‘Hot Planet, Cool Athletes’: A Case Study of Protect Our Winters and the Role of Ski Activism in Combating Climate Change

Ioana Mihala
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>BMWFW</td>
<td>Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Wirtschaft</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIPRA</td>
<td>International Commission for the Protection of the Alps</td>
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<tr>
<td>COP21</td>
<td>21st Conference of the Parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIY</td>
<td>Do It Yourself</td>
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<td>EPA</td>
<td>Environmental Protection Agency</td>
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<td>GNP</td>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
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<td>NEP</td>
<td>New Ecology Paradigm</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>POW</td>
<td>Protect Our Winters</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>VBN</td>
<td>Value-Belief-Norm</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Tourism Organisation</td>
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‘Hot Planet, Cool Athletes’: A Case Study of Protect Our Winters and the Role of Ski Activism in Combating Climate Change

IOANA MIHALA


Abstract:
Despite the high vulnerability of alpine environments to climate change, adaptation and mitigation within the winter sport industry have only recently received consideration. However, the focus has been mainly on the adaptation measures of the ski resort operators (supply side), not taking into consideration other actors (demand side) or attempts aiming for a sustainable form of winter tourism. Through a case study of Protect Our Winters (POW), an environmental group started by a professional snowboarder, this research aims at investigating the role of a new social movement, ski activism, in combating climate change. Interviews with active members of POW Austria and participant observations at events and meetings of this same organisation were conducted and analysed to gain an overview on the matter. Results show that empirical knowledge of climate change consequences and the concern about the future of lifestyle sports such as skiing and snowboarding can motivate activist behaviour. Furthermore, the variety of outreach tools of an organisation like POW can help raise awareness and inspire to join the ski activist movement. Because the study deals with a new type of movement, further research is needed to explore the effects of this alternative climate mitigation attempt and to analyse more initiatives and organisations started by the demand side of the winter sport industry.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, New Social Movement, Ski Activism, Climate Change, Winter Tourism, POW, Lifestyle Sports

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Summary:
Climate change is a global threat to which mountain regions are particularly sensitive. The ski industry is, thus, one of the economic sectors needing to address this issue immediately. Studies have mostly focused on the adaptation measures of the ski operators (supply side), not taking into consideration other actors’ initiatives (demand side). This research aims to address this gap, by delving into activist actions by the winter sport community. Through a case study of Protect Our Winters (POW), an environmental group started by a professional snowboarder, the role of ski activism in combating climate change is investigated. Theories of new social movement, identity, and lifestyle sports are used to frame the concept of ski activism and to look into the skiers and snowboarders behind the movement. The results are based on desktop research and empirical data: interviews with active members of POW Austria and participant observations at events and meetings of this same organisation. They show that empirical knowledge of climate change consequences and the concern about the future of lifestyle sports such as skiing and snowboarding can motivate activist behaviour. Furthermore, the variety of outreach tools of an organisation like POW can help raise awareness and inspire to join the ski activist movement.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, New Social Movement, Ski Activism, Climate Change, Winter Tourism, POW, Lifestyle Sports

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1. Introduction

As skiers, we interact with the world differently. We see things most people never even realize they are missing—a viewpoint from up high, for example, or the symptoms of climate change. The fight to save snow demands we share our views and empirical knowledge of climate change with the rest of the world. We must do more than change lightbulbs, recycle, and carpool to work. Now is the time to speak up, loudly. (Brown 2017)

“Become an Activist” is the title of the article that was published in the skiing magazine “Powder” in April 2017 to encourage skiers and snowboarders to participate to the 2017’s Climate March as they are “on the front lines of climate change”. The winter sport industry has been referred to as the ‘canary in the coalmine’ (Bicknell 2006) because it is one of the most vulnerable industries to the threat of climate and one of the first to signal its critical consequences. Melting of the glaciers, dry winters, therecession of the snow line or the increased risk of avalanches due to the extreme variances in temperatures and precipitation levels are some of the effects I was able to observe and experience myself, being a snowboarder and growing up in the mountains. In the same time, I could also notice the growth of the winter sport industry and transformation of the alpine landscape. Expansion of the ski areas leads to more ski lifts, more snow canons, more hotels, more roads being built and this expansion requires beside land, energy as well. Throughout the years, I have thus witnessed forests being cleared or hydropower facilities constructed. This industry can have negative impacts on the environment, however with over 125 million skiers worldwide (Vanat 2016), it is an important economic sector on which certain regions or even countries depend on, therefore action needs to be taken. While certain regions and businesses operating within the industry have high stakes, they are not the only ones affected by climate change. In nature-based sports such as skiing and snowboarding, the mountain setting in which the practice takes place is more valued than the sportive activity itself; furthermore, environmental connectedness, adventure, or the sense of freedom include the snow sports in the category of lifestyle sports (Wheaton 2010). These values and the lifestyle are thus also at risk.

Many studies have been conducted that examine both the vulnerability of ski regions to climate change (Scott 2006; Soboll&Dingeldey 2012; Gilaberte-Burdalo et al. 2014; Steiger&Abbeg 2013) and different adaptation measures within the ski industry (Scott 2006; Scott &McBoyle 2007; Steiger&Mayer 2008). Yet, researchers have focused on ski area operators, leaving out the supply side – skiers and snowboarders –, whose input on the subject can be as important. In the last decade, there have been an increasing number of environmental groups and campaigns, started by enthusiastic skiers and snowboarders, with the purpose to mobilize the winter sport community in addressing climate change. Through a case study of Protect Our Winters (POW), a bottom-up organisation reflecting the globalisation of the winter sport movement, I will investigate the role ski activism plays in the fight against climate change and in achieving a sustainable form of winter tourism. In addition, the research has the following objectives: to gain a better understanding of the identity of POW ski activists and their perceptions on the relationship between winter tourism and climate change; to explore the strengths and weaknesses of organisations like POW.
2. Background

2.1. Climate Change and Winter Tourism

Climate change is a global threat to which mountain regions are particularly sensitive. In the Alps the temperature increased with about 1.8°C since 1850 and the recent warming rate has been about three times the global average. Climate models project a further increase in temperature, 1 to 2 °C by 2050 and 3 to 6°C by the end of the century (BMWWFW 2012; OECD 2007). Other impacts include the reduction in snow cover (for every 1°C, snowline recedes by 150 meters), melting permafrost, change of precipitation rates and a higher number of extreme weather events (WTO 2003). Reduction of glacier mass presents a further issue, until the 1980’s 30-40% of their area and half of the mass was lost in the Alps and since then another 10-20% from the remaining mass (OECD 2007). With a constant temperature increase, almost all glacier cover in the Alps could melt by 2100 (ibid.). The acute vulnerability of the region was acknowledged by the Alpine Convention1 and in 2006 Declaration on Climate Change in the Alps was adopted with the purpose to develop adaptation strategies for the affected economic sectors in all the Alpine countries (ibid.).

2.1.1. Winter Tourism in the Alps

One of the economic sectors highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change is tourism and in the case of the Alps especially winter tourism. The total number of skiers worldwide is estimated to be around 125 million and growing according to Vanat (2016), same report states that the Alps are the largest ski market on the planet with 43% of worldwide skier’s attendance (see Fig. 1). Furthermore, the Alps are also the most intensely equipped region of the industry with more than 10,000 ski lifts. Along Switzerland, Austria is one of the Alpine countries whose economy depends on tourism and winter tourism. Despite a rather small area of 83,871 km² and a population of 8.1 million, it is ranked third in terms of global skier days after USA and France. It is the European country with the largest hotel accommodation offering and its western region, Tyrol, is the world’s most densely ski-resort populated area (Vanat 2016). Given the high investments, Austria also has the most updated, even luxurious lift technology. Besides the economic relevance (4.5% of Austria’s GNP), winter sports are also culturally important, Austria is the only country where kindergartens and schools have ski weeks regularly. (Vanat 2016; Steiger&Abbeg 2013; Wolfsegger et al. 2008; OECD 2007)

![Figure 1. Repartition of skier visits worldwide (Vanat 2016)](image)

As any other nature-based tourism sector, winter tourism is highly dependent on physical resources. The alpine environment is a fragile ecosystem; any human impact is felt stronger than in other areas. The ski industry is therefore often criticised for its negative impacts on the environment.

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1 International treaty between the alpine countries (Austria, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Lichtenstein, Slovenia and Monaco), signed in 1991 for the sustainable development and protection of the Alps (URL)
2.1.2. Environmental Impacts of Winter Tourism

Deterioration of the Alpine Land

The traditional alpine landscape is altered by the ski industry; forests have been cut down for the development of resorts and ski facilities. In Austria, there are currently 425 ski resorts with a total of 7226.9 km slopes and 2564 ski lifts to transport the guests (Skiresort Service International). The clearings and grading for ski runs lead to a fragmented ecosystem, erosions, and the disappearance of rare habitats (Weiss et al. 1998; Hudson 1995). Even though there are laws nowadays that prevent further construction without strict environmental assessments, a lot of the damage caused is irreversible and cannot be compensated for. The preparation and use of ski runs also brings additional damage; the sharp tracks of the heavy snow cats can cut up the ground and destroy layers of soil especially when there is poor snow cover (Weiss et al. 1998). At such times, damage is also caused by the intense use of the runs, by the edges of the many skis and snowboards (ibid.). Artificial snow, of which most resort are dependent on, especially with the increasing temperatures, melts slower thus influencing the growth of the vegetation (Hudson 1995). Moreover, snow canons require a great amount of energy and water (120 litres of water for 1.2 m 30cm deep snow) (Weiss et al. 1998). Not least, mountain farming villages have been transformed into big tourist centres with hotels, restaurants, shops, swimming pools and car parks. This expansion also led to buildings being constructed in ‘red zones’, zones with high risk of natural hazards such as avalanches, landslides, and floods. (ibid.)

Pollution

The greatest impact of winter tourism is in fact traffic (Schöntaler & Werbun 2007). Between 80 and 84% of all tourist journeys to the Alps are by car and cars are frequently used during the holiday stay as well. Measuring stations recorded the highest peaks on winter Saturdays. 75% of the CO₂ emissions produced by tourism are due to transportation. In addition, traffic also leads to high noise levels, which affects the fauna (ibid.). Beside air pollution, waste and sewage also represent big issues; about 5% of the total waste in Austria is produced by winter tourists. Production, servicing, and disposal of skis lead to further waste material, polluted water, and emissions; every year millions of skis are manufactured in Austria and around 400.000 are thrown away, ending up mostly in the trash. (Weiss et al. 1998)

2.1.3. Climate Impacts and Adaptation Measures

Given the economic relevance of this tourism sector especially for the alpine countries, a high number of papers examine the consequences of climate change on the ski industry and the possible adaptation measures. The most crucial factor on which winter tourism depends is snow reliability, the 100-rule defined by Wittmer in 1986 states that a ski resort is considered snow-reliable when there is snow cover of at least 30cm available in at least 100 days between December and April, in 7 out of 10 winters (Steiger & Abegg 2013). As mentioned before each degree Celsius increase in the temperature transform in 150 metres recession of the snow line, therefore putting in danger especially the resorts that are at lower altitudes (ibid.). The exact numbers of snow-reliable ski areas over time given a warming of 1°C, 2°C and 4°C differ according to study and method used, however the prediction are not in favour of the ski industry (Gilaberte-Burdalo et al. 2014; Steiger & Abbeg 2013; Elsasser & Burki 2002). According to a recent study by Steiger and Abbeg (2013) already for the 2°C scenario more than 50% of the ski areas in Austria will not show natural snow reliability and will have to increase snowmaking by 100-199% (Fig. 2).
Already 50-70% of the Austrian ski slopes are covered by artificial snow and temperature changes will not only increase this number but also have consequences on the snow production itself; temperatures of -3°C to -4°C and an optimal humidity are required for the process. (Steiger & Abegg 2013). These impacts will lead to potential winners and losers who will each have to adapt; the resorts in higher altitudes will probably receive an increased number of tourists and will have to deal with overcrowding and development pressure, while the areas in lower altitudes will need to cope with lower incomes and diversify therefore their touristic offer (Gilaberte-Burdalo et al 2014; Steiger & Abegg 2013; Wolfsegger et al. 2008; WTO 2003; Elsasser & Bruki 2002).

In their paper about climate adaptation in the ski industry, Scott and McBoyle (2007) discuss the different strategies adopted by both the supply and the demand side (Fig. 3).
Even though a combined approach would be most appropriate, the technological practices such as snowmaking, slope development, and cloud seeding remain dominant. Despite being a short-term to medium-term solution, snowmaking is the preferred strategy, especially in the Alps (Wolfsegger et al. 2008; OECD 2007). There are many studies examining this technology; costs and improvements (producing at a higher temperature and lower humidity) (Steiger & Abegg 2013; OECD 2007); the water demand needed for future production (Vanham et al. 2008) etc. Slope development includes landscaping, contouring, and smoothing of the slopes and protection of the glaciers. The last method involves installing large sheets of white polyethylene on glacier areas, protecting the ice from radiation and slowing down the melting in summer months, this method being now more frequently used in Austria and Switzerland (cf. Scott & McBoyle 2007: 1418). Following the technological adaptations, business practices such as joining ski conglomerates, diversifying winter products and enhanced marketing are seen as most appropriate, both worldwide and in the Alps (Wolfsegger et al. 2008; Scott & McBoyle 2007). Climate change is both a challenge and an opportunity for the ski area operator, being used as a key argument to justify expansion of the existing ski areas into higher altitudes and the construction of new snowmaking facilities (Elsasser & Bruki 2002). Adaptation measures in the future will depend on various factors, such as geographical attributes or government jurisdictions and competition between resorts will continue growing, leaving the ones with the greatest adaptive strategy to survive:

[ski areas with great adaptive strategy] they have the potential to expand into higher elevation terrain where exposure to climate change is lower and snowmaking capabilities enhanced; they have capital to develop efficient and extensive snowmaking systems; they have the capacity to expand water supply for increased snowmaking; they have the capacity to further diversify resort operations (multiple winter activities and four-season operation); they are part of a larger company or regionally diversified ski conglomerate that could provide financial or human-resource support during poor business conditions; they are located in jurisdictions with less land use restrictions (e.g., outside of national parks or in states/provinces where skiing makes a large contribution to the economy) and have positive relationships with host communities, both of which may reduce constraints to adaptation. (Scott & McBoyle 2007: 1427)

Both Scott and McBoyle (2007) and Soboll and Dingelday (2012) call attention to the lack of research
about demand-side adaptation, a side equally important for the ski industry: “Only when supply- and demand-side adaptation are incorporated into vulnerability assessments will the complexity of local and regional economic impacts of climate change on winter sports tourism be more accurately understood” (Scott & McBoyle 2007: 1428). The few studies that do examine this subject are mostly represented by surveys that look into the reactions of snowboarders/skiers to climate change and snow poor winters. Both in the USA and in the Alps, the frequency with which skiers will continue to visit the resorts given the future climate conditions was enquired (BMWFW 2012; Scott & McBoyle 2007). Other surveys analysed the amount skiers would be willing to pay extra for different services and products provided by environmentally responsible suppliers. (Scott & McBoyle 2007).

2.1. Ski Associations and Environmental Groups

Research on the role of Ski Associations and environmental groups formed in mitigating and adapting to climate change constitutes a further critical research gap, a gap that will be addressed in this paper. In their experiment, Luthea & Schläpfer (2011) examined the role of third-party information on consumer choices of sustainable products and services in the ski industry. The same information was provided to the research participants under three different forms: just as a fact without any source, given by a well-known environmental NGO and by other experienced consumers who would have visited the resort. The information consisted of negative recommendations such as long travel times to the resort, expansion on glaciers or 100% snow reliability and positive ones, short travel periods, small authentic resorts, flexible ski passes, or reduced grooming and snowmaking. Both information provided by the NGO and other consumers had an effect on about a third of the respondents, the difference being that positive recommendations were more effective when coming from NGO while negative ones when coming from other consumers. (Luthea & Schläpfer 2011). The experiment suggested that consumers, in this case people practicing winter sports, could be influenced by NGOs or environmental groups in supporting environmental responsible practices, a sustainable winter tourism and thus facilitating a transition.

Even though the role of environmental groups can be relevant for the future of winter tourism and against the threat of climate change very few studies focus on this aspect. Some Ski Associations and NGOs who support a more sustainable winter tourism are shortly described by some researcher: the Sustainable Slopes Association and the “Keep Winter Cool” initiatives under the National Ski Areas Association in the US, promoting environmental practices such as energy efficiency for skiing operators and supporting environmental legislation (Demiroğlu & Şahin 2015; Prendergast 2011; Scott & McBoyle 2007; Schmidt 2006). In Europe, CIPRA (International Commission for the Protection of the Alps) an organisation advocating for sustainable development within the Alps launched the Alpstar project, through which a pilot climate friendly ski resort was created (Demiroğlu & Şahin 2015). While being non-governmental organisations, none of the above is an organisation or project initiated by the demand side of the winter sport industry, by the skiers and snowboarders themselves. Demiroğlu & Şahin (2015) enumerate the different environmental groups focusing on climate change mitigation in the ski industry and points out how the efforts and activist initiatives of both supply and demand side groups should be considered equally important for climate change mitigation. In her dissertation on the evolution of ski resort sustainability, Prendergast (2011) also describes and compares these different organisations and argues how the ones started by individuals invested in skiing and snowboarding, so by the demand side, could have possible positive effects on winter sport sustainability because of their indirect or limited connection with the ski industry and thus a more unbiased approach. One such organisation, mentioned in both papers and described as “probably the most active of all” (Demiroğlu & Şahin 2015: 6) is Protect Our Winters (POW).
2.1.1. Protect Our Winters (POW)

Protect Our Winters POW is a non-profit organisation founded in 2007 in the USA by professional snowboarder Jeremy Jones with the purpose of uniting and mobilizing the global snow sports community in the fight against climate change. The focuses of the organisation are youth education, political advocacy, and community-based activism. By collaborating with ski and snowboard manufacturers, professional athletes, ski resorts, climate experts and the winter sport community, the organisation aims to raise awareness about the negative climatic consequences and change consumption behaviours among skiers and snowboarders. Beside the people actively working in the organisation, there is also a Rider’s Alliance and a Science Alliance. The Rider’s Alliance consists of professional skiers and snowboarders who support the ideas of POW and help with different actions and programs. Through the Science Alliance, as the name also implies, members of the academic field are consulted on the latest climate change research. The organisation extended over the last years in Europe as well, having offices in Norway, Sweden, Finland, France, Austria, Germany, and the UK. (Protect Our Winters) Protect Our Winters Austria is one of the many daughter organizations of POW US and was founded in 2015. The headquarters are in Innsbruck, Austria, a city in the region of Tyrol. (Protect Our Winters Austria)

Youth Education

In 2011 POW launched the program “Hot Planet/ Cool Athletes”. POW members together with professional athletes, part of the Rider’s Alliance, visit schools and give a multi-media presentation about climate change sharing both their personal experiences and latest climate science. The purpose is to inspire the next generation in becoming environmental stewards. Furthermore, teams of students can submit project proposals addressing environmental action in their schools or community. Twice a year, the winning team is offered a grant (‘powder grant’) for the implementation of the project. 52.000 students at 96 schools were reached in the US since the start of this initiative. (Protect Our Winters; Protect Our Winters 2016)

Political Advocacy

By leveraging the influence of the professional skiers and snowboarders and of their business partners, POW has a powerful voice and can put pressure on policy makers such as the White House, the EPA and members of congress. In 2015 for example, the focus was advocating for the Clean Power Plan, a program with the aim to reduce 32% of the industrial CO₂ emissions and increase the use of renewable energies. (Protect Our Winters 2016). In 2013 the founder, Jeremy Jones has been recognized as the ‘Champion of Change’ by former US president, Barack Obama. In April 2017, he testified before Congress on Capitol Hill on the impacts of climate change on the snow sports industry (Democrat, Energy, and Commerce Committee USA, 2017).

Community-based Activism

POW has also been actively involved in different climate change-related events and protests; they joined the movement at COP21 in Paris, initiated different voting campaigns or petitions to support climate change legislation. At the time of writing (April 2017), POW together with POW International are participating at Climate Marches in different cities and even organizing some in mountain resorts worldwide. (Fig. 5) (Protect Our Winters, 2017)
POW SEVEN Campaign

1. ‘Get political’- reaching out to politicians and urging them to act on climate change; electing parties, which are climate change believers.
2. ‘Educate yourself’- reading about climate change causes and effects; keeping up with the latest research;
3. ‘Speak up!’- talking about climate change, the known facts or the effects on winter sport for example, with family, friends, colleagues and others.
4. ‘Find your biggest lever’- taking advantage of the personal connections and expertise; using the biggest lever to create change.
5. ‘Talk to businesses. Vote with your wallet’- supporting environmental friendly companies and businesses.
6. ‘Change your ways, reduce your carbon footprint.’- making lifestyle changes: biking, carpooling or using public transportation; changing to renewable energies; reducing meat consumption etc.
7. ‘Join POW’- joining the movement; volunteering with POW. (Protect Our Winters, n.d.)
3. Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter, the relationship between winter tourism and climate change in existing research was discussed and the structure and initiatives of POW briefly presented. However, this paper focuses on ski activism, the movement of the winter sport community. In order to answer the research question, the actions of the ski activists, in this case the actions of POW, will be analysed through the theory of new social movement, which will be now be introduced. Exploring the identity of ski activists is, as mentioned before, an additional objective of this study. Therefore, within the theory of social movement, the concept of identity will be emphasized.

Environmentalism emerged in the 1970s stimulated by the studies on eco-crises and unsustainable consumption patterns (e.g. Carson 1962 – Silent Spring; Meadows et al. 1972 – Limits to Growth). Sociologists Catton and Dunlap addressed the need of a New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) promoted by social movement and this required “fundamental change in the social and political order based on decentralized radical self-management of communities in line with a holistic environmental ethic” (Saunders 2013: 32). POW is among the most recent organizations from the thousands that have raised in the last decades to address environmental issues such as climate change; studies about these organisations describe them as “discrete, autonomous agents, rationally seeking to inform and influence those actors – states, international agencies, corporations- who are believed to exercise forms of power that can be applied to change practices and trajectories of climate change” (Lipschutz & McKendry 2011: 373).

3.1. New Social Movement Theory

According to Lubell (2002), environmental activism is a collective action. When collective action results from the conflict between different actors about the appropriation of social values and, and includes behaviour that challenges institutionalized norms and rules and attacks societal structure can be called social movement (cf. Melucci 1980: 202)

The newness of the new social movement has been explained in different ways, new because of the adoption of new analytical lenses by scholars, new because of the characteristics of the 1960s-1970s movements that are different from previous labour or class-based conflicts or new because there is a new type society, whose problems requires a different social response (Saunders 2013). According to Melucci, new social movement happens in an era with wide availability of information; there is awareness of global issues, giving the movement a planetary dimension as well. Because of the access to information, activists are more self-reflexive and their actions are played out through lifestyle changes as well. Participation is not just understood as taking part of the movement but also belonging to the system and community. The interests of the activists are presented in the public space; however, their arguments are weakened when traveling through political channels. Finally, yet importantly, the effects of the new social movement include immeasurable effects too, slower processes through which cultural codes are challenged and reversed. (cf. Melucci in Saunders 2013: 132-133)

For resource mobilization scholars, social movement’s success was based on material and non-material resources such as money or power. They understood the social movement to be institutionalized, including under the term, social organizations with a formal structure. These types of formally organized groups, seeking to influence policy can also be referred to as pressure groups in political sociology (Saunders 2013). Early theorists of the new social movement, on the contrary, used the concept to describe non-institutionalized entities “engaging in unconventional behaviour and having little access to policymaking circles” (ibid. 23). According to Saunders (2013) in her book about Environmental networks and social movement theory, the modern concept of social movement can be seen as a bridge between previous theories. New social movement includes than both formal and informal organised groups, which demand small-scale changes, as well as radical social changes. They address issues that challenge the system and issues that do not; according to this, there are then insider and outsider strategies (Table 1). The author further points out, that in practice as well, most organisations are least partially institutionalised and some groups that used to be radical are now important actors consulted in decision-making processes.
Table 1. Pressure groups, non-institutionalized and modern concept of social movement compared (Saunders 2013: 26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>What is a social movement?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pressure groups</strong></td>
<td>Modern concept of social movement ← Non-institutionalized social movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Formal/ bureaucratic ← Both types of organization ← Informal, non-hierarchical and participatory. OR atomized individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demands</strong></td>
<td>Small scale change – usually related to specific interests of members ← Both types of demands ← Radical social change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issues</strong></td>
<td>Not system challenging ← Both types of issues ← System challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Conventional/ insider ← Both types of challenges ← Unconventional/outsider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network links</strong></td>
<td>None ← Must have network links ← Sometimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to avoid confusion, given the various denominations for social movement groups (social movement organizations, pressure groups, NGOs, eco-activist groups etc.), Sanders adopts the terms ‘environmental organizations’ and ‘environmental networks’:

Environmental networks, then, consist of formal and informal organizations with a common concern to protect or preserve the environment, using a wide variety of tactics, from conservation work and conventional lobbying through to sabotage and forming, living in and maintaining eco-communes. They consist of organizations that are networked: the organizations within the networks share information, and collaborate with one another. (Saunders 2013: 28)

The environmental organizations can operate at different levels: local, regional or national. They can further be distinguished through their conservative or radical approach and through their access to the political system. There are insiders, who are seen legitimate and consulted by governments and outsiders, who lack this type of influence. This relationship with the government can additionally be classified as being positive, ambivalent, contingent, negative, or as no relationship at al:

1. **Positive** – the government/council frequently seeks the environmental organization’s advice.
2. **Ambivalent** – the government/council is friendly, but the environmental organization itself initiates contact.
3. **Contingent** – government/council receptiveness depends on the issue(s) or department(s) involved.
4. **Negative** – the organization unsuccessfully attempts to influence the government/council or has become blacklisted.
5. **No relationship** – the environmental organization has no relationship with government/council. It prefers alternative campaign targets or does not work at that level. (Saunders 2013: 38-39)

3.1.1. Strategies

A strategy is a conceptual link we make between the targeting, timing, and tactics with which we mobilize
and deploy resources and the outcomes we hope to achieve (Ganz in Nulman 2015: 107)

In order to achieve their goals, environmental organizations need a strategic approach; these strategies are varying from moderate and conventional measures to radical or even violent ones (Table 2). The focus can be on ‘inside tracks’ or ‘outside tracks’, actors of social movement can “seek mainstream media attention, communicate through alternative channels, or seek relative anonymity […] These choices are part of a campaign strategy” (Nulman 2015: 107).

Table 2. Campaigning activities and categorization of strategies (Saunders 2013: 37)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Protest</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insider</td>
<td>Petitions, leafleting, press conferences, letter writing, researching and reporting, education and training, government consultee, LA21 involvement, procedural complaints, litigation, public meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thresholder</td>
<td>Media stunts, marches, rallies, demonstrations, cultural performances and/or a mixture of insider and outsider activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td>Boycotts, disruption of events, blockades/occupations, ethical shoplifting, ecotage, adbusting, social events, practical conservation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These campaigns can be aimed at institutions -directly, through consultation, lobbying and negotiating or indirectly, through marches and rallies-, or they can rely on self-directed change. Self-directed change strategies can be further divided into direct actions, such as blockades, ecotages or ethical shoplifting, and DIY/Practical projects including practical conservation, local exchange trading schemes or permaculture groups. (ibid.)

Social Media

“Internet and other technologies, such as cellular phones and digital video, enable people to organize politics in ways that overcome limits of time, space, identity and ideology, resulting in expansion and coordination of activities that would not likely occur by other means.” (Bennett 2003: 20)

Usage of the internet and social media has increased considerably in the last twenty years, making it a relevant channel through which social movements can communicate and organize their actions. The advantages of the online approach are the low costs, the ability to reach large audiences, participation in discussions and debates and most importantly a better alternative to mainstream media, which can be strongly regulated or favour specific stakeholders (McLean & Fuller 2016; Schafer 2012). In his book “Tweets and the Streets” (2012), Gerbaudo argues that social media can be a means, through which collective action can be shaped; people are given suggestions on how to act and are being directed towards spaces of protest. Emotions and identity moreover are used for the construction of a sense of togetherness, digital spaces becoming emotional conduits, where sentiments can motivate people and fuel the mobilization processes. This contribution of social media is described by the author through the metaphor ‘choreography of assembly’.

Schafer (2012) talks about the public debate on climate change and the different stakeholders competing in the virtual spaces to establish their perspectives on the issue. According to his research, NGOs are ‘the champions of online communication’; statement which is logically explained through the fact that NGOs have fewer resources and influence than other stakeholders and thus their desired outcomes depend more
on mobilizing the public. Studies reviewed by Shafer in his article lead to four different functions of the use of online media by NGOs. Online communication is a way to provide information about the organizations themselves and what they stand for, their aims and actions; it is the main channel for establishing contact with the public. Secondly, it can be a tool to get into the news media. Increasing and strengthen their outside support is another crucial aspect. Networking can give individuals the sense of belonging, which benefits the collective identity needed for the success of the organisation. NGOs moreover, provide information for donors and volunteers or sell merchandise with the aim of raising funds on which the success is also dependent. Least but not last, online communication aims at changing behaviour and mobilizing action. This can be accomplished through either ‘persuasive action’, by promoting the values and practices of an environmentally friendly lifestyle, or ‘pressurizing action’, supporter are in this case being invited to take part in decision-making processes by either signing online petitions or engaging in real life activist actions. (cf. Schafer 2012: 530-531)

The effects of online media have been less researched, Schafer points out, and existing research focused mostly on “potential first and second-level agenda-setting effects and on persuasion” (cf. 535). It has been argued that online media plays a role in engaging public in scientific topics, leading to greater awareness of environmental problems. The audience’s knowledge on global issues such as climate change is also potentially increased and improved. The last dimension analysed is the effects on behaviour; the studies conducted until now on this subject showed a rather weak correlation between the actual behaviour and action. (ibid.)

3.1.2. Identity

As stated previously, environmental activism and in general social movement can be defined by collective action. A crucial factor in this process is the concept of identity, “it is the basis for recognizing others and recognizing the self. It is permanent yet fluid, individual yet collective, and a precursor to social movement formation yet also a barrier” (Saunders 2013: 152). Identity is a process under constant reflexive revision; therefore, both individual and collective identity can be difficult to define. What can be said is that it implies differentiation from another individual, respectively another collective. Collective identity furthermore, is both a process and an outcome; it has a binding effect on social movements and can lead to strong solidarity when the individuals of a group share behaviours that differentiate them from other groups (Saunders 2013).

How does this identity form, however? What are the preconditions needed for this different behaviour, an environmental behaviour? Stern (2000) links personal values, beliefs about general conditions of the environment and proenvironmental personal norms to explain environmental behaviour (Fig. 9).

![Figure 7. A schematic representation of variables in the VBN theory of environmentalism](image)

Arrow represents postulated direct effects. Direct effects may also be observed on variables more than one level downstream from a causal variable.

Empirically, measures of egoistic values have been negatively correlated with indicators of environmentalism.(Stern 2000: 412)

Each variable in this chain affects the next one or other variables further down the chain. This causal chain
starts with “stable, central elements of personality and belief structure”, where altruistic values play an especially important role in the behavioural outcome. The beliefs about the environment are three folded; there is the belief about the human-environment conditions represented by the New Ecology Paradigm (NEP) variable, the consequences or the threat of these conditions for valued objects and values (AC) and the perceived ability to reduce the threat (AR). Last variable leading to environmental behaviour is the sense of obligation or responsibility for taking corrective action. There are four subtypes of environmental behaviour in term of its impact: environmental activism -active involvement in organizations and demonstrations--; nonactivist public-sphere behaviour –environmental citizenship--; private-sphere environmentalism – purchase and usage of environmental friendly items--; and other environmental behaviour- influences through organizations. (Stern 2000)

Identity and Lifestyle Sports

Identity, as mentioned already, has been highly valued in theories of social movement. As a result, alternative concepts to the term new social movement were suggested including identity politics, subcultures, neo-tribalism, and DIY culture, concepts based on alternative lifestyles and identities (Saunders 2013; Wheaton 2007). Lifestyle sports such as skiing, snowboarding, surfing, rock climbing etc. are seen to belong to these categories and studies argue for their connection with environmental activism. (Wheaton 2007; Wheaton 2010; Stoddard 2012; Erickson 2011) Erickson (2011) moreover explains how the practices of these activities can become political statements and thus lead to ‘recreational activism’:

At its heart, recreational activism is an attempt to harness enjoyment into the service of public mobilization; recreational activities are redefined as being about specific political issues and one’s participation signals a particular ethical relationship to the public sphere. (Erickson 2011: 478)

Lifestyles sports or nature-based sports (Humberstone 1998) are associated with values such as freedom, pleasure, a sense of control and connection with nature (Kay &Laberge; Stoddard 2012; Erickson 2011; Midol &Broyer 1995), “intertwined with the landscape and weather, it offers this freedom and forum for self expression in existence with nature”(Kremer). Moreover, they embody a philosophy through which the ‘unplayful’ and ‘unexpressive’ of traditional sports is rejected; innovation and originality are on the other hand admired (Humphrey). Terms such as ‘soulboarding’(ibid.) and ‘soul surfing’ (Lewis in Wheaton 2007) are also used, the world of commercialism and popularity is being rejected (Humphrey) and the riders can ‘blend with the environment’ and can even get a feeling of ‘entering an altered state of consciousness’ through this ‘intimate dialogue’ with nature and the wilderness experience (Midol &Broyer 1995). In the case of winter sports, these experiences are mostly associated with those practicing backcountry skiing or snowboarding; backcountry areas, which are far from the masses of people and the technologies of the ski resorts, offer a more authentic mountain environment (Stoddart 2012; Humphrey). Nature encounters like this can “sow the seeds of environmental awareness” (Humberstone 1998) and can lead to environmental behaviour through an ‘environmental subjectivity’:

Environmental subjectivity embodies attitudinal characteristic like environmental values and concerns, as well as everyday behaviours like recycling, buying organic, or reducing consumption. […] it also embodies participation in pro-environmental citizenship through green voting, environmental group membership, attending protests, or writing letters. […] in snowboarding, mountaineering, or surfing, participants construct their subjectivities through embodied experiences of snow, rock, and water respectively. (Stoddart 2012: 108).

It is important to remember however that the same lifestyle sports are part of a growing tourist industry. These same values that lead to environmental concerns are also commodities and part of a marketing strategy promoting the growth of these sports (Erickson 2011) and thus raising the question if the members of these subcultures are “hedonistic consumers or reflexive environmentalists” (Wheaton 2007). Stoddard (2011;2012) calls this tension ‘ecological irony’, and recognizes it in the case of skiing, in its interpretation between a form of sustainable development or an environmental problem. Moreover, his research shows how some skiers are conflicted by being aware of the ecological impacts that their lifestyle sport brings.
4. Methods

“Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame—an object—within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates.” (Thomas 2011: 513)

As mentioned above, the goal of the thesis is to look into the role of ski activism in the fight against climate change, to define this activist winter sport community and discuss through which ways their goals can be achieved. Protect Our Winters was chosen as a case study out of various reasons; POW is the most recent bottom-up organization, whose expansion in different countries and on different continents reflect the globalisation of ski activism; it thus becomes a “key case of a phenomenon” (ibid. 515), an aspect which is important when choosing a case study. Secondly, as Thomas (2011) observes, a case study can also be selected due to the researcher’s familiarity with it, leading to “intimate knowledge and ample opportunity for informed, in-depth analysis—ample opportunity for identification and discussion” (515).

The study was conducted in Innsbruck, Austria, the city where POW Austria has its headquarters. I have previously lived in ski areas close to the city, considering myself part of the winter sport community. In October 2015, after moving to Innsbruck, I have joined the organisation and have been actively involved since. According to Yin (1994), a case study is an empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon; the enquiry relies on multiple sources of evidence and is based on theoretical propositions, used to guide the data (cf. 13). There is not an exact methodology to be followed when working with case studies; researchers should instead select the appropriate methods that fit both the context or theoretical framework and the case itself: “The essence of case study methodology is triangulation, the combination on different levels of techniques, methods, strategies, or theories.” (Johansson 2007: 53). I conducted both desk-based and empirical research. Desk-based research was required in order to give the reader a background of the subject area and to link the subject to a larger analytical context (social movement, environmental activism, political ecology). The empirical data consisted of interviews, participant observations, and observational participations. Furthermore, for a more holistic view, I also consulted the web pages and social media pages of both POW US and POW Austria.

4.1. Participant Observation

There were organizational meetings every two weeks, where strategies and events were planned, achievements, and possible failures from previous events discussed etc.; I regularly attended these meetings since joining the organisation. Furthermore, I was present at three different events that POW organised or was invited too; there I was able to do more observations. The first event, the “Active for Climate” cinematic evening at Innsbruck University introduced the snowboard film “The little things”, a film about different American athletes and their initiatives and lifestyle changes as means of fight against climate change. Moreover three organizations – POW, Go-shred\(^2\), and Klimabündnis Tirol\(^3\) - were also presented and their present members (including myself) were invited after the screening for an open discussion about climate change adaptation and mitigation, and the role of the winter sport community. The second event was a visit to a school in Kufstein, Austria, as part of the “Cool Athletes, Hot Planet” initiative and the last one was a flea market in Innsbruck, where POW also had a stand where people could get informed about what the organisation does, and also buy POW merchandise. Because I actively participated in the above-mentioned meetings and events, taking notes during the observations proved to be difficult, thus increasing the risk that I wouldn’t recall all the details, as Emerson et al. (1995) also

\(^2\) Platform for carpooling to and from ski resorts or other winter spots (Go-shred)
\(^3\) Climate Alliance Tyrol, part of the Climate Alliance, an European climate protection network (Klimabündnis Tyrol)
observes “Over time, people forget and simplify experience; notes composed several days after observation tend to be summarized and stripped of rich, nuanced detail” (40). Therefore, besides the notes written after the events, I also used the protocols from the meetings to be sure no information was accidentally left out.

The observations I did were partially overt partially covert. The other POW members already knew I was doing research and had agreed to be part of it from the beginning so I did not constantly remind them during the meetings and events that they are ‘under observation’. In order to better understand the role and potential of ski activism I also paid attention to the people attending the events I was part of, their reaction, and questions after finding out about POW. Two of these events were public, making it thus difficult to notify that many people about my research and leading to more covert observations:

While most ethical codes would suggest that you should not conduct research in a covert or deceitful manner, […] you may find that an overt role is not always easy or possible to maintain. For example, if your setting is a busy café or a railway station, how can you easily inform everyone of your status?” (Mason 2002: 93)

4.2. Interviews

For the interviews, I chose active members of POW Austria and professional athletes belonging to the Rider’s Alliance. Each of the eight members interviewed are involved in POW for more than a year and have different main responsibilities inside the organisation: coordinating or organising events, organising the ‘Hot Planet, Cool Athletes’ program, managing the social media pages, building up the Science Alliance and overseeing the entire organisation and the different divisions within (Fig. 9). The purpose was “to sample the various cognitive perspectives present in the setting in order to produce a ‘plurivocal’ or ‘polyphonic’ account” (Gobo 2008). Through active involvement in POW access to the informants was easily granted, without requiring the presence of a gatekeeper allowing the research. In the process of choosing the athletes, however, one of the informants, the president of the organization, played the role of the intermediary by suggesting those athletes who have been more actively involved in the organization since its start (ibid.).

As an interview form, I selected the semi-structured interview. This type of interview is usually quite flexible, but has focused, specific questions and approach. It is used to obtain specific data and is structured to help make more sense of something already researched (Campbell Galman 2007). The interview questions were organized into categories: background information, Protect Our Winters and climate change and winter sports, categories I also later used when analysing the data. The questions were however changed and adapted to the different informants and the space where the interviews were taken. For almost all categories there was an introduction question such as “when did you join POW?” or “what are your thoughts on climate change?”, the purpose was to let the informants emphasize whichever aspect was more important for them, or said otherwise: “Such opening questions may yield spontaneous, rich, descriptions where the subjects themselves provide what they experience as the main dimensions of the phenomena investigated” (Kvale 1996: 133). Whenever I needed more details or a more thorough description, I used probing or specifying questions (ex: “what was your experience from the POW event you just mentioned?”,” can you give me more examples of these adaptation measures” etc.). Direct questions also played a role in a few of my interviews. There were situations where I couldn’t lead the subject to talk about a certain aspect that was of interest to me so I had to ask for it, ex “Do you think you can influence people more because you are a professional athlete?”. I paid attention, though, that I only ask direct question more towards the end of the interview, because I wanted to listen first to the spontaneous descriptions the informant would give me. (Kvale 1996).

4.3. Data Analysis

After gathering all the data and transcribing the interviews, I started the interpretation.

“the researcher’s interpretation is one of many multiple perspectives; so too will respondents develop multiple perspectives and opinions about the researcher . . . interpretation, the heart of qualitative inquiry, is a collaborative, ambiguous, anxiety-provoking, and challenging
process” (Magolda 2000: 231)

For the evaluation of the data, I decided to go for qualitative content analysis and to code by categories. McCormack criticized this method “I was concerned that the traditional method of coding for themes in transcripts and studying those themes separated people’s words from their spoken and heard context” (McCormack 2000a: 283). Nevertheless, I had chosen before specific topics that were relevant to me for answering the research questions: meaning of skiing or snowboarding, climate change knowledge and adaptation measure, strengths and weaknesses of POW, future. These "categories" had an important role in both interview (structuring of the questions), and during the participant observation. There was certainly the risk that my categories would be subjective, as McCormack also affirms: “Meaning is continually constructed and reconstructed. This construction and reconstruction occurs within, and is made visible through, stories.” (ibid. 286). For that reason, I tried not to define these topics and was open for change; new subcategories were formed throughout the study, including new arising aspects such as the importance of Social Media for POW.

4.4. Reflections and Limitations

There are pros and cons when being part of the community under study. For this study, the advantages were participation to all meetings and public events, easy access to the informants and a deeper understanding of the research subject. The risk however was that I would not recognize and pay attention to relevant aspects for the study, as they were part of my daily life: “While keeping a watchful eye for the sensational, I ignored the ordinary (…) There was no need for something to happen – that which was important was already happening around me” (Magolda 2000: 218). McCormack (2000b) however points out that it is important as a researcher not to write ourselves out of the story and include only “our voice as disembodied reporter of another's experience.” (312). Subjectivity can be an asset; the most important aspect for the outcome of the research is nonetheless to be aware of it from an early stage of the project:

“It is no more useful for researchers to acknowledge simply that subjectivity is an invariable component of their research than it is for them to assert that their ideal is to achieve objectivity. Acknowledgments and assertions are not sufficient. Beginning with the premise that subjectivity is inevitable […] researchers should systematically seek out their subjectivity, not retrospectively when the data have been collected and the analysis is complete, but while their research is actively in progress. The purpose of doing so is to enable researchers to be aware of how their subjectivity may be shaping their inquiry and its outcomes” (Peshkin 1988: 17)

I have accepted thus my role for this study and included my own experiences as a snowboarder and a member of POW. I paid attention however that these experiences would not influence the collected data. For example during the events and meetings I attended, whenever there was an issue debated that I would consider relevant for my research, I would let everyone else discuss it first, before presenting my own arguments. Moreover, while the informants were aware I am writing a paper on POW and have agreed to be part of it, they did not know what my research question or objectives are. The interview questions were very general as well. This way more aspects were addressed by the informants and not just the ones, which they thought I would need to know.

POW Austria was launched only two years ago, therefore many of the programmes and activities, which I have previously described in the background section, are still in a planning phase. I was able to research the intentions of ski activists and the potential of an organisation like POW against the threat of climate change in the Alps. Social media research, furthermore, facilitated an overview of the achievements of the mother organisation in the United States, which also played a role in my conclusion. A longer time framework for the research would have allowed me, however, on one hand, to observe the effects of POW Austria’s actions, and on the other hand, to get in contact with members of POW US for a more holistic approach to ski activism.
5. Results

As explained in the method section, the interview questions were organised into three main categories: background, climate change and winter sport and POW. The findings from the first two categories will be presented first: the history of the POW members as skiers or snowboarders and the meaning of this practice in their life, knowledge and perceptions about climate change and winter sport, and possible adaptation measures by both supply and demand side. The second part will then focus on POW, on the development of POW Austria, the way it operates, and the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation.

5.1. The Winter Sport Community and Climate Change

Before discussing climate change and winter sport, the interviewees were asked to talk about their background as skiers or snowboarders. All have started skiing between the ages of two and five, a part of them changing then to snowboarding during the teenage years. According to their free time and winter conditions, they go skiing or snowboarding from two times a week to even every day, “I have been this season I think around 40 times already on the mountain, before there were seasons where I went even 110 days in the winter on the mountain” (Int. 2). Most of the informants go both riding in the resort, especially freestyling in the park, and ski-touring 4 or splitboarding 5 in the backcountry. The ones practicing the sport only in resorts want to start touring as well. Even though a sunny spring day in the resort or park with friends was described as an ideal day on the mountain, an early hike on an empty peak with a view of the sunset and then a run down through fresh powder snow was mostly preferred (Int. 1; Int. 2; Int. 4; Int. 6; Int. 7). Furthermore, the ones who ride professionally, transitioned from freestyle or slalom competitions to freeride ones (Int. 1; Int. 7; Int. 8). Winter sport plays an important role in life for all informants, being also a reason for their choice to live so close to the mountains. It was described as not just a sport but also a passion and a lifestyle, giving them a sense of freedom; by connecting with nature, they can shut down daily concerns and problems:

First there is…the feeling….when you just glide without any great effort…and you move forward without a big amount of force…I think that already releases happiness hormones in you […] and there is of course …especially when ski-touring or going off-piste…that one has an unbelievable contact with nature…and somehow you can see the whole mountain, so a huge area, like a playground or a possibility of self expression (Int. 4)

Snowboarding is my biggest love, no one has managed to last as long as my snowboard, snowboard hasn’t left me since I got it and…yes so snowboarding is for me simply….yes simply the biggest (Int. 1)

When asked about their first encounter with the issue of climate change, many explained how due growing up close to the mountains they were able to observe its consequences for a long time, through the changing winter patterns -winters with less snow- and the melting of the glaciers (Int. 3; Int.5; Int 6; Int. 8). Interviewee 8 related how he used to train on this one glacier in Tyrol and was shocked to see how in just one year about four meters of the ice was gone. Another subject told the story of a mountain accident which had happened in his home area; a man followed the hiking path that used to be on the glacier but because of the fast recession of this glacier, he got lost, ending up in a rocky area and crushing to death. This miss happening made him think more about the consequences of climate change: “I remember then,

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4Skiing across open country, walking uphill on skis as well as skiing downhill
5Splitboard: a snowboard that can be separated into two ski-like parts used with climbing skings to ascend slopes, similar to ski touring
6Interviews have been translated from German, by the author
that I was Oooh, this is the first victim of climate change (laughing)” (Int. 2).

Moreover, everyone was aware of the effects of climate change on the ski industry, they had all already experienced dry winters with little snow “if you have seen the pictures from December here in Austria…only the ski slopes had snow until down, the rest was green” (Int. 8). They related how the warm winters and therefore the reduction of snow cover already affects especially lower areas and if no action is taken, in time more and more resorts will have to shorten their season or even close. This “survival of the fittest process”, as Interviewee 2 called it, then could lead to the overcrowding of glaciers, as they will become the only areas with enough snow for skiing throughout the winter. Additionally, some feared, that these surviving resorts will increase the prices because of their exclusivity, and winter sport will become a luxury sport that very few will be able to afford (Int. 2; Int. 4; Int. 6).

Beside these consequences, the ecological impact of the winter tourism was also acknowledged by all informants. Traffic was perceived as the biggest issue, followed by the continuing development of the resorts; the construction of new hotels, new lifts or expansion of the skiing area. Non-renewable Energy, artificial snow and the use of pollutants and chemicals for ski clothing and products were also mentioned throughout the interviews (Int. 1; Int. 2; Int. 4; Int. 6; Int. 7).

Our sport [about snowboarding] and skiing are of course not very environmental friendly, when there are always bigger facilities constructed, when more and more forest is being cleared in order to build even bigger ski resorts and to extend the slopes km even more. (Int. 7)

So ski tourism is generally a really… it is a CO\textsubscript{2} intensive type of sport to be doing, alone the getting there, so that is actually the biggest part… is the mobility to ski areas, a lot of people coming from Holland or Germany by car to the Alps and this is simply… a high CO\textsubscript{2} footprint and…yeah the whole snow making, energy, hotels; this is, of course, more energy-intensive than if I now go biking or so […] not to talk about helicopters, heli-skiing, heliboarding, that is again something else (Int. 8)

When asked what they thought the solutions were, the answers varied. It was unanimously agreed however that closing ski resorts and putting an end to winter sport was not an option, given also its role in the country’s economy. Different mitigation and adaptation measures by both supply and demand side were instead suggested. Given that traffic was perceived as the main CO\textsubscript{2} source, all saw it as the first problem to tackle. Skiers and snowboarders should use public transportation or car-pooling on one hand, public transportation system should be improved on the other, so that ski areas can be reached as easy and fast, as by private cars. Other measures by the supply side included the transition to renewable energies, especially in the hotelier sector, where many still rely on oil for producing heat (Int. 2; Int. 6) and the rethinking of the winter season – what times are promoted, alternatives in snow poor times – (Int. 4). Clothing and equipment manufacturers should also produce more environmentally friendly, especially in the case of clothing companies, per fluorinated chemicals (PFC) should be dismissed, and circular economy principles applied, avoiding to constantly develop and produce new designs that are then thrown away to make place for new ones (Int. 1; Int. 4). Laws preventing further resort expansion or taxing CO\textsubscript{2} emissions were suggested as well (Int. 6; Int. 8).

Regarding the actions the skiers and snowboarders should take, all interviews offered multiple suggestions. As previously, mentioned transportation was top of the list in all the cases. Supporting environmental friendly resorts and products (Int. 2; Int. 4; Int. 5; Int. 7) and adapting to the natural snow conditions, while avoiding times (warm winter periods, other seasons) when snowmaking is needed (Int. 1; Int. 3; Int. 4; Int. 5) were also popular solutions: “it doesn’t have to be that you go on the glacier in summer and ski, it really doesn’t” (Int. 3). Alternatives to skiing in the resort, such as ski-touring and splitboarding (Int. 3, Int. 5) were also mentioned. Even though the measures differed, a popular conclusion was, that even small gestures, such as using less plastic or paying attention that no garbage is left behind, can affect the bigger picture, it is important to be aware of the problems and the possible solutions (Int. 1; Int.4; Int. 5, Int. 7, Int.8). Not least the consumer, the skier or the snowboarder, is setting the trend, the industry listening to his or her demands. Therefore, if the consumer values environmental friendly practices and refuses to accept unsustainable ones, the industry will have to follow and adapt to the
requirements (Int. 2; Int. 6).

We don’t have to just stop skiing from one moment to the next; I simply think that the awareness has to be bigger. If you practice this sport, you have to look, that you don’t each drive in your own car, that you join groups, that perhaps in order to get to the ski resort, you take the public means of transport, that you eventually book a hotel that is somehow CO₂ careful and pays attention on saving up and such things…things that are also in the daily live important… that you take the garbage from the mountain back with you, that when you smoke, you don’t throw your cigarette down from the lift…these are tiny little things that can help extremely further if everyone pays attention to keeping his footprint low; and if we start with the small then we can definitely already move something and not that you just…it doesn’t mean that everyone has to stop skiing and you have to avoid it, because then you could just lock yourself in your room somewhere in the world and don’t do anything anymore. (Int. 7)

I actually think that climate protection and winter sport can exist next to each other, the movement for ski-touring and splitboarding is already here and I think if everyone, like when you go hiking, brings his own stuff on the mountain and then takes them down again and leaves as few traces as possible behind, then it is possible. (Int. 3)

Awareness and the role of individual actions were also discussed at two of the events I was part of, the movie screening and the ‘Cool Athletes, Hot Planet’ initiative. The movie, ‘The little things’ (2015), as the name also suggests it, was centered on these ideas. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it presents professional skiers and snowboarders and their lifestyle changes and initiatives for tackling climate change. From downsizing consumerist habits to building sustainable houses, to doing a whole winter season without consuming fossil fuels or founding organizations such as Protect Our Winters, each protagonist emphasizes the relevance of every contribution – big or small – that, when added, can lead to bigger change. A very similar video was also shown at the second event, at the school. Furthermore, each POW member (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 6 and myself) shared own little measures with the kids: splitboarding and ski-touring, choosing public transportation, studying sustainable development, being actively involved in an organisation such as POW etc.

Even though the informants knew the different measures that they have to apply, some also admitted that it is not always easy to follow them and transitioning to a sustainable lifestyle does not happen in one day. During the school event, interviewee 1 said that she is still using her car sometimes for getting on the mountain. The Same statement was made by interviewee 8:

Of course, I also drive a car and such things… you cannot give up everything, sustainable development is a huge topic or?…it is the transition…I would love to…if someone wants to offer me an electric car for the winter, I would take it at once. (Int. 8)

The issue of not acting sustainable at all times, combined with a desire to get actively involved was what led one of the subjects to join POW Austria:

[after a POW presentation] I listened and I immediately thought that it is something which one should support because it really makes sense…especially…because as a winter sports person one knows how unsustainable winter sport can be, especially how I do it, I don’t go touring, I…use lifts and so on…like going also in November or December skiing when there is just artificial snow and it is simply not sustainable and that is why I think one should at least…for example try to somehow give something through POW back…to get actively involved.(Int.3)

5.2. Protect Our Winters

As mentioned in the beginning of the paper, POW Austria is one of the many daughter organisations of POW US and was launched in 2015. By regularly attending the meetings, talking with or interviewing various members that have been part of POW for a longer time, I was able to find out more about the history, the goals, and structure of the organisation. The founder, a professional snowboarder as well,
initially started working on a similar project with a friend, a smaller local organisation, also addressing winter sport and issues of sustainability. Shortly after this project was started, however, they were asked by POW US to become POW Austria instead and they accepted right away (Int.1).

The goals of POW Austria coincide with the ones of the mother organisation, raising awareness about the threat climate change poses and engaging all actors involved or depending on winter tourism towards a common solution:

 [...] we don’t want to block anyone; we are not against someone, instead we are actively looking to work on solutions with all ski resort and so on [...] we heard from some others climate protection groups: ‘yes, but just abolish the whole winter sport!, and only that is the solution’; but we cannot support that because it is not the reality and every 14th workplace depends on that and that is why it is for us...let us transform it so we can still save something. (ibid.)

In the last two years the main focus has been promoting the organisation and the values it stands for. POW Austria has participated since at different events: sport fairs and conferences (Alpinmesse, ISPO), winter sport competitions (Air & Style Innsbruck, Back On Track- Feel Free Ride Contest), flea markets etc. They have also organized movie events (Jumbo Wild7, The Little Things), have been to two schools with the ‘Hot Planet, Cool Athletes’ program and were part of different climate change movements (COP 21, Climate March). The main sponsors of POW Austria are KleanKanteen8 and Blue Tomato9. Furthermore, they work in cooperation with other environmental organizations and networks such as Global 200010, System Change not Climate Change11, and Klimabündnis Tyrol. (Int. 1, POW 2015).

POW Austria’s members work only on a voluntary basis. Currently there are 10-15 persons actively involved, which meet two times a month in POW’s office, a rented space in an Upcycling Studio in Innsbruck. At each meeting, previous events are being revised and upcoming ones planned, respectively strategies and ideas for improvements brainstormed. Each member has certain functions according to their background and knowledge and also to what they wish to work on. Nonetheless, these roles are not 100 per cent fixed, people can chose to get involved or take over other tasks as well. These main functions include event organisation, managing finances and sponsorships, handling social media platforms and platforms for internal use, overseeing Rider’s Alliance and the ‘Hot Planet, Cool Athlete’ Initiative, keeping contact with POW International and not least building a Science Alliance. (Obs.)

In February 2017, the first POW International gathering, with POW members from all countries, was hosted in Innsbruck to help create a better network and discuss future common strategies. During the meeting following this event, stories and impressions were shared with the group by the ones that had attended it. Among other things, the fact that all daughter organizations in Europe rely on volunteering was praised by POW US, as they have people employed. Volunteering was also presented as one of the virtues of the organisation during the other events I attended and also in some interviews, the idea, that the movement is based on enthusiastic skiers and snowboarders who next to other jobs or studies are actively engaged to protect the thing they care for, being emphasized (Int. 5; Int. 8; Obs.). This virtue however, although admired, was also considered to be a weak point of the organisation, Although POW Austria currently has 10-15 actively engaged members, I noticed, that it was rarely the case that all these members were able to attend all meetings. Furthermore all the different new concepts brainstormed each time and different tasks assigned, require time as well. Many of the informants affirmed that the lack of a few people who would take over responsibilities full-time, affects the structure and the outcomes of the organisation (Int.3, Int.4; Int.5; Int.7)

 [...] there is no one who preoccupies full-time only with POW, each has in fact much to do, a

7 Documentary film (2015) by Sweetgrass Production and Patagonia
8 Company producing a stainless steel, BPA-free, reusable water bottles
9 Austrian snow-, surf- and skate-shop
10 Independent Austrian environmental organization, part of Friends of Earth (Global 2000)
11 Austrian social movement, uniting activists and initiatives that tackle climate change (System Change, Not Climate Change Austria)
job or being a student or whatever...and I think that is why it is a little hard to really implement all that was planned right away [...] as in after the meetings there are so many ideas...and to just sit down the next day and work on that...first a job and then you have your weekend, of course you also enjoy doing something for POW but it is...it doesn't come first...(Int. 3)

It lacks simply resources in all corners...each person does it voluntary and has then next to it also a job [...] and then it partially all goes down, there could me way more achieved probably, if someone would be hired permanently...who can drive it all a bit further.(Int. 5)

All Interviewees pointed out that POW Austria is still in a start-up phase and there is place for many improvements. Other suggestions, besides having people that work full-time, were improvement of the structure and a better defined standpoint (Int. 2; Int. 4; Int. 6; Int. 7). Nevertheless everyone thought POW to be moving in the right direction and showing great potential in terms of outreach especially in a country like Austria, where skiing is part of the culture and moreover so in Innsbruck which is often referred to as 'the capital of the Alps'.

5.2.1. The Brand and the Winter Sport Lifestyle

When asking what the reason were for joining POW, a popular response was that POW is a unique organisation linking climate change concerns to winter sport passion (Int. 1, Int. 2, Int. 4, Int. 5, Int. 8). One of the Interviewees explained that POW preaches to the winter sport community starting already with the name, Protect Our Winters; there are many people that have through skiing or snowboarding a greater connection with nature and higher awareness of the problems and POW addresses exactly these problems (Int. 8). This link to the winter sport lifestyle and the more laid-back approach is also, what differentiates POW from other environmental organizations and one of its strongest feature, according to five of the subjects (Int. 1, Int. 2, Int. 4, Int. 5, Int. 8). Moreover being actively engaged becomes thus a ‘cool thing to do’ (Int. 1; Int. 5)

I find it so fascinating that the whole subject is rolled up through a...trendy and modern connection, not even rolled up but somehow...you somehow try to bring it down to people through this hype sport type, the winter sport...and that you try precisely here to inform people, to influence them to become active (Int. 4)

[...] other climate organizations like Global 2000, value us a lot and have asked once for a partnership, because we are a cool communication factor, that means we can shape climate protection into something cool; compared to others, we can link it to life and lifestyle (Int. 1)

Lastly, one of the informants added that especially the ones not having much knowledge on climate change protection or who are not necessarily interested in the topic but do practice winter sports, those are the ones that can be reached by POW. He continued saying how he had observed this during discussions at the different events where POW had an information stand:

The interest shown was big ...and I think because of this link to the winter sport community, you can lure people much easier...and you can also observe this in the discussions, that the moment the link is made...that it was started by a snowboarder, and that there is a rider’s alliance and that it is, precisely, linked to the sport that will eventually be harder to practice because there is less snow...you strike somehow the right chord with the people and that is nice (Int. 4)

Additional to the connection with winter sport lifestyle, POW is also sometimes associated with a snowboard or lifestyle brand, which adds to the ‘coolness’ factor. Besides stickers and flyers, the organisation also sales merchandise such as t-shirts, hoodies or water bottles, on which the logo is printed. The logo is composed of a snowflake and the name, POW, abbreviation that is also used by members of the winter sport community when referring to powder snow. I have personally also misinterpreted the logo before finding out about the organisation and have observed during the flea market I attended, how some people were surprised as well when I told them what it stands for. At the meeting following POW International, while discussing the differences in approach of the different countries, one of the members
mentioned how in the United States, one of the first priorities has been to make out of POW a powerful and well-known brand. During the interviews, POW as ‘a global brand’, has also been enumerated among the strengths, as it can increase the outreach (Int. 2; Int. 4; Int.5)

So the strengths are any case the attractiveness of the brand, so POW is somehow cool; POW, the logo; POW, the name…there are many people who somehow know about POW and find it cool without knowing exactly what it is exactly…such as a brand like Burton, Ride…so cool as a brand while at the same time concealing behind this thought and claim of raising climate change awareness, so an emancipatory claim, so not sales like a normal brand but really sending a message…and because it is not brought to the fore, it is for many easier approachable than for example Greenpeace or Global 2000 or 350.org or so, because it is about the fun, it is about the sport, it is about being somehow cool (Int. 2)

5.2.2 Rider’s Alliance and Social Media

Besides branding and the connection with the winter sport lifestyle, the professional athletes that build the Rider’s Alliance were also seen as one of the main tools for spreading POW’s missions, by five of the informants (Int. 1; Int. 3; Int. 5; Int. 6; Int. 7). Moreover, half of them and myself included, had first found out about the organization through the American founder and snowboarder Jeremy Jones. At the flea market I observed as well, how after mentioning his name, some people immediately smiled and seemed more interested in what I had to say about the organisation. Jeremy Jones together with other professional athletes is also present in the movies ‘The little things’ and the one created for the ‘Hot Planet, Cool Athletes’ initiative. In both movies, the skiers and snowboarders talk about their passion for winter sport and the outdoors, their awareness and concerns regarding climate change threats and their response to these threats. It is emphasized how a winter sport lifestyle could also be a sustainable lifestyle. The talks about these ideas are accompanied throughout the movies by footages of the athletes riding steep mountain faces or deep powder snow, and doing huge jumps off kickers or cliffs.

As mentioned, Austria has a big winter sport community and therefore POW Austria puts great value on its outreach through the Rider’s Alliance, which consists at the moment of writing out of 17 athletes. In many of the meetings it was emphasized as well, how there needs to be more focus on this part of the organization: improve the communication channels, involve the athletes more in the different activities or initiatives of POW and push for more educational events such as ‘Hot Planet, Cool Athletes’:

We have riders, we have professional snowboarders that are more or less…our face, they are the face of POW, and like that, you can reach of course also more people, with professional riders that are cool in the scene (Int. 5)

At the end of the interviews with one of the early members of the Rider’s Alliance, I asked if she felt she had more influence on the people by being a known professional snowboarder (she had won the Freeride World Champion a few years back). She answered how she has not noticed to necessarily influence that much the people around her; she thought instead that being a professional athlete could have a greater impact on the younger generation:

[…] I think you can get to the kids or the younger ones if you are some idol or a role model, if you have been world champion and if you are good in snowboard, if you are famous and if you introduce yourself to the kids and say: ‘hey, look, I mean snowboarding is cool and all, but you also have to think about other things’ […] the kids can look up to someone and then be somehow more enthusiastic than if just someone, some teacher tells them (Int. 7)

The impact on the children and young people was also discussed with one of the other riders, who had been present at POW Austria’s first ‘Hot Planet, Cool Athletes’ event. When asked to describe his experience, he related with great enthusiasm of the discussions that were led after the film screening and

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12 Jeremy Jones is one of the most renowned freeride snowboarders worldwide, especially because of the snowboard and splitboard brand, Jones Snowboards, which he founded and a trilogy of freeride documentaries, which he directed

13 Referring to the Innsbruck scene and winter sport scene
the interest and many great ideas the children had. He moreover noticed how the children were aware of the existence of climate change, however, they had not grasped before, the real significance of it and the fact that they could themselves get involved and inflict change, which was, he considered, one of the causes of the intensive discussions (Int 8). As mentioned, I had also attended such an event during the research time. In the beginning, the athlete talked about herself and her competition history, her great passion for snowboarding and how changing to freeride and splitboarding allowed her to explore new places, have a better connection with nature and experience special moments such as a sunrise or sunset on a mountain peak. Pictures and a video of her snowboarding were also used as tools during this talk. Afterwards, there was a short presentation on climate change and POW and the video produced by POW US for this event was screened. The discussions following the movie were not as intensive, as described by my informant, who has been at the previous event. The children did, however, show interest and had many questions for both the athlete and us, me and another POW member, that attended the event. They wanted to know if we ourselves fly a lot, or use an electric car or have a vegetarian diet and all the other little life changes that were shown in the movie or discussed afterwards. By standing in the front of the children as a young skier or snowboarder, it is easier to catch their attention, was what Interviewee 8 also concluded at the end of his storytelling:

[...]they were all actually more interested on the fact that I was a snowboarder and stuff…but they are just kids or? And then I pay attention, I also added some jokes and a bit of tralala[referring to irrelevant chats] and then it went really well, because there were two young people in the front and I think that is really important for the ‘Cool Athlete, Hot Planet’ program that there are really…that there is the athlete, which is cool, that is the motto or?...and that the one, who knows the facts and tells about POW, he is…there are all young people and that is seen cool by the kids…if one would come, looking like their principle, and says so and so…that doesn’t interest them from the beginning. (Int. 8)

One of the POW members mentioned during the interview, how the fame of the professional athletes also leads to a bigger outreach in people because of the high numbers of followers they have on social media pages such as Facebook or Instagram(Int. 6). For example, POW founder Jeremy Jones has 40,500 followers on Facebook (URL) and 121,000 (URL) on Instagram, while POW itself has 95,900 (URL), respectively 91,200 (URL). The numbers are not as high in the case of POW Austria (URL), however, I observed similar proportions, some athletes from the Rider’s Alliance having more followers than the organisation, especially on Instagram.

Except in the one Interview, outreach on social media pages was rarely mentioned by the informants. By attending the meetings, however, I noticed that it does play an important role in the organisation. I remember the president of POW Austria saying in the autumn, how increasing the numbers of Facebook and Instagram followers was to be one of the main goals for that following winter and at every POW gathering, at least ten minutes were spent talking on what should be posted online. As I already said, there is also a member, whose main role is to manage these online platforms. Posts include photos and short comments from previous events; articles that feature POW achievements or interviews with athletes from the Rider’s Alliance. People can also see and join future events. Occasionally, especially around holidays, there are online raffles where people can win POW merchandise by liking the page or sharing a certain photo etc. Not last scientific articles about climate change or pages of innovative and sustainable businesses and ideas are also shared online.
6. Discussion

Before discussing the role of POW and ski activism, it is important to look at the members of the winter sport community, as they are the ones behind this new social movement. For all interviewees, winter sport is more than just a recreational activity that they practice occasionally; it is part of their lifestyle and the biggest passion. As it could be seen in the results, it was often associated with freedom, a form of expressing oneself and connection with nature. They all started at a very young age, so they have spent much time in the mountains and are now living in Innsbruck, the city, which as I have mentioned, is also referred to as the Capital of the Alps. As alpine environments are fragile ecosystems, the effects of climate change are more visible, such as the rapid melting of the glaciers, the receding snow line and the extreme weather events, and members of the winter sport community are the first to see it as they are often in these environments; thus the increased awareness on this issue. Not least, the described impacts threaten the future of the winter sport, therefore threaten the lifestyle of the winter sport community. By applying Stern’s (2000) ideas on the preconditions for environmental behaviour, it can be noticed that this chain of events coincides with the belief variables used in his scheme. The ecological worldview is represented by awareness about climate change, while the adverse consequences for valued objects can be understood as the consequences of climate change on the mountains, mountains being indispensable for skiing or snowboarding. All the solutions or ‘little things’ present throughout the interviews and the movies, from carpooling to supporting environmental friendly businesses, become then the perceived ability to reduce the threat. Further research would be needed to define exactly what personal norms are behind the sense of obligation to take corrective actions that lead then to environmental behaviour. Nevertheless, knowledge about the ecological impacts of winter tourism and the unsustainable habits, such as driving a car to the ski resort or skiing on artificial snow, which they admitted doing sometimes themselves, could play a part. Protect Our Winters becomes in that sense a platform, through which environmental behaviour is expressed and shared.

Protect Our Winters and the ski activists behind it fit the parameters describing the new social movement. The demands, as described by Saunders (2013), are both small-scale change and radical change. As pointed out in the results, the small contribution, that each person can do, are seen as very important. In the same time, the ecological impacts of winter tourism are recognized and a more drastic change, an environmentally friendly approach that is less CO₂ intensive, is required from all the industries and businesses, which are directly or indirectly related to this tourism sector. Lastly, however, in order to slow down the effects of climate change that among other things, threatens the future existence of winter sport, a radical societal change is needed and through participation at events such as COP 21 or Climate Marches, POW supports this type of change. Given the relationship with the governments, POW belongs to the insider groups, having direct contact with policy makers. Even though POW Austria has not been in direct contact with the government yet, through the educational program ‘Hot Planet, Cool Athletes’ and their cooperation with the Climate Alliance Tyrol, they are seen as a legitimate organisation, thus also being ‘insiders’. The strategies are at the threshold between insider and outsider, activities including cultural events, participation in demonstrations and educational programs; in the case of POW US government consultation, petitions or public meetings. POW’s campaigns are thus on one hand aimed at institutions, directly (POW US) and indirectly, but also promote self-directed change.

As stated in the theory, new social movement is characterized by self-reflexive activists, who see own
lifestyle changes as an action and for whom participation means being part of the community as well. Throughout the interviews, the sustainability of the winter sport was questioned and members of POW were aware of their own ecological footprint. The importance of lifestyles changes has also been the main message conveyed at the different events or throughout the movies. Moreover, the lifestyle changes of both POW members and professional athletes, discussed or showed on screen, are used as a tool of inspiration and persuasion; and this tool can be effective because the ski activist is part of the winter sport community. Additionally, professional athletes are sometimes perceived as idols, especially by younger generations, therefore, their actions can speak even louder.

Collective identity is a binding element for social movement and when skiing or snowboarding is more to people than just a sportive activity when they are part of a lifestyle; the basis of this collective identity is set. Furthermore, the values associated with this lifestyle such as freedom or connection with nature, make engaging in the movement attractive, fighting against climate change becomes ‘cool’, as interviewees described it. Ski activism is then a form of recreational activism, combining mobilization with the enjoyment of winter sport. In the case of POW, associations of the name with a snowboard brand increases the ‘coolness’ factor of the movement, and therefore its attractiveness. Not least, the athletes of the Rider’s Alliance in combination with the social media channels lead to an increased outreach pool.

What is the role of ski activism in the fight against climate change then? What effects can it have on winter tourism? POW, the group chosen to represent ski activism, tries to mobilize the winter sport community in the fight against climate change and as shown in the results, raising awareness is the first and most important step. I have already discussed the ways, through which people can be reached and persuaded to support such a movement. In the best case scenario, the majority of skiers and snowboarders would be reached and convinced to take action. The winter sport industry, ski resorts operators, equipment and clothing producers, or the hotelier sector depend on the winter sport community. If skiers and snowboarders listen to POW’s recommendation and choose only sustainable products and practices, the industry will have to adapt to these requirements and so, the transition to sustainable winter tourism can take place. In order to be sustainable, winter tourism will not only have to be based on technical adaptation measures such as snowmaking or cloud seeding but mitigation ones as well, through which the carbon footprint is reduced. Winter tourism would become then an industry fighting climate change instead of contributing to it.

What can POW achieve in Austria? World revolution and saving the winter! (laughing) […] we have managed that we all…that all ski resorts rely on renewable energy; the Olympics are a green event, the Worldcup as well…in the chalets we managed to ‘eat smarter’, that means, that in twenty years you can only find the best regional food […] we respect environmental protected areas, so nature reserves and we still have a lot of free space and we still have snow…because we have saved winter! (laughing) (Int. 1)

Furthermore, in a country like Austria, where skiing is an important cultural and economic factor, the voice of the winter sport community can resonate at a political level as well, paving the way for sustainable development. In this utopian future scenario, POW and ski activism would play a very important role in the bigger context of climate change.

As established, POW’s strengths are the connection to winter sport lifestyle and the wide outreach pool. Although POW members experienced people having positive reactions about the organisation, it does not mean that these same people will take action. Looking back at Stern’s (2000) theory, POW could strengthen the beliefs of its target group, however, there are other personal values and norms as well, that determine environmental behaviour. Moreover, there are activist and non-activist environmental behaviours and, while all types of environmental behaviour can be considered positive, activism would be desirable as it can affect change faster. Considering the climate scenarios, particularly for alpine environments, change has to happen now, so a crucial factor, on which the potential success of ski activism and POW depends, is time. Secondly, although there are already severe impacts of climate change, affecting mountain ecosystems and thus winter sport, adaptation measures such as snow-making or snow farming, make it still possible for people to ski and snowboard throughout the winter. As such, the next question one would have to look into is how serious the threat of climate change is perceived by the members of the winter sport community.
7. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of ski activism in the fight against climate change and in achieving a sustainable form of winter tourism. In the case of POW, the goal is to unite and mobilize the winter sport community to join this fight and the first step is to create awareness about the existing problems. The strengths of this environmental group are mainly their powerful outreach tools: collaborations with professional athletes, the use of various social media platforms, and POW being noticed as a brand and an organisation. Secondly, there is the attractiveness in joining the movement, as it is associated with the ‘coolness’ of the winter sport lifestyle and is inspired by the professional athletes who become, in this context, ambassadors of change. Not least, this lifestyle is threatened by climate change, which can lead to an increased personal motivation to get actively involved. The ski activists within the organisation recognize the impacts of winter tourism and the required measures that need to be taken by both the supply and demand side. A sustainable winter tourism would include both adaptation and mitigation measures against climate change, it would be an industry with a low ecological footprint. Taking into consideration the strengths of an organisation like POW, these promoted values and measures can reach a considerable part of the ski community and, in an ideal scenario, should help in putting increased pressure on various aspects of the winter sport industry to become sustainable.

Ski activism and initiatives from organisations such as POW are still fairly young, which limits what researchers can analyse to further determine the role and effects of such a movement in the fight against climate change. This, however, leads the way to future suggested research opportunities, such as initiatives undertaken by other organisations similar to POW, as well as changes in the supply and demand side in relation to increased awareness and pressure from climate change activists.
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