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Performance or sustainability? Tensions between (elite) sport logics of performance and reducing environmental impact

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In the face of climate change, and driven by the logic of sportification, many sport landscapes have become more dependent on advanced technology. In this paper, we analyze how sport practitioners view the landscapes in which they conduct their training and competitions. Specifically, we explore the role of technology in balancing performance and environmental sustainability by analyzing two cases that are both impacted by climate change. The first case focuses on the role of sustainable development among individuals who have alpine skiing as their profession and lifestyle, primarily as ski instructors. Their relation to sport landscapes and seasonality over two decades explain how the environment and climate has changed and affected the possibility to ski and having skiing as a living (or not). There is a tension between the importance of technology in artificial snow production to sustain a full season, and a more caring attitude towards the nature and mountains. The desire to work with skiing is strong and, to some extent, work towards environmental sustainability. The second case zooms in on cross-country skiers, and the tensions between (elite) sport logics of performance and reducing the environmental impact (Backman & Svensson, 2022). We argue that the tension between performance and environmental sustainability becomes explicit in relation to climate change, and that sport with its long tradition of regimentation and standardization regarding technology and performance (Loland, 2018) has the potential to become a driving force in climate-related adaptations.

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