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Trends in Adventure Sports in a Post-Modern Society

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Abstract

The article delineates main trends in the development of adventure sports and looks into possible future scenarios. Since the 1970s there has been an increase in adventure sports of various kinds. The concept “adventure sport” is used in a wide sense, covering sports that are labeled “alternative”, “extreme”, “X”, “gravity”, “lifestyle”, and “action sports”. The rise of adventure sport must be seen both on the background of developments inside the sports field itself. Adventure sports have things to offer that are difficult to find in other sports, like strong sensations and risk. They represent an opposition and protest against certain aspects of modern societies, but can also be said to express key ideas in modern and post-modern society such as individualism, technology, self-realization and transcendence. The article discusses various theories and recent empirical findings that may explain and predict developments of adventure sports in the future

Introduction

Since the 1970s there has been an increase in adventure sports of various kinds. The rise of adventure sport must be seen on one hand on the background of developments inside the sports field itself. On the other hand the popularity of adventure sports needs to be seen on the background of central aspects of modern societies. Adventure sports certainly have things to offer that are difficult to find in other sports. There is a possibility for mastery and perfection in relation to challenging environments. There is a need for skills related not only to the body but the mind. One has to cope with anxiety and stress and yet perform. The reward is a strong blend of wonderful sensations and experiences. There are few arenas where one in a similar way can get emotionally “high” on the body’s own chemistry with mixtures of adrenaline, endorphins and catecholamines. Furthermore adventure sports are not in the same way as mainstream sports controlled by organizational frameworks, strict rules, and regulated competitions in clearly defined environments. But the development of adventure sports must also be seen inside a larger framework. It can be explained on one hand as an opposition and protest against certain aspects of modern societies. As expressed by Elias and Dunning sports may represent a “quest for excitement in unexciting societies”¹. This expression is especially fitting for extreme sport. As Cashmore has pointed out sport has become important since it represents deep human needs that are difficult to satisfy in the over-controlled modern society². First, sport is a counterbalance to modern society’s overemphasis on routine and control. Sport is unpredictable. There is an element of chance in every competition. Secondly life has become too civilized. In sport one sees a ritualized Darwinian survival game. There is room for hard competition. And thirdly life has become too secure. Sport contains “manufactured risks that are actually designed in such a way as to preserve natural dangers or build new ones.”³ These aspects are certainly possible to find in various sports, but it seems that adventure sports are especially well suited to fulfill these needs for chance, competition and danger.

Adventure sports thus in many ways represent an opposition and alternative to traditional sports and the society that foster these sports. On the other hand adventure sports point to key ideas and developments in modern and post-modern society such as individualism, technology, self-realization and transcendence. With its global networks and the close contact with entrepreneurs, media and technology adventure sport builds on structures that are at the forefront of modern Western societies. Thus it will be interesting to see how adventure sports will develop in the future. We know that climate changes will be on the agenda for the next decades. Adventure sports are developed in close contact with both artificial and natural environments. A prediction may be that we certainly will see new advanced technological adventure sports but that ecological and “green” forms of adventure will become much more central. We may also see changes in the demographic composition in adventure sport. The notion of adventure sports is strongly connected to the white

middle class youth culture. It is likely that more adventure for kids as well as for old people will be developed in the future. More women are likely to become practitioners and may become trendsetters in some of these activities. And not only middle class people but workers may experience the benefits of adventure. My goal in this chapter is to give a picture of the development of adventure sport, its present status and its possible future. I will look at theories that can explain why adventure sports have become central and popular over the last 30 years. And I will discuss scenarios for further developments and possibilities in the future.

Concepts

The concept “adventure sport”, as used in this chapter, covers a relative broad field of sports or physical activities. It includes sports that are labeled “alternative”, “extreme”, “X”, “gravity”, “lifestyle”, and “action” sport. There are no clear boundaries between these sports. The term “adventure sport” is used interchangeably with “extreme sport”. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language gives the following definition: “Extreme sport (also called action sport and adventure sport) is a media term for certain activities perceived as having a high level of inherent danger or difficulty and often involving speed, height, a high level of physical exertion, and highly specialized gear or spectacular stunts”.⁴ The term “adventure” denotes that the activity takes place in a setting that is demanding, challenging, dangerous or exotic. An adventure is something special and valuable that sticks out from ordinary life. It is used about sports or physical activities but also about travels, in body and mind. As I use the term it includes various types of extreme sports, risk sports, alternative sports and lifestyle sports where the element of adventure is salient⁵.

The content of the commonly used term “extreme sport” has shifted over the years. In the late 1980s/early 1990s, it was used for more traditional activities like skydiving, scuba diving, surfing, rock climbing, snow skiing, mountaineering, and hang gliding. It was connected with the outdoor person sort of lifestyle, clothing and gear. With the introduction of Extreme Games in 1995 the content of “extreme” changed and the typical new extreme sports were youth sports like skateboarding, snowboarding, and BMX. The extreme sport type of person also shifted towards a more urban look, with urban lifestyle and alternative rock music.⁶

“Alternative sport” is a term that is used to characterize sports that represent an alternative or opposition to the dominant sport culture. Many of the alternative sports tend to build groups and milieus in a way that lead to subcultures. The term “lifestyle sport” points to this characteristic. It is used by many of the hard core performers. “Risk sport” is a term that has been used both in popular and scholarly settings. It is a concept that cuts across the borders of extreme, alternative and lifestyle sports since some of these sports include big risks whereas others do not. Risk sports are sports where one must reckon with the possibility of serious injury or death as a consequence of the activity⁷. Risk sports include activities like formula I, downhill, climbing, white water kayaking, base jumping.

To sum up we see that the concept “adventure sport” contains a broad mixture of sports. It contains activities that a) have elements of challenge, excitement and (in most sports) risk, b) take place in demanding natural or artificially constructed environments, c) are more loosely organized than mainstream sports, d) represent a freedom from or opposition to the dominant sport culture, e) are individualistic pursuits but tend to build groups and subcultures around the activity.

Modernity and the ideal of the rational safety-seeker

The development of adventure sports with real risks stands in contrast to the basic ideology of modernity. The idea of modernity has as core elements rationality and control. In many ways our modern industrial society is obsessed with safety. Frank Furedi points to the increasing risk consciousness in modern societies. People are afraid of hidden dangers everywhere. Furedi maintains that “despite the many problems that face humanity, we live in a world that is far safer than at any time in history.”⁸ We seem at the same time to exaggerate the problems and risks and denigrate the problem-solving capacity of people. This leads to a culture of fear where the solution

seems to be even more rational control. Risk-taking becomes irrational. Lupton's comment is very relevant: "To take unnecessary risks is commonly seen as foolhardy, careless, irresponsible, and even 'deviant', evidence of an individual's ignorance or lack of ability to regulate the self".⁹ Such a view of human beings emerged during the Enlightenment period in the 18th century. The idea of modernism encompassed progress, science, rationality and control as central factors.¹⁰ The goal was to create a Dominion of Man that could control Nature and bring Happiness to all human beings. The new industrial and technological society that was developed in the 19th and the 20th century in many ways presupposed the docile and tamed 'animal rationale'. Without control over impulses and needs and a rational, long-term perspective on one's own behaviour and thinking, it is impossible to run a complex, fragile technological society in a safe way.

Accordingly there has been in most Western societies a growing focus on safety. Children need seatbelt and helmets, cars are built safer and with air bags, traffic is controlled and monitored by policemen, helicopters and video cameras. Houses are built with burglar alarms, fire detectors, and high insurance premiums. Children are continuously supervised in the kindergartens, sports get new regulations and injury protection devices. Industry and commerce have a growing list of rules and safety regulations they have to follow and comply with. Some industries operate with 24 hour security which means that the employees have to behave safely not only at work, but at home, during leisure; everywhere and always. In a way this is the final triumph of the idea of a rational safety-oriented human being with focus on prudence and self-control. Never do stupid things! But it seems that the human being is not totally malleable. It seems to have a nature inside that is still untamed. There is a "l'homme sauvage" inside us that is not content with security and full control.

The quest for excitement and risk

The beast within is easy to observe, both in positive and negative versions. And it seems to be alive and well also in the rational modernist society. A list of some examples suffices to make the point:

- Children are involved in rough and sometimes risky play in streets, gardens and woods.
- Young people explore a variety of dangerous sports.
- Young people are members of gangs and groups that fight each other, use drugs, and race cars.
- Young as well as old love tivolis with carousels and rollercoasters.
- More people are attracted to modern playgrounds with trampolines, bungee jumping and water slides.
- People tend to drive too fast with cars and motor bikes.
- People like to travel to exotic places and spend holidays in faraway countries.

Most of these activities have a long history but they have been further developed and expanded.¹¹ Activities that include excitement and risk have been cultivated and organized into new and more specific forms of adventure sports:

- There has been a further development, differentiation and specialization of older risk sports like climbing. Traditional mountain climbing has been differentiated into indoor climbing, big wall climbing, bouldering, ice climbing and so on.
- Air sports like paragliding, hang gliding and sky diving have been transformed since the 1970s by new types of equipment and suits, new activities and competitions, new styles and events like base jumping, sky boards and acrobatics.
- Skiing has been transformed and developed by Telemark, ski extreme, use of twin tip skis, kites and sails.
- Various board sports have been developed; snow boards, skate boards, wake boards, sky boards and new styles, events and competitions have appeared.

- New sports have appeared on the scene. The X-games that started in 1995 brought in new activities like street luge, eco-challenge, sky surfing, barefoot water skiing, in-line skating, mountain biking, BMX. New activities have been introduced regularly.

The development of new forms of excitement and risk has also taken place in areas targeting the broader public. The leisure parks introduce more exciting roller coasters, new types of bungee jumping. The family can experience wilderness trips with rafting, top-rope climbing and rappel. It makes possible strong thrills and excitement without a long learning process, but also with less possibility for mastery and self-fulfillment.

Tourism to exotic places increases. Sixty year old people can go to the South Pole or North Pole or to Everest Base Camp. Commercialized trips are available almost anywhere if you can pay. Adventure sports are used for character building and personal development by schools like Outward Bound. Challenges in nature are used to build teams, train on decision making, and learn stress mastery.

The new extreme sports introduced use of cameras in sport. Photos and videos documented the stunts, facilitated learning and were used to build identity in the subculture. Magazines and internet facilitated the international distribution of the new extreme sports. In many ways the adventure sports have become a metaphor for important aspects of modern society. Adventure sports are used in marketing and sale, in newspaper ads, and in cinema commercials. Films and TV-programs focus on extreme expeditions and dangerous activities. Specific channels and programs show the most extreme stunts and the worst accidents.

These various developments and trends show that adventure sport is part of a broader picture. The idea of prudence and control is leaking. There is an intrusion of excitement and risk in modernity. This is part of the development of a post-modern society. How can we understand and how can we explain the development of excitement, risk and adventure sports over the last 30 years? There are several theories that can contribute. I will come back to these. But in general I think we can discern two or maybe three main types of explanation. One explanation seems to be that there is an increasing uneasiness and dissatisfaction of some aspects with the modern control and safety-oriented society. There is a need for compensation that adventure sports partly fulfill. But it is also a fact that the society has become more exciting and colorful in many ways. An alternative theory could maintain that we have got more stimulation, more entertainment, more leisure parks, more TV-channels, more cafés, a more diversified society. If that is the case we need an adaptation theory. In the same way as alcoholics adapt to alcohol and need more or stronger doses in order to experience the same effect, the population needs more excitement and risk to experience the same effect. This explains why new adventure sports appear, why more extreme activities are developed. The entertainment and leisure parks need higher and faster roller coasters. The white water kayakers try higher water falls. The climbers climb more difficult routes.

A counterargument to a compensation theory could be that we have got more stimulation and excitement but it is only on the surface. The information, the media and the entertainment channels are more exciting, but relatively superficial. They are not the real thing. They do not challenge us in a deep personal way. But that is what adventure sports do. We seek bodily challenges in adventure sports because we want to experience the real world, not only images of the real. It may be that both the compensation and the adaptation theories have something to offer. It may be true that most people need adventures to counteract the control in modern society. And when people have found a relevant risk arena they need stronger doses of thrills in order to experience what they want. But this does not explain all. In addition adventure sport with its risks seems to function as a metaphor for deeper aspects of modern society. When Beck and to a certain extent Giddens, use the concept of risk to identify the negative, hidden dangers that we are exposed to in modern societies, this is only one part of the full picture.¹² Risk is not only connected with negative dangers. Risk also points to possibilities and freely chosen opportunities for life fulfillment. Thus adventure sport in many ways functions as an example or metaphor for entrepreneurship, decision-making, transcendence and freedom. Adventure sports are therefore a pure expression of some central aspects of post-modern society.

Theories

I have used compensation, adaptation and expression as three key terms for a general explanation of the popularity of adventure sports. There are several more specific theories that can help us get a firmer grip of the paradox that on one hand people want safety and on the other hand they willingly expose themselves to risks. Some theories use evolutionary and biological factors.¹³ Other theories focus on personal and individual factors.¹⁴ And some theories seek explanations in the social and cultural field.¹⁵ I will give examples of each of the approaches.

Adventure sports may be explained in an evolutionary perspective. “Evolutionary anthropology” and “evolutionary psychology” look at the human being in an evolutionary perspective.¹⁶ The evolutionary picture of man is quite different from the picture of humans as physically weak but culturally strong beings. Getting down from the trees, surviving on the savannah, moving to new climate zones, crossing rivers, mountain ranges and seas, certainly involved challenges and risks. As hunter-gatherers for 2 mill years, from *Homo habilis* to *Homo sapiens sapiens*, humans became used to both strong stimulations and dangers. Seen from an evolutionary viewpoint the modern lifestyle certainly lacks both the risks and many of the thrills of earlier lifestyles. One could argue that the modern quest for excitement is a search for elements of earlier lifestyles and environments. Adventure sports represent a “coming home” to an earlier form of living. The earlier lifestyles included role differentiation and individualization. Among-hunter-gatherers men in general were involved in the hunting and had a risk-taking role, whereas women were gatherers and had a security-oriented role, taking care of household and small children. In addition to culturally based gender differences there seems to be genetically based individual differences. The genome project revealed personality-related genetic differences.¹⁷ The risk-taking gene was found to be part of the adrenergic system and was correlated with novelty seeking and risk taking. This means that some individuals have genetic factors that dispose them to risk-taking. From a survival point of view it seems reasonable that a society should contain both risk-takers and risk-avoiders, and with most people somewhere in-between. These genetic underpinnings may explain why even today some people are more willing to take risks than others. Hard core members of adventure sports may be of the same stuff as the risk-takers that brought us down from the trees and out on the savannah some millions of years ago.

Adventure sports may be seen as a compensation for too much safety and control. In his civilization theory Norbert Elias showed how Europeans from the Middle Ages and onwards took control over their bodies and minds¹⁸. Speaking, eating, dressing, and behaving took more cumbersome forms. Etiquette, manners, and games got stricter rules. At the same time rough games and sports made it possible to experience freedom, excitement and joy. For the English workers in the 19th century the football stadium became a place where the routines and control gave way to exuberance and joy, rough fighting and hooliganism. One could speculate whether modern adventure sports similarly function as a vehicle for excitement in present society. According to such a view the civilization process runs in two directions. Control must be balanced by freedom and excitement. Based on empirical studies of traffic behavior John Adams has developed a theory of “risk compensation” that implies a similar view.¹⁹ All human beings have a propensity to take risks, some more than others. Choice of risk level depends on possible rewards and earlier experiences of loss. Risk taking is a balancing act, weighing the perception of risk and its consequences against one’s propensity to take risks and the likelihood of rewards. Higher risk can lead to higher rewards but also higher losses. When perceived risk decreases we adjust our behavior and take larger risks. With seatbelts in the cars we drive faster and take more risks than without seatbelt. The climbing pioneers with their stiff ropes had a simple philosophy: “The leader must not fall”. With flexible ropes one can risk more and take a fall without damaging consequences. Adams theory is well suited, I think, to explain why people in adventure sports do more extreme things with better equipment and better training.

Adventure sports and the cultivation of risk. Risk is not necessarily something negative. It signals something positive that can be achieved and even cultivated. In his analysis of high

modernity Giddens has shown how individuals react to their life situation and construct their identity.²⁰ In pre-modern societies risks were encountered as fateful dangers connected with nature (disasters, illness), violence (robbers, gangs, armies), and religious forces (evil powers, damnation). The risk arenas in modern society are on one hand related to the individual life project (reflexivity). One may fail in making one's life meaningful or important. Also the environmental risk profile has changed. It has become more intense and encompassing (nuclear war), and also unpredictable (financial crisis, unemployment). The risks are increasingly the result of industrial and social processes (chemical waste, radiation). Under these circumstances where new hidden risks are continuously exposed and dramatically portrayed by the media, the individual has to decide how to respond. The negative uncontrollable risks can however be balanced by positive forms of risk that one can handle. Adventure sports could from this perspective be an arena where we can test our physical and mental skills when confronting risky situations. Giddens thinks that the most demanding situations are those that are fateful moments that lead to consequential changes. Fateful moments are encountered in individual risk-taking situations where one can influence the outcome by using one's skill, courage and will. The joy and excitement in risk-taking situations are the result of three factors: 1) One is aware of the risk, 2) one voluntarily exposes oneself to risk, 3) one is confident that one has the necessary skills to handle the risk. The individual choice of risk arena and type of risk is an important part of the risk climate in high modernity. Self-construction means that one can profile oneself by smoking in spite of increased risk of lung cancer. One can drive fast in spite of increased risk of accidents. Giddens calls this "cultivated risk". The concept contains two elements: 1) One signals that one actively courts some forms of risk. 2) One further cultivates the risk through social forms and cultural values. In the end this means that in one's life plan one includes a risk package that follows from one's choice of life style. Adventure sports are arenas where the modern risky life project can be staged in a clear and comprehensible way.

Deep flow. In many ways Giddens's theory focus on the cognitive aspects of risk-taking. He undercommunicates the emotional and experiential sides of risk. An important part of adventure sports is related to the possibilities they give for mastery, strong experiences and joy. When some people seem to become addicted to adventure sports it may be because they experience flow. Csikszentmihalyi found flow experiences among climbers, rock dancers, chess players, music composers and surgeons.²¹ Flow experiences are characterized by merging of action and awareness, immediate feedback, match between skill and task, feeling of competence and control, and feeling of joy. Some people get hooked on activities where they can display mastery and skill when facing difficulties and dangers. Hard core members in adventure sports report to have feelings of deep flow where the experience affects them in a deep way.

Adventure and personality; high sensation seekers. Individual differences in personality seem to play an important role in attraction to and selection to adventure sports. Eysenck found that extraverts function better than introverts when the stimulation gets strong.²² This means that extraverts are more likely to have fun and function well when jumping out of an airplane or taking part in an important competition. Mental toughness and hardiness also seem to play a role. Zuckerman found that people who are both extraverts and mentally tough are "high sensation seekers". They like new, intense, varied and complex sensations and experiences and are willing to take physical, financial and legal risks to get what they want.²³ Sensation seeking follows a normal distribution curve in the general population and approximately 10 percent are extreme types that can be labeled "high sensation seekers". Studies by Breivik showed that climbers, parachutists, and white water kayakers score higher on sensation seeking tests than ice hockey players and karate performers who have medium scores.²⁴ Even lower scores were found among volleyball players and tennis players. All athletes were at national elite level. This means that sensation seeking scores correlate and reflect the risk levels of the activities. Adventure sports are likely to attract certain personality types that like strong experiences and are willing to take risks.

The theories we have presented represent parts of the total picture. They complement each other and need to be integrated. Giddens theory shows how the life project in modernity must include a reflection about risk, what kind of risk package each of us wants to include. An adventure sport is

here one option. For some people an adventure sport could develop into a lifestyle sport, where risk is part of a cultivated profile. The idea of compensation and balance between risk and safety advocated by both Elias and Dunning and by Adams may give support to a hypothesis that imply that as the control and safety focus increases in society there will be a need for new voluntary risk arenas. Both the evolutionary theory and Zuckerman's bio-social model show that there are individual differences that make some people much more prone to become involved in adventure sports than others. High sensation seekers are the prime candidates but many more will enjoy adventure of some kind if they get the chance.

Some recent discussions of adventure sport

Before we take a look at future dilemmas for adventure sports it is pertinent to present three authors that in different ways describe the present status of adventure sports. In the introduction to her anthology *Understanding Lifestyle Sports* Belinda Wheaton points out that various terms are used for the new alternative sports – extreme, alternative, lifestyle, whiz, action-sports, panic sports, postmodern, post-industrial and new sports. They are all individualized sporting activities, from surfing and skyboarding to new activities like B.A.S.E jumping and kite-surfing. According to Wheaton these new sports are characterized by being play as much as sports and with a certain artistic sensibility. In spite of differences the sports represent an alternative and potential challenge to the traditional sports culture with its rule-bound, competitive and masculinized spirit. Wheaton uses the term “lifestyle sports” as a less all-embracing term than alternative sports or new sports because “it is an expression adopted by members of the cultures themselves, and one that encapsulates these cultures and their identities, signaling the importance and socio-cultural context in which these activities emerged.”²⁵ Lifestyle sports thus express a particular and exclusive social identity. According to Wheaton this identity in late modernity becomes more personal, self-reflexive, and subject to change and innovation. Even if the identity and status are influenced by class, gender, race and lifestyle the way of doing the sport is more important. Commitment, attitude and style are central factors. Argot and authenticity matter. But not all are committed in the same way. “Those who *do* the sports range from very occasional participants who perhaps sample different lifestyle sports on a summer holiday, through the ‘weekend warriors’, to the ‘hard core’ committed practitioners who are fully familiarized in the lifestyle, argot, fashion and centrally technical skill of their activity.”²⁶

For Wheaton the lifestyle sports express postmodern lifestyles. Several of the lifestyle sports started with grass root participation – not spectating – and as an alternative type of sport. A participatory ideology “promotes fun, hedonism, involvement, self actualization, flow, living for the moment, “adrenalin rushes” and other intrinsic rewards”.²⁷ Lifestyle sports therefore resist institutionalization, are skeptical towards competition and instead emphasize creative and performative aspects. In many ways lifestyle sports both adapt to and resist the modern market. But as Wheaton argues, “To explain “the *meanings* of lifestyle sports solely in relation to ‘market incorporation’ and ‘resistance’ to the market, ignores the centrality of consumer capitalism and the media industries in their very inception and meanings of the sports practices. In these subcultural spaces, participants do not resist materiality, but contest the discourses about commercialization, regulation and control, and importantly about who has power to define and shape those discourses.”²⁸ Lifestyle sports therefore not only redefine what sport is about but also what sport participation and sport consumption is about. To a larger extent than in mainstream sports the alternative sports have people in the driver's seat that can influence the development and future of sports.

Rinehart and Sydnor's book *To the Extreme. Alternative Sports, Inside and Out*, contains articles about in-line skating, windsurfing, skydancing/surfing, BMX dirt-bike racing, mountain biking, Eco-challenge, whitewater kayaking, climbing, surfing, skateboarding, extreme skiing, and snowboarding. The topic of their book is the extreme and how it is expressed through modern alternative sports. Alternative sports come however in quite different versions, some of them are quite close to what Wheaton calls “lifestyle sports”. On one hand there are people who seek back

regions, privacy and adopt quite ascetic lifestyles. On the other hand popular extreme sport in versions like the X Games is forwarded by commercial companies like the Disney Corporation, ESPN, ESPN2, ABC, MTV, the Discovery Channel, Pepsi, Coke, and Nike. In many ways commercialism has shaped the electronic image of extreme sports. There is thus a quest for authenticity in some of the alternative sports, but there are also some that succumb to the multimillion dollar consumption industry. There are idealistic performers who want to be part of a peaceful international sport brotherhood, but there are also leading performers that are wealthy and exclusionary, traveling to exotic places and with a certain disdain for the mere “tourists” of adventure sport.

It is characteristic of the new extreme sports that they include self-imaging through videos, films, magazines, internet sites. Extreme sport’s growth is dependent on commercial imaging – but in addition “dependent on videography for novice and experienced athletes alike watch videos of themselves, of others, and of experts repeatedly to learn basic skills and new tricks.”²⁹ The videography is especially important in the board sports. According to Rinehart and Sydnor board sports are basic to extreme sports. They use philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s cultural-aesthetic of sport to catch the ontology of board sports: “The basic thing is how to get taken up in the movement of a big wave, a column of rising air, to come “between” rather than to be the origin of effort- to theoretically grasp the new sport of skysurfing.”³⁰ Movement, speed and time are fundamental factors in these types of sport. Not only spatial but temporal issues are central in the ontology of alternative sport. These issues are also important in the discussion of identity of post-modern society.

Most adventure sports involve risk-taking. Rinehart and Sydnor defend the risk athletes and claim that “extreme athletes are not lunatics or daredevils, but meticulous performers, giving themselves to some lofty form.”³¹ But risk is not only a matter of morality. Stephen Lyng has edited a book called *Edgework* which discusses the handling of risk in different life areas. Lyng sees risk-taking as “edgework”, which means “a form of boundary negotiation – the exploration of “edges” as it were. These edges can be defined in various ways: the boundary between sanity and insanity, consciousness and unconsciousness, and the most consequential one, the line separating life and death.”³² What is special in the risk-taking experience is the good feeling that accompanies advances in skills and practices and the strong sensations and thrills that they lead to.

I have maintained earlier that adventure sports on one hand can be considered as an adaptation to an unexciting security-obsessed society and on the other hand as a pure expression of some of the central traits of high modernity where individuality and risk-taking play an important role. This is in line with Lyng who thinks that “the risk-taking experience can be understood as either a radical form of escape from the institutional routines of contemporary life (variously conceived) or an especially pure expression of the central institutional and cultural imperatives of the emerging social order.”³³ *Edgework* is thus both escape and resistance to postmodern society. It resists and transcends modern rationality. Different types of risk-taking play on different aspects of resistance and expression. Lyng thinks that an important aspect of criminal behavior is linked to the sensual immediacy of the criminal act. There is an adrenaline rush also in criminal endeavors. Graffiti-writing is a resistance to authority where resistance as such is an important aspect of the experience.

On the other hand edgework can be seen as an expression of risk society. Following Beck one can see a synergy between edgework and the institutional order of “second modernity”. Lyng uses the concept “hyperconsumption” to get a grip on the hyper-rational gaming strategies that are used by the Wall street bond traders where a reliance on intuitive judgment is more important than mainstream rationality. Also among workers that are often considered to be safety-oriented Lyng sees more opportunity for greater variety, risk and profit: “Possessing the skills and perceptions of bond traders and edgeworkers – being vigilant and self reliant, trusting one’s intuition, refusing to panic, and believing in one’s survival skills – the post-Fordist employee may be attracted to greater risks of the new economic reality.”³⁴ This means that we may expect a more risk-accepting attitude in the future. However the tension and paradox of risk-acceptance and risk-denial will not be

eliminated. Lyng thinks that even if second modernity accepts and expects expanding risks in many domains, there exists “technologies of domination” that pervades the present social order. Following Lyng’s analysis one could on one hand see the growth of adventure sports as signs of expanding risks in a post-modern future. But the adventure sports may also succumb to the technologies of domination that are typical in hegemonic mainstream sports.

The future of adventure sport – some alternatives and dilemmas

There are then several dilemmas and alternatives for adventure sports in the future. I will mention a few. The first dilemma concerns the organization of adventure sport. In many adventure sports there is a history of self-organization. Loose groups decided on their own how to build identity and values, how to develop techniques and skills. Snowboard used to consist of groups of young people that opposed the formal organized sport culture. Snowboarders dressed, behaved and trained differently from traditional sports people, like alpine skiers. Gradually parts of the snowboard milieu have been swallowed by the formalized sport culture and has become part of the Olympic sport culture with its competitive events and ideology. Even the extreme BASEjumping community has gradually become more organized with formal regulations, training regimes and safety measures. Will this become a typical pattern in the future? Will some groups resist the tendency? Will new adventure sports be developed continuously?

Another question concerns the commercial aspect of adventure sports. There has been a long tradition of close links between people in adventure sports and equipment producers. Mountaineers tested equipment and were paid for it. As modern extreme sports developed from the mid-1990s a new step was taken. The bonds between the performers, the media, the equipment industry and the event entrepreneurs became much closer. The development in many adventure sports has been staged by the media and event producers. In formal sports the athletes train and compete according to the schedule set up by an international sport association. In extreme sports, like snow boarding, film and video making seems to be as important as the competitions. If the mirroring of the activities by films and the media becomes important the focus will be on spectacular stunts. The non-organized lifestyle with less focus on performance and more on sociality and new experiences, will be replaced by focus on extreme performances and media visibility.

A third question concerns the relation to nature. Will adventure sports more and more become low-tech events taking part in natural surroundings or will motorized and high tech events increase in popularity? The X-games have produced events like eco-challenge that take place in natural surroundings and wilderness. On the other hand motorized events like freestyle motocross and snow scooter races have become popular. Events like wakeboarding and skyboarding need power boats or airplanes. With an increasing focus on contact with nature, global warming, and environmental protection we could see a future development of “green” versions of adventure sport.

A fourth question concerns the demographic composition of adventure sports. Adventure sport was traditionally an arena for men between 17 and 45 years. Gradually women have entered many of the adventure sports arenas. The motorized and technological variants are still dominated by men. In climbing, skydiving, white water kayaking, and snowboarding women have entered in large numbers. I think it is likely that the women will catch up with the men in many adventure sports in the future both in number and performance. In some adventure sports muscle power and endurance play little role, for instance in sky diving. Versions of adventure sports can therefore be adapted for young kids as well as old people, healthy as well as handicapped people. Since adventure sports are media sports they are continuously spread to the global community. Also non-Western cultures are likely to take up adventure sports in the future.

Conclusion

Adventure sports have a long tradition. In the 19th century exploration of arctic areas and climbing in the Alps were new adventurous pursuits. In the 20th century alpine skiing, kayaking, sailing, parachute jumping and other risky sports were developed. From the 1970s and onwards we have seen a sharp increase and development of new forms of adventure sports. What we have

termed adventure sport covers a broad area of activities with differing names and characteristics like risk sports, extreme sports, ultrasport, youth sport, lifestyle sport, alternative sport. Whereas many of the traditional adventure sports had rough, rural characteristics, the development of X-games from 1995 signaled a type of alternative youth culture with more urban style and clothing. The popularity of adventure sports can on one hand be seen as a quest for excitement in unexciting societies. The modernist ideas of rational control and focus on safety stand in contrast to the adventure sport ideas of freedom, challenge and risk. On the other hand adventure sports represent key ideas in modern societies like individualism, entrepreneurship and transcendence. We also see striving among many adventure sport performers to reach higher performance levels and produce more extreme stunts.

It is thus likely that adventure sports will continue to grow and diversify. We looked at several theories that explain different aspects of the development in modern physical culture. Several theories seem to point to a strong relevance for adventure sports also in the future. There are alternatives and challenges for the future development of adventure. We have at least three distinct alternatives represented by a) loose groups of alternative lifestyle people (sea kayaking, mountain skiing b) people that are involved in formal sport settings with competitions and associations (snowboard, climbing), c) people that are involved with media, sponsors and entrepreneurs and make spectacular videos and films with extreme stunts (extreme skiing, surfing). It is unclear whether the sport organizations or the commercial media will swallow the loose alternative lifestyle sport. Since the quest for excitement is relevant also for children and old people it is likely that adventure will become popular in new groups of the population. And it is likely that more women will become practitioners and maybe trendsetters for new adventure sports. The focus on nature and the preservation of the environment may also give rise to more green and ecological versions of adventure sport.

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- ¹ Elias and Dunning, *Quest for Excitement*.
- ² Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*.
- ³ Cashmore, *Making Sense of Sports*, 8.
- ⁴ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language.
- ⁵ An overview of extreme sports are given in Allen and Peissel, *The Encyclopedia of Dangerous Sports*. A presentation of extreme sports from a newbeginner's point of view is given in Bane, *Over the Edge*. Gutman and Frederick, *Being Extreme*, presents interviews with members of different high-risk sports. A look into the early years of the Extreme Games is given in ESPN, *Way Inside ESPN's X Games*. A philosophical discussion of various aspects of risk sport is given in McNamee, *Philosophy, Risk and Adventure Sports*.
- ⁶ see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extreme_sports.
- ⁷ Breivik, *Empirical Studies of Risk Sports*.
- ⁸ Furedi, *The Culture of Fear*,54.
- ⁹ Lupton, *Risk*, 148.
- ¹⁰ See Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.
- ¹¹ An overview of various spontaneous and organized risky activities is given in Apter, *Danger*.
- ¹² See Beck, *Risk Society* and Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*.
- ¹³ Buss, *Personality*. Staski and Marks, *Evolutionary Anthropology*.
- ¹⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*. Zuckerman, *Behavioral Expressions and Biosocial Bases of Sensation Seeking*
- ¹⁵ Elias and Dunning, *Quest for excitement*. Breivik, *The quest for excitement and the safe society*.
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- ²⁵ Wheaton, *Understanding Lifestyle Sports*, 4.
- ²⁶ Wheaton, *Understanding Lifestyle Sports*, 8.
- ²⁷ Wheaton, *Understanding Lifestyle sports*, 11-12.
- ²⁸ Wheaton, *Understanding Lifestyle sports*, 20-21.
- ²⁹ Rinehart and Sydnor, *To the Extreme*, 5.
- ³⁰ Rinehart and Sydnor, *To the Extreme*, 11.
- ³¹ Rinehart and Sydnor, *To the Extreme*, 12. A discussion of the moral acceptability of BASEjumping is given in Breivik, "Can BASEjumping be morally defended?".
- ³² Lyng, *Edgework*, 4.
- ³³ Lyng, *Edgework*, 5.
- ³⁴ Lyng, *Edgework*, 9.