

### *Practice motivations*

Finally, 5 modalities of motivation were proposed, in the form of questions measured again in Lykert scales. For example, "When I practice, what I'm looking for is to become one with nature (to feel in communion with it)". We find that the order of motivations is psychological, then physical, then social, and finally technical, communion with nature being the least motivated motivation by the practitioners themselves. This hierarchy of motivations is finally the most surprising data of our research.

## **Conclusion**

This study finally shows contrasting effects. On the one hand, we have a shared vision of what nature sports are, whether we practice them or not. On the other hand, differences of opinion about the environmental impacts of these sports exist, with a link to the experience of the practitioners, without this link being very marked. Does this mean that practicing or not practicing a sport of nature does not radically affect the perception of its effects on the environment? Such a conclusion is premature as many other factors can affect the perception of practitioners. This shows that this type of survey is only a tool to target other investigation needs, probably more qualitative, like the interviews conducted by Audinet, Guibert, Sebileau (Ibid.).

## **References:**

- Audinet, L., Guibert C. & Sébileau A. (2017). *Les sports de nature*. Ed. du Croquant, Paris.
- Bessy O. et All. (2008). *Sport, Loisir, Tourisme et développement durable des territoires*. PUS, Grenoble.
- Collectif (2016). *Baromètre des sports et loisirs de nature en France*. 2016
- Thomasset C. (2017). A chacun son adrénaline ! De la notion de liberté au tourisme de l'expérience. *Espaces*, Cahier « Sport extrême et tourisme », 339, p.32-34