

# Skiing unlimited? Acceptance of resort extension by skiers in Tyrol/Austria

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## Introduction

Many ski-resorts in the European Alps hope to increase their visibility and attractiveness when expanding their respective resorts by developing new slopes and/or by merging with others. Examples like the Zermatt-Matterhorn-Ski-Paradise in Switzerland, the “Helm-Rotwand” in Sexten Italy, or the Ski-world “Wilder Kaiser” and the “Skicircus Saalbach -Hintertglemm - Leogang - Fieberbrunn” in Austria illustrate this trend. The main motives for the expansion and cooperation are expected marketing opportunities, synergetic management, and a higher overall financial stability (Zegg 2015). Also, climate change adaptation seems to be an argument in favor of increasing resort sizes (Steiger and Abegg 2013). The expansion or merging of ski resorts leads to impacts into the sensitive alpine environment and a permanent disturbance by the new infrastructure. The presented study aims to analyze the perception of the winter tourists and daily skiers concerning these changes and discusses recommendations for future resort development.

## Methodology

Against this background we asked a representative sample of German and Austrian winter tourists, as well as daily visitors about the perception and acceptance of this development. Since this issue is of high relevance in Tyrolean ski resorts we have chosen this area for our research. The respondents were recruited from representative panels in Germany and Austria. Overall the survey consists of 2161 respondents (1186 respondents from Germany and 975 from Austria, (60,1% tourists, 28,3 daily visitors, 11,6% skiers with a seasonal ticket). The respondents were to rate their motivation for winter sport activities and past sportive behavior and state their perception of climate change and answer demographic questions.

## Results

For all respondents nature experience and health improvement are the main motives for skiing in the Alps. Daily visitors are more focused on the activity itself than the tourist who is also interested in the region and the experience to be in the mountains.

We asked the respondents whether they would accept a reduction of a protected area in order to expand the ski resort and to stabilize its competitiveness and economic stability. One third of all respondents (37,5%) are against any development. Most of the respondents however support the idea that the impact should be possible if it would be compensated by an increase of the protected area somewhere else

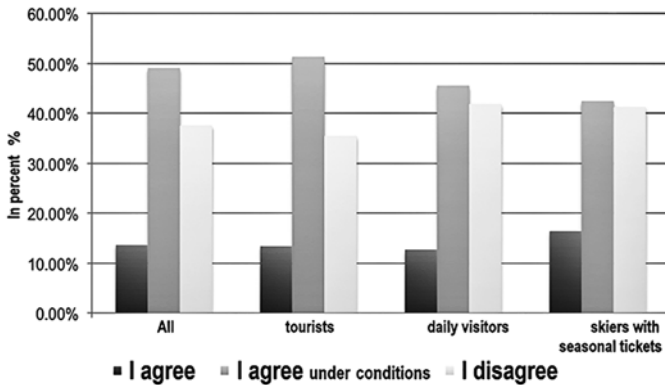


Figure 1. Expansion of a ski resort into a protected area

(49,0%). Those respondents who live far from Tyrol argue more in favor of the development than those from Austria.

Indebt analyses revealed significant differences between various segments. Looking at the group of daily visitors (including skiers with a seasonal ticket) we found the following segments:

The *beginners* (27,7%) are interested in many different winter sport activities. They are also interested in cross country-skiing or snow-shoeing. They have overall little time for winter sport activities. Selecting a ski resort they focus on the price level, nature and the accessibility. About 38% are completely against an expansion of a ski-resort into a protected area.

The *savory skiers* (36,8%) are very much committed to their sport. They love to combine the nature experience with spending time with family and friends. They look for perfect conditions on the slopes. They argue in favor of a compromise and believe that the expansion of the ski resort can easily be compensated (53%).

The *skilled skiers* love their sport and perform it as often as possible. Nature experience and social motives are of little relevance. They also argue in favor of an expansion of the ski resort but ask for an adequate compensation (53%).

The *young and wild skiers* (22,7%) are also a segment which is very committed to their favorite sport. They combine social motives, the improvement of their driving skills and action when skiing. The interest in nature and landscape is rather low. Therefore 26% would allow the expansion of the ski resort into the protected areas without any compensation measures.

Within the group of tourists we found five different segments:

The *average sport tourist* (29,7%) is very committed to its sport and attracted by additional infrastructure such as a halfpipe, a fun park or free-riding opportunities. Infrastructure for ski resorts is important and therefore the acceptance for an extension is rather high.

The *nature oriented winter tourist* (21,7%) is mainly attracted by the landscape and the winter experience. They are not interested in winter sport activity only, but also in others such as cross country, snow shoeing and ski touring. This segment votes strongly against any further expansion of ski resorts.

The *demanding family* (19,2%) is interested in resorts which are characterized by an attractive offer for family and kids. They also prefer an attractive landscape and nature experience. This group travels with children older than 6 years and belongs to a higher income class. They are sensitive towards further impacts and the expansion of a ski resort.

The *price-sensitive sport tourist* (19,2%) focuses on downhill skiing and snowboarding only and is characterized by excellent skills. Nature experience is less relevant. This segment seeks for a high diversity of ski slopes, an attractive mix of difficulties and good snow conditions. If an expansion of a ski resort is compensated, it is acceptable for most of them.

The *price-sensitive family* (9,2%) is characterized by a high amount of beginners. This segment focuses on learning the desired activities (downhill skiing and snowboarding), suitable slopes and less on landscape and nature. This is also reflected in their evaluation of an expansion. They tend to agree to any new development (37% in favor of development).

## Conclusions

Overall the skier are sensitive towards the additional consumption of landscape for the development of new slopes or connections to other resorts. The majority would support a solution where the impact is properly compensated e.g. by an enlargement of the affected protected area.

However the preference and acceptance of an expansion of a ski resorts are influenced by different factors such as distance to the tourism destination, commitment to the sport and the desired experience.



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