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Motives in Slacklining

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ABSTRACT: Slacklining is an activity of air equilibrium which offers a wide range of practices from a mere leisure shared with friends in a park or as urban contest (Jumpline) to an extreme experience in high altitude (free solo). Vertiginous heights or fear of falling transform the gaming area into a felt void. This immateriality creates an inflexible feeling against which the consciousness is harmless. The body then ecologizes itself without founding any solid marks (external or internal). The void, thanks to its sensorial deepening, put us into a more genuine and more intimate space. This is the reason why slacklining such as other physical or mental vertiginous experiences is currently growing in our today society where falling is one of the strong symbol.

KEYWORDS: Slackline, leisure, environment, community, prowess.

INTRODUCTION

Slacklining is an activity requiring balance, and has been spreading around the world since roughly the year 2000, with strong growth particularly in France over the last five years judging by sales of slackline kits in sports shops and on specialist websites¹. The principle is to successfully cross a flat, slack sling of webbing of between 19 mm and 5 cm in width, above a void. At the beginning of the century, Loret (2004) predicted a rise in equipment-based physical activities that would enable and enhance vertiginous thrills. The slackliner fits into this category, dealing with his/her presence in relation

to the void, while constantly maintaining balance on the sling.

Slacklines appeared on the Californian climbing scene in the mid- 1970s and we will see that this is not insignificant in terms of their original use. When Corneloup (2016) refers to Californian climbing, he means the libertarian climbing movement that emerged in opposition to modern mountaineering in the 1970s and set the tone, symbolically, for postmodern climbing. There was a revival in interest in outdoor activities at the time, and this complicated the potential offering of activities in that area. Different types of practice emerged and new players were involved in creating an outdoor

1 *Simond* has been the mountain sports brand for the *Décathlon* sports store chain since 2008. The company is the leader in mass retail for the sports market and must react rapidly to changes in physical leisure and sports practices. In 2014 *Simond* created a *slackline* kit, which is an indicator for *Slackline* popularity in France. Product sales grow by almost 50% in 2015 and have remained stable since. More than 140 000 of the brand's kits have been sold in France so far. Similarly, specialised websites such as *slack.fr* or *slack-mountain.com* have shown strong growth in sales since 2010.

sports market: local authorities, the media and service providers.

HISTORY

Prior to presenting our research question, we would like to explain the cultural element that is involved here. We are using sociological input to identify different cultural forms in terms of the typical practices and norms of a given period. Hence, through their relationship with institutions, techniques or even values and symbols, the analysis of individuals' involvement in social practices, enables us to describe different cultural eras.

Traditional games that appeared during the Middle Ages were gradually refined by regional diversity, through cyclical and festive events (Camy, 1985; Vigarello, 2002). The advent of modern sport, at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries (Elias, Dunning, 1994), and its massive growth during the following century, coincided with the development of an increasingly more rational, normative and perfectible world (Chartier et Vigarello, 1982). "Modern sport appeared in Britain and in France, during the transition from a traditional society to an industrial society" (Tetart, 2007). The movement was counterbalanced in the 1970s to 1980s by the emergence of postmodern activities that reshape one's relationship with nature, oneself and others, in keeping with the fundamental principle of hedonism (Lipovetsky, 1983). These "Californian" sports (Pociello, 1981) were imported into France by a young generation that wanted to break free of the strong codification of modern sports, since they symbolised the libertarian and ecological values of May 1968. The pursuit of immediate pleasure and the expression of one's individuality by adapting to natural constraints, replaced the quest for performance that was expressed until

then within the normative framework of existing sporting practices.

In post-WW2 America, and buoyed by a spirit of freedom, part of the baby-boom generation grew up contesting traditional values and the lifestyle created by the consumer society. This movement accompanied the emergence of hippie communities, seeking more authentic human relationships and promoting the ecological cause through their practices. This no doubt explains the attraction of outdoor physical activities. In this vein, climbing developed, from the end of the 1950s, beyond a simple physical activity. Gathering in Yosemite National Park in California, these adventure seekers would camp out for several days and even months. Appropriating the site was in keeping with their life style, close to nature and far from a society they considered to be too normative. Beyond the climbing aspect, these living quarters were conducive to looking for shared occupations, particularly during rest or bad weather days². Against a backdrop of camaraderie and fun, the climbers in Yosemite's Camp 4 transformed their balancing game into one of displacement between two anchor points. To do so, they gathered pieces of lanyards and ropes and tied them together between two trees, close to the ground. While it certainly provided a chance to come together through a shared experience, in keeping with their values, the game also helped to develop skills that were directly related to climbing. It would gradually become a specific object after the 1980s, when two climbers, Jeff Ellington and Adam Grosowsky, replaced the ropes by webbed straps, combining elasticity and comfort underfoot. Its development was then fuelled by a desire to cross over between two natural points, in keeping with a new attraction towards « *fun challenges* » (Pociello, 1981). The advent of this vision of physical activities represented a break with modern culture. Technology

2 As witnessed by the comment and photos in the following: "Yosemite in the Fifties: The Iron Age" by Dean Fidelman, John and et Tom Alder, published in 2015; "Yosemite in the sixties" by Glen Denny in 2007 and "California Surfing and Climbing in the Fifties" by Yvon Chouinard, Steve Pezman and Steve Roper in 2013. We can also feel this atmosphere in the documentary film "Valley Uprising" by Peter Mortimer and ROSEN Nick from 2014 (86 minutes).

innovations in board sports, and for interaction with the elements, a more egocentric view of the body, heightened sensations, a fun and community-based approach, social inclusion for youngsters and women in particular, self-organisation or even informal practice... these hedonistic values, which were marginal in terms of sporting practices in the 1980s, started to gain headway as an approach in the early 2000s (Loret, 2004). It is the case with slacklining, which was limited to a few pioneers before the turn of the millennium. And this new approach to physical activity translates today into both the appearance of immersive disciplines in varied and variable environments, from the wilderness to city centres, and a new approach to sport. It is a sports counter-culture that “*does not hold with the recent incarnations of sports practices but expresses a new anthropology based on hedonistic individualism that can accommodate individual pleasures shared with others or in ‘tribes’, whose meaning is to be found in both the continuing forms of traditional practices and those of the new ‘fun practices’*” (Le Pogam, 1997). This said, this “*‘leisureisation’ of sport*” (Bessy, 2008) has not replaced the club model through “*creative destruction*” (Schumpeter, 1990). It sees itself more as a complementary offering that is gaining in magnitude and is contributing to the redefinition of the French leisure landscape. Today we are therefore witnessing a crossover in practices, ranging from the hedonistic form of traditional sports to the competitive redefinition of postmodern activities.

In slacklining, technical and material improvements enable the diversification of experiences and the multiplication of environments, reaching an ever-wider audience, ranging from leisure to competition. The line itself has different names depending on certain characteristics. Frequently used in public parks at roughly 50 cm off the ground, the *Shortline* is no more than 20 m long. Once this has been mastered, several other types of practice are possible, with very different challenges and body techniques. *Longline* is used for long distances, usually over 50 metres; *highlines* are installed at

height, usually over 20 m off the ground. In the first, the aim is to sustain one’s action in the present moment, so as to “*hold out*” over a long course, and in the other to exercise self-control in terms of “*one’s presence over the void*” as one of them explained to us (anonymous interview dated July 11th 2016). A more acrobatic discipline exists, called *Trickline* or *Jumpline*, using a short sling with strong bounce, enabling stunts to be performed. Other variables can be added to these slacklines for heightened sensorial experiences. One of the best known is the *Rodeoline*, which is reminiscent of the traditional loose rope of the circus arts, using a slack sling, and the *Waterline*, set up above water, which throws off the visual reference points.

We believe that the recent success of slacklining and its different variants provides an opportunity to better understand the motives behind present-day leisure pursuits.

QUESTIONING

The multiplication of disciplines shows a desire to satisfy diverse aspirations. This is why we are interested in what draws slackline practitioners to this outdoor balancing activity. Until now, little research has been carried out on slacklining, especially in human and social sciences. The scant work on record today is more concerned with the qualities required to establish a state of balance on the sling (Volery, 2009). These show improvement after four weeks of practicing (Dordevic et al., 2017), hence the idea of including slacklining in sports training programmes, alongside other exercises (Donath et al., 2017). Practicing also appears to be beneficial in stabilising the ankle (Schaefer et al., 2017) and the knee (Pfusterschmied et al., 2013), limiting the risk of injury. It can therefore be useful in rehabilitation programmes (Gabela et al., 2015) as well as in schools to improve pupils’ concentration, since the activity requires a significant effort in terms of attention (Rodenkirch, 2012). These references are typical of scientific studies on slacklining, in that they are often

limited to the mechanical features of the object, and tell us nothing about the practitioners. Obviously, slacklining is a demanding activity in terms of balance, requiring constant focus, but we would like to understand what its enthusiasts are looking for.

This is why we enlarged our scope to the context, the environment in which the activity is carried out. We looked at papers on outdoor activities, where the surroundings are the fundamental element. The different scientific studies we encountered show a variable perception of that environment. It can merely be a sensory aspect for certain athletes, or represent a symbolic act of commitment for others.

For sea kayakers, while there is an ecological and aesthetic appreciation of nature, it provides above all the means for a recreational activity (Krieger & Ginelli, 2015). The environment also represents a libertarian statement for potholers (Schut, 2015), going beyond an interest in exploration, protection of the environment, or even opposition to institutional sports. In another area, Urbex (Lebreton, 2015) and Rooftopping (Andrieu & Chavaroché, 2017) are new activities, an alternative kind of tourism (Lynch & Causevic, 2008) that provides new interaction with urban surroundings. More specifically, certain studies focus on the natural elements at play in these outdoor activities. Pociello speaks of an almost fusional relationship with the elements, and this is confirmed by Valençant in reference to extreme skiing (1979). In climbing, the rock becomes an extension of oneself (De Lésélic 1997). Because of its composition, water is often referred to as an element of communion with the subject (Lacroix & Bessy 1994). Sayeux (2015) even evokes a symbiosis between the surfer's body and the ocean. In free diving, Schirrer (2015) explains that the immersion becomes symbolic, whether the aim is performance, contemplation, fun or sensory perception. Objects often mediate activities in a natural setting, enabling harmony between the body and the element. This « material culture » (Level & Lesage, 2012) has been the subject of

studies in many different sports, such as scuba diving, (Rosselin 2015), surfing (Sayeux, 2015), parachuting (Breivik, 2010), finswimming (Shirrer, 2015) or slacklining (Chavaroché, 2017).

The different research devoted to outdoor physical activities concurs on the necessary adaptation to the setting, whether in pursuit of excellence or enjoyment. Achieving this can amplify the relationship with the surroundings, facilitating the pursuit of osmosis and potentially heightening the symbolic value of the activity itself.

We also used work by Corneloup (2016) who, in analysing the cultural and social dimension of climbers, carried out a classification of different styles in climbing (using socio-demographic and sports data, social norms and representations). Using a structural and constructivist approach, his work identifies and compares climbing styles in regard to the historical/cultural periods mentioned previously: traditional, modern and post-modern. We feel this is an interesting stylistic approach, since slacklining enables different types of activity, in multiple environments.

Having taken into account all of these aspects, we paid particular attention to the environment and type of activity in our study. Given their diversity, we attempted to understand what motivates slackliners, to give us an opportunity to better appreciate what is at play when looking for a leisure activity today. The recreational sport offering is of interest with regard to urban policies as well as to actors in the physical activities sphere. Is the accomplishment of an exploit the only motivation? What role is played by the environment, both physical and social? How do we measure the impact of the group on what is essentially a personal challenge? In summary, to understand the attraction, should we be looking for the answer in the activity, or its practitioners?

METHOD

In order to understand the recent popularity of slacklining, we first of all devised an

exploratory questionnaire. This enabled us to glean socio-demographic data and ask the reasons for practising the activity, what motivated the respondents. We sent it to all of the slacklining groups on social networks, since this represents the most common communication vehicle for the target population. However, we chose to have the questionnaire completed by non-beginners, so as to have more meaningful answers on the implication of the participants.

On the strength of the analysis of the responses, we adopted an ethnographical³ approach so as to better grasp the world of slacklining and to further investigate certain answers. We noticed a different level of implication between those discovering and those pursuing the activity. To understand what motivates slackliners long term, it was necessary to make contact with them. By investigating six slackline festivals, representing the biggest gatherings in the discipline, and following 6 small groups of practitioners throughout France, we were able to produce a corpus of data. We will see that their aspirations, indicative of new leisure practices, seem to go beyond the mere physical aspect, becoming part of a life style.

RESULTS

In order to appreciate the diversity of the practitioners, we carried out an initial questionnaire, which was returned by 108 regular slackliners, i.e. those who were no longer just discovering the activity. Women represented a third, 71% were between 20 and 30 years old and the majority was located in the greater Paris area, the southeast of France, or between the Alps and the Mediterranean. Two-thirds of the respondents had been slacklining for more than two years and the large majority prefer to work in groups, whether indoors, in

public parks, or during special trips, although they admit to needing to work alone at certain times. For the most part, their sporting past includes climbing and board sports, artistic activities, and 23% confessed they had had no other sports leisure activities since childhood. This last figure is far from insignificant, and gives pause for thought as to the available sports offering and what the practitioners are looking for through their activity. More specific results informed us on the different motives for those discovering the activity and those who chose to pursue it, without necessarily helping us to define them. This was therefore a point that we wished to elucidate. And micro-sociological investigations confirm the results of the questionnaire, between discovery of the activity and its long-term practice. Continuing seems to be driven by factors that transcend the activity itself, tending towards more global notions in terms of human activity. We have identified three: prowess (motive n°1), community (motive n°2) and the environment (motive n°3). And we were able to confirm this trend by asking the sample population (108) to complete an end-of-study questionnaire.

Once they have mastered balance on a short sling (shortline), practitioners move on to a specific type of slackline. The range on offer is sufficiently wide to be able to cater for different tastes. These can be found in the « *physical imagination* » and « *attraction* » lines of Table 1, which are the most frequently mentioned themes. With the challenge of distance, longliners are looking to achieve an almost meditative state, whereas jumpliners are attracted by technical mastery or performance. It is more difficult to define the motivations of highliners, who are somewhere between the modern and postmodern forms of the activity, since a quest for osmosis and escape are mentioned as often as a desire to push ones limits.

3 In order to carry out participative peripheral observation, we kept a field journal (notes and recordings) during the following festivals: the *Winter Festislack*; the *Turkish Highline Carnival*; the *Marmotte Highline Project*; the *Outdoormix Festival*; the *Ardeche Slackline Meeting* and the *Festislack*. We also conducted interviews with six different groups, which we followed daily for between one and three weeks, in Aix-en-Provence, Lyon, Nancy, Nantes and Paris.

Table 1. Choosing a slackline discipline: discovery and commitment

Slackline type	Jumpline / Trickline	Longline	Highline
Specific features	Wide, short sling with little elasticity, providing bounce for stunts (jumps or static poses)	Thin, very long sling. From 30 meters to several hundred.	Thin airborne sling, requiring a safety leash
Primary environment	Urban and indoor (gyms, sports halls).	From peri-urban to countryside	Wilderness (including mountains)
Physical imagination (Reason behind the choice of each discipline)	Artistic or acrobatic performance Freestyle approach	The effort of concentration and self-control over time The challenge of crossing a long distance	Overcoming fear and keeping ones nerve despite the void Vertiginous thrills
Dominant terms (Attraction)	Mastering Augmenting Improving Pushing personal limits	Controlling Self-knowledge Disconnection Zen attitude	Exceeding personal limits Proving oneself Escapism Osmosis
Interpretation			
Cultural form	Modern	Postmodern	Essentially postmodern

After a trial season, slackliners who choose to continue, do so for reasons that are not confined to the type of slackline. Our study clearly highlights a progression from an attraction to a particular slackline discipline, to a more global quest. According to our ethnographical study, borne out by the end-of-study questionnaire, a very large majority of slackliners move beyond the type of activity to include dominant common values, enabling us to

group them into three motives (Table 2). This is of course an interpretive model. We present the three motives separately, whereas in reality and depending on the moment, individuals can move between the three. While the quest for performance, either artistic or measurable, is still a motivation for some, others are more drawn by the membership of a group, and a third set of the slackliners is attracted more by the surrounding environment.

Table 2. Choice of slackline disciplines: pursuing involvement

Motivations	Prowess	Community	Environment
Imagination (What motivates the slackliner to pursue the activity)	Artistic expression. Performances that are viewed (shared videos, spectators) or judged in a competition	Belonging to a group. Meeting up, being together, sharing.	Appreciation or enhancement of the surroundings. Spatial appropriation. Interest in the void or the territory.
Practical activities	- Jumpline / Trickline - Original creations in the other disciplines, and aesthetic hybrids.	- Cohabitation between the different slackline disciplines - Relaxing activities in parallel: games, music, food, rest.	Airborne and wilderness activities: Highline, high-altitude hybrids (baseline, swingline, spacenet), climbing, hiking, wingsuit, paragliding, etc.
Main locations	- Indoor halls. - Accessible spaces, conducive to demonstrations. - Choice of a location that suits video.	Parks and spaces that can accommodate groups.	Wilderness

MOTIVE 1: PROWESS

Here, it is the modern sporting vision that counts: performance, measurable achievement, and records.

It is not surprising to note that the most 'sportified' of the disciplines, the Jumpline, attracts rather competitive individuals. We can see in the two tables above that jumpliners start and continue long term with the same objective, that of improving their performance. Many of them had previous experience in an artistic discipline. Jumpline at times resembles a federal sport, with a championship where routines are judged by specialists according to a performance grid, according to criteria on the difficulty and variety of the stunts, style, as well as the height of the jumps. « *The discipline is really gaining ground. We now have a training mind-set to prepare for the championship* » said one of these athletes (anonymous interview dated October 7th 2016).

However, performance can also be judged through the quest for measurable records. For example on June 9th 2017, Pablo Signoret, Nathan Paulin and Lucas Milliard, walked 1662 metres across the Cirque de Navacelles in France, which represents the longest line in the world, and highlines at over 100 m above the ground or at high mountain altitudes mean you can almost literally touch the sky. Groups and practitioners that are in the race for records organise in secret, and then unveil their victory by sharing footage of the event, which makes the competitive element more subtle and indirect. In just three years, records have been smashed, whether for length, height or speed of execution.

In the same way, artistic efforts have led to the association of different disciplines to invent original creations or unique exploits. As an example the *Flying Frenchies* combine slackline with circus arts and other extreme sports. It was they who came up with the idea of setting up a line between two hot air balloons.

Aesthetic considerations stimulate creativity. We could list crossing a burning sling, or

music on the move as groups play their instrument while crossing the slackline, or use the sling to play the Theremin. One of the artistic directions the discipline has taken is into staged shows or choreographies, with two dancers, for example, clearly moving into the realm of the performing arts. The slackline has been used by the Cirque du Soleil, in video clips, in commercials and on TV shows. It has to be said that Andy Lewis's performance during one of Madonna's songs at the half time show at Super Bowl 2012, was an exceptional showcase for the activity. In a discipline without rules, the unusual and the original transform routines into performances. The worldwide distribution of these exploits or these artistic creations *via* social networks amplifies emulation, and reinforces the competitive aspect of the discipline. Slackline pioneers in France try to stand out from the neo-practitioner by creating new techniques, meeting new challenges, which are then communicated in the same way as the techniques of the federal sporting world's top athletes, encouraging creativity and therefore the development of the discipline. If we take the example of Théo Sanson, a former Longline record holder, he is now moving towards more artistic or spectacular productions, such as his work that combines Freelineing (without safety equipment at great height) and Blindlining (crossing blind). The 'spectacularisation' of slacklining has certainly brought the discipline closer to the competitive spirit of modern sports, emphasising the comparison of different exploits. Some use the term 'ultra modernity' (Balandier, 2004; Ferez, 2000) to explain this phenomenon. While fairly far removed from the original values of slacklining, which was about fun and sensations, the quest for performance is easier to accept when it is based on a voluntary, shared involvement, rather than imposed by an institutional ethos. And yet, « *we train like mad, it's worse than in a club! (...) But we're in it together and we motivate each other* » explained a longliner (anonymous interview dated July 2016) during our discussions. One jumpliner added: "We take the time we

need (...) We do everything we can to help each other do the stunts (...) it bonds us” (anonymous interview dated 31st July 2016).

MOTIVE N° 2: COMMUNITY

The second category concerns practitioners for whom the chance to meet up together is more of a priority than the type of slackline. Different types of sling and levels of tension are present in the same space. The activities are varied (Longline, Jumphline, Shortline, Rodeoline), the standard is disparate, but these individuals cohabit because it is the shared experience aspect that gives the activity meaning. The common theme in our interviews was above all the necessity to co-experience. “*Slack is also an excuse for getting together* » said one longliner. Another, who is used to practising in parks stated « *We never know how many of us will be there. There are a few diehards (...) but also some casuals and new folk... It's never organised up front*”. One female highliner put it this way: “*what I like most of all, is discovering new spots (...) and thinking that several of us are going to experience pure sensations*” (anonymous interviews dated August 13th 2016). This means that the outings on offer may matter more than the individual's preferred activity, and in reality 58 % practice several disciplines. Slackline fans advocate the idea of an activity that is open to all and inclusive, as shown by the diversity in a given territory, whether in terms of female participation or that of different socio-professional categories, or the sensations that they seek. One of the groups I followed, who practice in a public park in the Paris suburbs, was made up of two students, a jobseeker, a banker, a manager, an engineer and a salesperson. One of them explained that he was unable to find a way to push his limits in a society that he finds too sanitised. Slacklining enabled him to do this quite quickly, but without taking any unnecessary risks. For another, on the contrary, it represents a battle with himself, which helps him to assert himself in a job that he finds very stressful. “*I've never been very sporty, (...) but slack's*

brilliant. You have to fight against yourself so you don't fall. There's no room for error (...) You have to concentrate all the time. I'm learning self-control, and it helps me in my work.” (interview dated August 14th 2016). And apart from their personal interest, all of them admitted that they like to share these experiences together, encouraging each other, chatting, relaxing, getting a change of scenery, sharing what Portes calls a “*slice of life*” (1999). This is why they would meet up every day during the summer. We observed this phenomenon in each of the six groups we followed, throughout France⁵. Colombetti talks of “*sense-making*” (2014) to define what makes human beings act, what motivates them, what touches them. On top of their desire to improve on the sling, these slackliners are essentially driven by the pleasure of meeting up, whether for an outing at the weekend, or after work. The practitioners become true actors of their leisure activity and the shift in organisational responsibility forces them to demonstrate creativity in order to be able to practice, whether in terms of finding spots, technique, setting up the line, protecting trees, training, etc.

While they are actors in an individual activity that augments sensations, slackliners say they prefer spots where they can get together, to private gardens or remote outdoor locations, and these become new playgrounds where a new type of sociability is on display (Lebreton, 2008). Some talk of “*re-connecting with the world*” (Maffesoli, 2007) to describe this present-day humanism, a way of co-existing and “being in the here and now, promoting sensitivity. We are witnessing more and more initiatives based on interaction, a knowledge-based economy, such as at slackline festivals. Organised over several days, the *Ardèche Slackline Meeting* for example promotes the surrounding area, as witnessed by temporary campsites or the use of local and often organic products for the meals. Parallel activities to do with nature and wellbeing are very common. Workshops on somatic techniques, nature walks for discovering local wildlife, concerts by local groups and films about

outdoor activities... This festive spirit, which is about local and traditional revival, represents a distancing from modern and postmodern cultures, embracing other philosophies such as naturalness and body ecology (Andrieu, 2011) but also relational ecology (Ingold, 2011). Slackline spots become social territories, structured spaces in which human relations play out through, but also beyond, the practice of the sport. One needs only consider the volume of time spent there, as opposed to actual practice time. Installing the equipment, relaxation, games, listening to music, meals and other parallel activities... these are all exchanges and occupations that take up more than two thirds of the time spent. To this extent we can talk about social territories, places that come alive through their relational potentialities.

MOTIVE N° 3 : ENVIRONMENT

Slacklining represents escapism for a core group of practitioners, a majority of whom come from the world of climbing. Territorial re-appropriation represents a third motive found among those who continue to slackline after a few months or years. In response to the domestication of the world, with the development of bigger and bigger buildings and private spaces, escaping to the wilderness provides a means of temporary ownership. *"Highlining means being immersed in nature. You get some amazing views, for sure... but above all it makes me realise that I'm part of this place and it's part of me"*. This territorial re-appropriation is at its peak when related to an as yet inalienable element, the air. Slackline gives shape to the empty space between two earthbound points. *"Apart from the challenge of the length or the height, you really feel like crossing over gives space some texture"* (anonymous interviews dated July 18th 2017). While most lines are set up in urban or peri-urban areas, encouraging camaraderie (motive n°2), some more adventurous souls are committed to discovering wild landscapes, pushing the sensorial boundaries of the activity. They often also practice other

airborne activities like paragliding, parachuting, Wingsuiting or climbing, and sometimes combinations of these. Dean Potter started Baselining, bringing together Highlining and Base Jumping. Instead of wearing a harness, the practitioner uses a parachute, which enables him to jump off the sling. Swinglining is another example, and includes a forward leap midway across. The experience is augmented by a 'vertiginous immersion', connecting the slackliner to his inner self, through the emotion he experiences, whether fear or euphoria. This temporary ownership of a free space, the void, also bears witness to a more ecological lifestyle. In the same way, and to a greater extent, Spacenet breaks up the linear aspect of the slackline, creating a new space between several slings, woven together into a kind of spider's web. The central space, reached via several slings, prolongs and reinforces the dizzying experience. On its surface, measuring several square metres, practitioners can *"sit on the void"*, a free and elusive space. This is also true when hammocks or tents are set up on the sling, representing leisure cohousing, an ephemeral cohabitation that encourages a connection between the practitioner and the air.

According to the questionnaire responses, 93% of slackliners say they are sympathetic to the ecological cause. The depletion of natural resources along with worrying predictions no doubt elicit, in response, a need for environmental harmony. Outdoor sports become a means of promoting the relationship that individuals have with the environment and the elements, underlining a desire to connect with the world. This ecological quest is also present through the body, in the Merleau-Ponty sense, since it is in the front line of this sensorial revolution. Whereas conquest and measurement were features of outdoor activities during the modern period, today there is a more intimate relationship with space, and a more qualitative relationship with time. Slackliners that have this outlook have a contemplative rather than a conquering relationship with the environment. There are no codes in their surroundings,

which can be the case in climbing. The point is not to get to the top of as many routes as possible, but on the contrary to savour, to take time out, to be at one with nature, with an aesthetic and ecological ethos.

We are therefore witnessing a new glorification of different spaces, where the interior, the emotional core, seeks osmosis with the surrounding environment. Being suspended in the air, this dreamlike confrontation with the void, enables the slackliner to be at one with nature. And experiencing a fall plunges the slackliners into a space that is both more real and more intimate (Petit, 1997). The experience is brief for the slackliners who are attached or who are only a few centimetres off the ground, but they say the sudden loss of control is revealing in terms of sensations. One of them told us: *“When I fall, I feel more like I’m falling into myself than into the void (...) I can’t get that in any other situation”*. One of his colleagues added: *“when I’m really concentrating, I can feel myself fall into myself... And it’s that disconnection that then makes me fall, physically”* (anonymous interviews dated July 10th 2018). Falling therefore represents a new sensory depth where the subject gets back in touch with his inner self, as witnessed by another highliner: *“I’ve never found an activity like it (...) I was able to explore all my fears (...) and with practice, I learned to relax my body, to relax my mind (...) Little by little, everything became fluid. I reached a level of consciousness, and I can say that I turned my fear into happiness”* (anonymous interview dated October 3rd 2017).

CONCLUSION

The diversification of types of activity and motives is leading to more and more varied spatial use, underlining a territorial development in sports practices (Augustin, Bourdeau & Ravenel, 2008). Slacklining, like other outdoor sports that are becoming more urbanised (Adamkiewicz, 2001) is becoming a challenge for local authorities in terms of these new spatial poles. Urban policies are beginning to

address this, so as to find a balance between safety, sustainable development and urban (re) development. But there is a dilemma. Should they be permissive, with no control over these new activities and their social impact, or invest in what might be a passing phase? The sociologists who have considered the question such as Pociello (1995), Defrance (1998), Loret and Waser (2001), Bessy and Hillairet (2002), Corneloup and Mao (2002) consider that this trend is becoming a major factor in the leisure sport area. Given the activity’s increased popularity, perhaps one solution would be to envisage dedicated areas, or to partially equip otherwise natural spaces.

Slackline is an activity that enables multiple sensory experiences and creativity, as opposed to technical standardisation, co-existence of cultural forms as opposed to a hierarchical single model; public and wild spaces as opposed to private property. The quest for achievement, shared experiences, (re)discovery of the space in which they operate... these three notions explain the continued involvement of slackliners. They go beyond physical activity and touch on lifestyle issues. These categories are dominant, but not distinct. On a given day, for a given trip, some may be drawn by the performance aspect (motive n° 1), and an attachment to a particular environment (motive n° 3) is not necessarily contradictory to the search for shared experiences (motive n° 2), on the contrary. The model highlights the fact that motives are no longer limited to the physical activity. On this aspect, Corneloup talks of transmodernity when defining *“a combined approach that overcomes oppositions between cultures and types of activity, reinforcing territorial identity depending on certain choices, involving the local and regional population through the (re)discovery of public or open spaces and minority populations (handicapped, homeless, marginals, elderly, youth) with regard to the activities themselves”* (2011). Creativity, community life, rediscovery of the body and space... slacklining reflects the quest for balance within oneself, in ones dealings with others, and with the world.

Through the relationship with the air and the void, slacklining is part of a new generation of dizzying leisure pursuits that attract more and more people because of the emotions they generate (Andrieu, 2014). In a similar vein, we can also mention the development of new flying sports like Wingsuiting, non-traditional high-altitude accommodation such as portaledges for example, which are tents that can be attached to a rock face and were originally designed for climbers, walking across high-altitude glass bridges, or vertical leisure activities such as *Roofopping*. When considering what provides meaning, what motivates practitioners for the activity, we believe their interest in symbols to be important too. Behind these disciplines, there is without doubt a cosmic significance that is deeply rooted and often even subconscious since, as Bachelard claims, “to dream profoundly, we must dream with substances” (1942). Many of the slackliners in our study speak of the paradox of wanting to walk across the void, objectivising a link between what is real and what is imaginary. During our interview, one highliner explained that he felt a dissociation between his body “which needs to move forward” and the realisation of the “abnormal” nature of the situation, requiring constant “self-management”. This sensitivity also drives their involvement, a sort of Bachelardian reverie that connects them to nature. Analysing the challenges that draw someone to get involved in a physical activity provides an insight into the relationship between man and society, and could be of interest to those who work in leisure clubs, sports clubs and schools, both in terms of their choice of physical activities and their approach to them.

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