

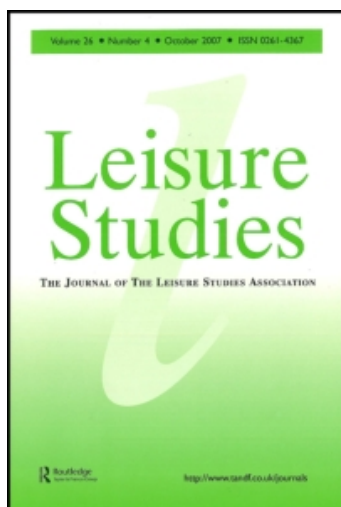
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The indoorisation of outdoor sports: an exploration of the rise of lifestyle sports in artificial settings

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During the last 20 years, a remarkable new type of service has been developed in the world of sports, which can be described as the *indoorisation of outdoor sports*. Typical outdoor sports like climbing, skiing, surfing, rowing and skydiving, which used to be exclusively practised in a natural environment of mountains, oceans, rivers and the air, are now being offered for consumption in safe, predictable and controlled indoor centres. The present article emphasises the rise of indoor *lifestyle sports*, such as rafting, snowboarding, skydiving and surfing. It discusses the conditions under and ways in which commercial entrepreneurs in the Netherlands have created this market, the meanings that they have ascribed to their centres and the dilemmas with which they have been confronted. It is argued that the rise of this economic market cannot be understood if it is solely interpreted as the result of economic, technological or natural developments. These economic activities were also embedded in and influenced by shared understandings and their representations in structured fields of outdoor sports, mainstream sports and leisure experience activities. A better understanding of the indoorisation of outdoor lifestyle sports can be achieved by recognising how these structures and cultures pervaded the rise of this new market.

Keywords: sociology; economy; culture; lifestyle; sport; commercialisation

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, there has been a paradoxical development in the sports world, which can be best described as the *indoorisation of outdoor sports*. Outdoor lifestyle sports, such as surfing, skating, rowing, alpine skiing, biathlon, cross-country skiing, snowboarding, mountain climbing and even ski jumping and parachute jumping, which used to be exclusively practised in a natural environment of mountains, oceans, lakes, rivers and the air, are now being offered by entrepreneurs in safe, predictable and controlled indoor centres.

The indoorisation of outdoor lifestyle sports has mainly taken place during the last 20 years, although earlier examples in mainstream sports can also be found. At the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, various miniature versions of sports, such as croquet, bowls, golf and lawn tennis, which were played by members of the social elite in their gardens and on their estates, emerged. Table tennis, for example, started as a sort of mini-tennis that could be played indoors as parlour game in bad weather

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or after dinner. Dining tables were used as the playing surface, and a type of net was improvised. Entrepreneurs were quick to seize the commercial advantages of this game (Bottenburg, 2001). Other examples of early indoorisation are 'futsal' or indoor soccer and swimming.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the indoorisation of outdoor sports occurred on a far greater scale; mainly as a result of the quest for more variation in the fitness sector. The traditional supply of weight-training apparatus was expanded with the introduction of cardiovascular equipment, which meant that people could now run indoors on the treadmill, cycle on the indoor exercise bike or home trainer and row on the indoor rowing machine. While this development certainly sparks the sociological imagination, the process of indoorisation that has developed worldwide outside the fitness sector provides even more food for sociological thought.

A global market of indoor complexes has been developed offering typically lifestyle outdoor sports, such as climbing in the climbing gym, ice climbing up indoor ice walls, diving in indoor diving pools, surfing on artificial waves, skiing and ski jumping in indoor ski centres and parachute jumping in vertical wind tunnels (Loynes, 1998). When discussing the indoorisation of outdoor sports in this article, the focus is on so-called lifestyle sports (Wheaton, 2004). Various authors use different definitions to describe these new sports, and the difficulties to capture all of the elements involved in these new activities in a single term are known widespread. Rinehart (2002) uses the term 'alternative sports', Midol (1993) mentions 'whiz' sports, while Tomlinson (2001) holds the definition of 'extreme sports'.¹ Sky (2001) and Wheaton (2004) reject the use of 'extreme' because of the devaluation of the term due to the use in media and by marketers, and the fact that 'extreme' is certainly not the way participants themselves interpret the activities. In the current paper, Wheaton's (2004) definition of lifestyle sports is followed.

It will be clear from the outset that these lifestyle sports are characterised by meanings and properties, which do not appear to lend themselves to being practised in a reconstructed indoor environment. Indeed, these outdoor sports usually take place in wild and desolate natural places, which have not been prepared for sporting activities in advance. The practitioners of these sports extol the virtues being close to nature and being part of natural sceneries. This goes hand in hand with a sense of adventure, uncertainty and danger; those who practice these sports wilfully seek out the upper limits and take considered risks (cf. Stranger, 1999). At first sight, this experience of nature and a 'just do it' kind of attitude (Wheaton, 2000) is at odds with the artificial and calculated character of the indoor sports centres that have been developed. Whereas those who participate in the outdoor variants of the sports are totally wrapped up in nature, the indoor practitioners must necessarily surrender themselves to technology. While the buzz from outdoor sports comes from adventure, uncertainty and danger, the indoor variants inescapably embrace the elements of control, predictability and calculability.

There is a similar tension with respect to the mutual bond and subculture that has developed among the participants of these sports. Despite the informal ties that are common to the outdoor lifestyle sports, the hard-core enthusiasts form various tightly knit social groups, which outsiders find difficult to penetrate. It takes years of practice and participation – and thus also a major investment in cultural capital – to master the techniques of these sports and to appropriate the shared cultural significance of the sporting styles, clothing, materials, language use and the like (Bourdieu, 1984;

Wheaton, 2004). In contrast, gaining access to an indoor sports centre seems to demand no more effort than simply buying a ticket. In comparison to the subcultures that the fervent aficionados of, for example, snowboarding and surfing have built up from the grassroots, visits to the indoor halls are likely to have a fleeting and irregular character from which very few shared meanings can develop. Loynes (1998, p. 35) mentions to this with the term 'recreational capitalism'. We show that there are significant differences in indoor and outdoor versions of the same sports.

The indoorisation of these sports raises many questions. How and why have entrepreneurs succeeded in offering these typical outdoor lifestyle sports in a controlled indoor environment? How do they provide efficiency, safety and predictability (i.e. independent of the geographical and climatological conditions) while also offering sufficient variation, challenges and changes to hold the consumer's interest and continue surprising them? How does the way in which the outdoor sports (and above all the lifestyle sports) are packaged and marketed as indoor sports influence the way that they are experienced, consumed and interpreted by consumers? What meanings do consumers attach to participating in these outdoor and lifestyle sports in indoor centres and how does this relate to the meanings attached to participating in these sports outdoors?

As part of a broader research study into a variety of commercial complexes where outdoor sports are presented in an indoor environment, this article offers the first theoretical exploratory interpretation of the process of indoorisation of outdoor lifestyle sports, or, as Eichberg (1998) has called it, the 'artificialisation and interiorisation of the body' (p. 60). Following Eichberg, we will argue that natural (to take shelter from bad weather), health or medical and technological explanations do not go far enough. The changes in space are indelibly social, related to broader processes like commercialisation, globalisation and individualisation (Eichberg, 1998, p. 60 and further). In a subsequent PhD project, these processes in relation to the activities will be further explored. In this project, sociohistorical developments, participant profiles, questions of ecology and sustainability, the tension between consumers and producers as well as sensation seeking in indoor lifestyle sports will be highlighted.

In the present article, the focus will be rather on the supply side of the market than on the demand side. It will discuss the conditions under and ways in which producers have created this market, the meanings that they have ascribed to their centres, how these meanings have been marketed in an attempt to reach a broad public and the dilemmas with which they have been confronted in the process. Furthermore, it will show that the ways in which commercial entrepreneurs have created this market cannot be understood without taking into account the social networks, institutional structures and power relations in which they are embedded and the shared understandings that give meaning and sense to goods and services exchanged on the market, and indeed, the exchange itself (Granovetter, 1985; Guillén, Collins, England, & Meyer, 2002; Smelser & Swedberg, 2005).

In order to do so, attention will be devoted to the way in which the rise of this economic market has been embedded in (1) the structure of the fields in which the new indoor centres in this market are positioned (Bourdieu, 1988), (2) the diverse cultures – in the sense of shared meanings and their representations (Zelizer, 2005) – that have developed in these fields, and (3) the broader social processes, which have occurred relatively autonomously from individual action, but have still had a structuring influence on it (Elias, 1977).

Methodology

The research project was carried out between January 2007 and May 2008, with the help of 31 students in two courses of the Masters Program for Sport Policy and Sport Management at Utrecht University. These students did 81 semi-structured interviews in 13 indoor sports centres in the Netherlands (indoor centres for beach volleyball, cycling, golf, skiing, skydiving, surfing and tennis, two fitness (spinning) centres and three indoor skating centres). The interviews were held with 12 owners/managers, seven trainers and instructors, 50 indoor sports participants and seven participants in corresponding outdoor sports.

As the indoorisation of outdoor *lifestyle* sports is the subject of this article, we restricted our analysis here to those centres which most pronouncedly represent the combination of risks, sensation, freedom and adventure on the one hand, and artificiality, simulation of nature and commodification on the other: Skidôme in Rucphen, SnowWorld in Zoetermeer and Landgraaf, Dutch Water Dreams in Zoetermeer and Indoor Skydive in Roosendaal. In the research period, these centres were visited by the authors and 11 master's students, and owners were interviewed.

Besides the interviews, the analysis was based on textual and visual materials of the five selected indoor sports centres, ranging from institutional documents, factual accounts, press releases, media texts, leaflets, websites, photographs and videos. The textual and visual materials were analysed as cultural texts. They were not taken as the only 'real' portrayals of the marketplace phenomenon, but as sources that provide access to particular accounts of those phenomena, in and through which social reality is constructed (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

In addition to the interviews and analysis of textual and visual materials, data were obtained from observations in the centres. However, for the purpose of this article, these observations have not been processed yet. They are to be expanded in the near future, as part of a broader, longer and in-depth PhD project on the indoorisation of outdoor sports by one of the authors. In this four-year project, the methodologies mentioned above will also be extended with consumer surveys, more in-depth interviews and additional textual analyses. Methodologies used in this first explorative study serve a broader goal: to discover questions and to map this specific market for the first time.

The construction of a market

The fact that the indoor centres for outdoor sports have rapidly been able to establish themselves across the globe cannot be seen independently of the acceleration in globalisation, commercialisation and technological change, which has occurred during the last quarter of a century.

The initiatives for these centres were taken by internationally oriented entrepreneurs who can be regarded as outsiders to the mainstream sports world. As far as can be ascertained, the world's first indoor ski centre was opened at the end of the 1980s. At least, that is what SnowDome in Adelaide, South Australia, claimed when it opened its doors in 1988. This idea was also taken up elsewhere, first in Japan, and then mainly in countries that had poor skiing conditions, but which had nonetheless developed a ski culture partly as a result of their increasing affluence and the rise in popularity of winter sports vacations. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Belgium and Germany had the most indoor ski centres. Nowadays, one can find these centres all over the world, even in desert regions, such as Bahrain.²

In the Netherlands, there are nowadays eight indoor ski centres with real snow, about 25 professional climbing centres with artificial climbing walls, an indoor skydiving facility and an artificial raft and surf accommodation. The company SnowWorld runs two of the artificial snow centres and has far-reaching plans to establish similar complexes in other European countries through a stock-market floatation.³

Skidôme in Rucphen was the first indoor ski centre in the Netherlands. It was built in 1995 by Nicky Broos, an independent entrepreneur. The idea that Broos realised originally came from a Dutch construction and architect company, which had seen one of the very first indoor centres that had been built in Japan in 1993.⁴ With the 160 metre (525 feet) long slope that he built, he incurred, in the words of Thorstein Veblen, 'the penalty of taking the lead'. Later ski centres, such as SnowWorld in Zoetermeer and particularly in Landgraaf, which with its 520 metre (1706 feet) ski slope is one of the longest indoor ski runs in the world, would go on to profit from these earlier experiences and new technologies.

The same largely applies to the indoor skydiving and indoor surfing centres: a recent, rapid global expansion, which has been fostered by technological innovations and new commercial initiatives. In 1991, the American Thomas Lochtefeld invented the so-called FlowRider, an invention which made a new board sport possible, christened as 'flowboarding'. The FlowRider first came into use in New Braunfels, Texas, in 1991. Within just a few years, Miyazaki (Japan) and Bo (Norway) followed suit. The FlowRider is now being used across the globe, predominantly in the USA and Europe, but also in Japan, Korea, China, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.⁵ Similar and competing developments also took place elsewhere. In New Zealand, ASR Limited developed the Artificial Surf Reefs, which were also put into operation outside of New Zealand – in the USA, Great Britain and South Africa – in collaboration with other companies.⁶ In addition, in Japan a major steel concern, the NKK Corporation, developed an alternative business when shipbuilding went into decline. Because of its shipbuilding activities, NKK had gained significant experience in generating waves and used this to develop Wild Blue Yokohama, a beach with an ocean and waves, complete with plastic palm trees, set in a large building.⁷

The company Dutch Water Dreams in Zoetermeer has offered consumers the possibility of surfing indoors since 2006. The initiator of this centre, which cost some 32.5 million euros (at that time ca. 41.5 million USD), was Tobias Walraven, a celebrated entrepreneur who, amongst other things, set up and ran SNT, a call centre that is quoted on the stock exchange. He bought the French company Hydrostadium's rights to construct a white water sports complex; this company had already built the official Olympic white water course in Barcelona and Sydney, and was also commissioned to build the Olympic course in Beijing. To add indoor surfing to his concept, Walraven established a partnership with Thomas Lochtefeld's WaveLoch.⁸

The vertical wind tunnel for skydiving had originally been developed during the 1950s and 1960s for military purposes and space travel. The first commercial applications of this technology were realised around 1980 and then replicated worldwide during the 1990s, first in Japan and Switzerland. There are now more than 20 commercial indoor skydiving centres in the USA and Europe.

Indoor Skydive Roosendaal, the very first indoor skydiving centre in the Netherlands, opened its doors in 2007. This centre has a vertical wind tunnel, which has an air current with a speed of 230 kilometres per hour (143 miles per hour) so that visitors can experience the freefall of a parachutist. This centre was the initiative of the

husband and wife team André and Corrie Kempenaars. They became familiar with the vertical wind tunnel during a parachute jumping course in the USA.⁹

Interviews and analyses with relation to the mentioned centres and other international initiatives demonstrate that commercial motives lie behind all the innovations in sport facilities that they achieved. In this regard, they were not only able to profit from the politics or market deregulation and liberalisation in general, but also the increasing receptiveness of the public, government and sports organisations to commercially run sports facilities in countries where these facilities were traditionally financed and managed by a coalition of national sporting organisations, local sporting clubs and national and local governments. As will be discussed later, the Dutch national government and the NOC*NSF (Dutch Olympic Committee/Dutch Sports Federation) made funding available for the realisation of one of the indoor centres; local government agencies adopted a helpful and flexible stance with respect to issuing permits; and the sports umbrella organisation and sport federations entered into collaborative relationships with some of the indoor centres with a view to the advancement of elite sport. National borders, national regulatory bodies and national cultural traditions have hardly created any impediment to the global dissemination of these commercial innovations, which have then been given their own local character (Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1997).

It is self-evident that the developments in new construction, cooling and insulation techniques and the achievement of innovations in water, snow and atmospheric control, which have been enabled by advanced technology, were prerequisites for the indoorisation of outdoor sports. Yet, this does not mean that these technological developments should be seen as the driving force behind indoorisation. In so doing, one would run the risk of ignoring the initial idea of using these new technological possibilities to achieve such ends. The development, realisation and response to this idea, and thus the global market of producers and consumers, which has emerged with the indoorisation of outdoor sports, should be viewed as a social construction, in the sense that the use and meaning of these new services had yet to be defined (Collins, 2004).

The idea of offering outdoor sports indoors did not arise from a pre-existent consumer need or interest. 'Consumer demand', argues Randall Collins in *Interaction ritual chains*, 'is not simply an exogenous quantity, but something that is constructed by what is being offered by producers' (Collins, 2004, p. 167). The initiative for the indoorisation of outdoor sports came from entrepreneurs who kept a close eye on each other's activities. Naturally, market research was carried out to be able to underpin and justify the necessary investment. And, without a doubt, just as the prospectus of Dutch Water Dreams reports, this market research discovered that there actually was an interest for such centres among a sizeable group of sports-loving respondents who were, of course, part of the target group.¹⁰ However, this interest is obviously related to the concept that was presented by the producer prior to the realisation of the complex.

This does not mean to say that consumers are merely followers with no will of their own, who do nothing other than consume the products and services on offer along with the meanings that are ascribed to them. Quite to the contrary, as Appadurai (1986) has astutely noted, 'the production knowledge that is read into a commodity is quite different from the consumption knowledge that is read from the commodity' (p. 41). Collins (2004) contends that in the ongoing flow of social interaction rituals between producers and consumers, the interpretations and meanings that are given to the products and services on one side of the market resonate on the other side, and vice

versa. Consumers interpret and assess the constructed meanings, which reach them by way of advertisements, Internet, stories and so forth, and compare these with their personal experiences and those of others. The meanings of the indoor sports centres are, therefore, not established in advance. Nor are they determined by the producers or the consumers. Instead, there is a constant process of what Erving Goffman has called 'framing' and 'reframing' between the producers and consumers (Goffman, 1974). Both producers and consumers are involved in a continual interactive process, a 'cultural circuit', which not only influences themselves, but also the meanings of the product or service in question (Du Gay, Hall, Janes, McKay, & Negus, 1997; Lury, 1996; Sassatelli, 2007; Shove & Pantzar, 2005; Zelizer, 1988; Zukin & Smith Maguire, 2004). This interaction can have an unintended consequence; namely that, over the course of time, the kinds (aspects) of sport on offer and their setting can acquire a form, meaning and function that no one had anticipated and intended in advance (Elias, 1977).

As is generally the case with the development of new markets, the initiative for this interaction lies on the side of the producers. They take the first and most decisive steps 'that begin to pump up material objects into Durkheimian sacred objects, which will in turn generate the biggest profits' (Collins, 2004, p. 168). This principle does not just apply to material products, but also to services.¹¹ While competing with each other, the producers were the first to give shape to the nature and meaning of the indoor complexes and outdoor sports, which had to be realised according to their visions. 'Welcome to *our* dream' (our emphasis), proclaimed the commercial supplement that Dutch Water Dreams published in *De Telegraaf*, the biggest national daily newspaper in the Netherlands, when the centre opened.

To understand this dream, the meanings which are ascribed to the indoor sports centres should not be understood as intrinsic values that can be derived from the activities themselves. Instead, following Pierre Bourdieu, they should be viewed in relation to the structure¹² of the sports and leisure field, and the various activities that already existed there (Bourdieu, 1988, 1996). When launching and promoting their indoor centres, the entrepreneurs paid particular attention to the meanings surrounding three sub-fields: lifestyle sports, organised competitive sports and elite sport, and the adventure and experience market in the leisure sector. As the next section illustrates, the indoor centre entrepreneurs defined their services in such a way that it either competed with one or more of these sub-fields in the market, or actually dovetailed with the wishes and needs of the organisations and the meanings that dominated in these sub-fields. Maintaining a good balance between the various layers of meaning that are involved proved to be a difficult task. Placing the emphasis on one layer of meaning can have undesirable consequences for meanings, which, from another perspective, can be viewed as just as desirable.

Dilemmas of ascribing meaning

Meanings in relation to outdoor lifestyle sports

According to Bourdieu (1980), a field effect occurs when it is no longer possible to understand a practice, like the introduction of a new product or service on a market, without knowing the history of this field. In this sense, the fact that the producers – when developing and positioning their indoor sports centres – are unable to escape from the dominant meanings of the outdoor lifestyle sports, from which their sport supply partly derives, can be regarded as a field effect.

While it is true that the hardcore aficionados of the outdoor lifestyle sports do not constitute a large group, the popularity of these sports has grown significantly. Moreover, the diverse aspects of the subculture of these lifestyle sports have gained a worldwide following. Although this subculture was initially characterised by an anti-commercial (rather ambivalent) undertone, it has quickly become the object of commodification, marketing and mediatisation. After all, the sports that they offer are largely derived from these lifestyle sports. They are widely practised outside, so why not inside?¹³ Indeed, the specific culture of the outdoor lifestyle sports can be used to give the indoor variants a similar appeal.

In their publicity, the indoor sports centres make an explicit connection with the culture of the outdoor lifestyle sports by using slogans and language that appeal to it. For instance, Indoor Skydive Roosendaal advertises that its visitors can experience 'The Ultimate Xperience', implicitly referring to the so-called XSports (extreme sports) and the XGames of the American sports channel ESPN. This indoor centre also claims that its visitors can also get their kicks when it comes to excitement and adventure ('one gets a great adrenaline rush when skydiving'). In their attempts to lure the public, they also refer to seeking out and pushing back boundaries ('defy the laws of gravity'), and the experience of nature and adventure ('experience the ultimate freedom') among outdoor sports participants. Likewise, the promotional materials for Dutch Water Dreams employ similar language, which is redolent of the outdoor lifestyle sports culture: 'an adventurous experience'; 'for real adrenaline junkies', 'to push back boundaries'; 'aimed at the hardcore fun sports enthusiast' and 'Go with the flow!'.

The experiences that such centres promise attempt to satiate the 'quest for excitement', which, according to Elias and Dunning, characterises modern society. The sporting activities in these centres generate fleeting, pleasant and pleasurable forms of suspense and excitement, which these authors believe are often lacking in the ordinary routines of everyday life. Nonetheless, this suspense and excitement occurs under controlled conditions, thus allowing people the opportunity to experience what Elias has called a 'controlled but enjoyable de-controlling of affects and emotions' (Elias & Dunning, 1986, p. 44).

Needless to say, it is crucial for the indoor centres that the safety of the participants is guaranteed. Accidents, which can be blamed on the supplier's negligence, pose a great risk to every indoor centre not only due to the insurance claims that may ensue as a result, but also because such calamities may damage the centre's image. To minimise the risk of accidents, these centres operate a tight safety policy and this is strongly emphasised in their communications. 'Naturally, the safety of our guests is our first priority' notes Dutch Water Dreams in one of its brochures. Indoor Skydive Roosendaal also expressly states like 'For every decision we take, we make sure that safety prevails' and 'Safety is the leitmotiv of the entire project'. To guarantee this safety, extensive safety regulations, protocols and procedures are implemented at all indoor centres. For example, these regulations require that protective clothing is worn and they forbid the use of stimulants. 'There is a zero-tolerance policy with respect to the use of alcohol and drugs' (Dutch Water Dreams). 'It is strictly forbidden, under penalty of expulsion, to take alcohol, confectionery, food or smoking materials into the Ski School' (Skidôme). Instructors play an important role in this regard. At Dutch Water Dreams, there are also active lifeguards and the safety policy is coordinated from a control centre which, thanks to eight cameras, has a complete view of the watercourse.

The emphasis on excitement *and* safety poses a tricky dilemma for the indoor centres. Too great an emphasis on the one (safety) can undermine the very meaning and appeal of the other (excitement). The combination of both desires is the *unique selling point*:

At Dutch Water Dreams, you can take part in spectacular white water sports in an environment where safety and comfort take centre stage (...) The advantage of the wild water course compared to a natural wild water setting is that, in the event of a calamity, we are able to turn off the water pumps, and stop the flow of water.

The same applies to indoor skydiving: 'If there is a power failure, then the 12 ventilator fans will carry on turning for a while. This means that you will be able to descend gently and land in a strong net'.

Nonetheless, there is still a danger that an ambiguous meaning will be transmitted: on the one hand, the indoor centres appeal to the 'hardcore fun sports enthusiast' and the 'adrenaline junkie', yet, on the other, they position themselves in such a way that the centres also have meaning for rather less courageous daredevils.

Of course, the outdoor experience of sky diving is partly because of the danger, and the kick from the parachute. But, professionals aren't afraid of a failure or mistake. When these pros are flying indoors, they most enjoy the possibility to 'play'. Indoors, they have the time to play with the wind, to do some tricks. Outdoors, the free fall is about 30 seconds, and after 3 minutes you reach the ground. (Interview with marketing manager, Indoor Skydive Centre, March 2008)

Indoor Skydive Roosendaal targets both groups: 'It is a real kick for people who perhaps find 4 kilometres (2.5 miles) just a bit too high, as well as for the diehards!' Likewise, Dutch Water Dreams reassures the consumer that the bottom layer of the FlowRider is made of a soft material, which feels like a judo mat when water flows over it. 'Falling hardly hurts and so this board sport can be practised safely.'

The described dilemma is part and parcel of a broader discrepancy. The indoor enterprises are oriented towards efficiency, predictability, calculability and the control of their service provision; this is a development that George Ritzer has called 'The McDonaldisation of Society' (Ritzer, 2008). Yet, this rationalisation must not be at the expense of the experience of the sport as a special activity, which can be seen as comparable to experiencing such sports outdoors. The rationalisation thus constantly demands diversification and variation to hold the consumers' interest and keep on surprising them. To achieve this, commercial institutions in the sport, leisure and entertainment industry employ specialists, whom Roberta Sassatelli has characterised as 'motivational professionals' (Sassatelli, 2007). They must guide the consumers to and in their meaningful experience by giving them insights into the techniques and experiences with which they can better understand the activities concerned and enjoy them even more. In the indoor sport centres, this role is mainly fulfilled by instructors.

Right now, we are trying to develop a concept with mountainbiking in this area. Our ski instructors ... those people have a background in sport, they know how to enthuse and entertain people, they also have experience in children's sport camps and so on. In this way, we are always busy with the extension of our products. (Interview with manager and ski instructors, Indoor Snow Centre, March 2009).

Meanings in relation to mainstream sport

The development of competitive sport and elite sport from sporting activities that were initially intended for the leisure market is the next example of a field effect in Bourdieu's terms. Competitive sport is the dominant model of sport worldwide – the mainstream sport – with elite sport as the greatest audience puller, which enjoys the non-stop attention of the media. The organisations and media, which have a vested interest in perpetuating that model, exert pressure to also organise new sports activities according to this model and to incorporate them into the world system of sports organisations. Conversely, interest from the mainstream sports world can also encourage initiators, practitioners, representatives and (possible) developers of these new sports activities to indeed conform to the dominant model, and to organise, regulate and standardise these sports activities in accordance with the wishes of the media and international sports organisations.

The rise of the outdoor lifestyle sports can be regarded as a reaction to – or resistance against – these mainstream sports. These sports were not developed by or within the established sports organisations, but came about more or less spontaneously from the unregulated activities of young people who, while practicing these sports, began to increasingly align themselves with each other. One of the meanings that they shared was their preference for individual and informal expression in an open and free environment, unhindered by regulations and controls by schools or sports organisations (Wheaton, 2000, 2004). However, the global dissemination and popularisation of these lifestyle sports also went hand in hand with a differentiation of performance styles and subcultures within these outdoor sports. The desire and proclivity to continue to distinguish themselves from mainstream sport has continued within certain subgroups. Yet, at the same time, the dominant sport model has been applied to various kinds of sports within the outdoor lifestyle sports. Organised, regulated and standardised disciplines have developed in nearly all lifestyle sports, culminating in competitive and performance-oriented elite sports that are covered by the media. A number of these, such as snowboarding and freestyle skiing, even have been included in the Olympic programme, which can certainly be regarded as *the* symbol of mainstream sport.

Although the commercial indoor sports centres have developed their sports services outside mainstream sport, they cannot escape completely from its sphere of influence. Because of the established balance of power in the field of sport, a relationship with mainstream sport – particularly elite sport – afforded access to funding bodies. For example, the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the NOC*NSF awarded grants to Dutch Water Dreams on the recommendation of the Dutch Canoe Association for the creation of a white water course, which would satisfy the requirements and norms of the International Canoe Federation. The facilities were subsequently given the status of an 'A-location' by NOC*NSF and now serve as the training centre for the Dutch kayaking slalom team.¹⁴ Similarly, Indoor Skydive Roosendaal has also focused on raising the performance level in sport parachuting, in collaboration with professional parachutists and the Dutch Ministry of Defense.

In addition to this, a link with mainstream sport – and with elite sport in particular – guarantees free publicity. For example, the SnowWorld ski centre in Landgraaf is used annually for the official FIS European Cup and the Snowboarding World Cup championships, which both receive considerable media attention. To further consolidate the relationship between the ski centre and the elite sport, SnowWorld also acts

as the sponsor of Dutch elite athletes and talents, particularly with respect to snowboarding. Dutch Water Dreams has also attracted media attention with its white water course, which is based on the design for the Olympic course in Beijing.

These public flirtations with elite sport are significant for the positioning of the centres. In commercial terms, their function as training centres for elite athletes is subordinate to that of consumer entertainment. The vast majority of visitors is not oriented to training for elite sporting performance, but is instead simply looking to have an enjoyable experience. However, the attention for elite sport within these commercial centres prevents too great an emphasis being placed on casual, recreational entertainment. In the light of this, stories in daily newspapers about the 'most perfect slope in the world', which makes it possible to perform 'bold stunts', are extremely welcome to draw attention to the fact that they are also attractive places to seriously practice sports.

Just as they must maintain the equilibrium between excitement and safety, these centres also have to keep a watchful eye on the precarious balance between their significance to elite sport and the broader public. The centres use the proximity and easy accessibility of their indoor facilities as another *unique selling point*. As one can read in Indoor Skydive's mission statement, 'one of the most important goals is the chance to give the sport greater publicity, so that a broader public is able to become acquainted with it'. Likewise, Dutch Water Dreams points out that 'for those who want to go rafting, the Ardennes in Belgium is the closest possibility. Dutch Water Dreams has put an end to this situation'. Skidôme also emphasises that 'increasingly more people are prepared to take their winter sports vacation in their own country. Skidôme offers the best conditions for this: perfect snow, good service and expert guidance'.

Their proximity (i.e. you do not have to leave the country to do the sport) also gives the indoor centres an accessible character. The centres stress that they also make the outdoor sports in question more accessible to a broader public. Skiing, surfing and parachute jumping can be done close-by, at a relatively low cost and can also be tried just once.¹⁵ As the promotional materials from Indoor Skydive state, 'experience an extreme sport in a very accessible way'. In an interview, the owner of Indoor Skydive argued 'we have lowered the threshold, so that everyone can experience the sensation' (interview with owner of Indoor Skydive Centre, February 2008).

Similarly, the brochure for Dutch Water Dreams claims, 'The complex makes white water canoeing, rafting and indoor surfing accessible to a broad public in an environment where comfort and safety take centre stage.' Among others, SnowWorld is aimed at 'the littlest ones among us, who can have their first winter sports experience at SnowWorld'. Skidôme points out that the middle-aged who 'would still really like to try' skiing or snowboarding have come to the right address. They offer a skiing course for 50-plus where they can learn 'at your own pace with your peers'.

The message is that the indoor sports complexes are open to everyone and they lower the threshold: partly due to their proximity, partly due to the limited degree of difficulty and the higher level of safety. An analysis of the visitors to these centres should reveal the effect that this image has on the broader public and whether new target groups have indeed been attracted.¹⁶

In this way, the popularisation of the formerly elite sports should continue. Throughout the twentieth century, the level of affluence in Western countries has increased considerably, which has meant that more and more consumer goods have been brought within the reach of an increasingly larger group of people. The differences

between rich and poor have decreased significantly and become less visible. In particular, the expanding middle classes have developed a degree of affluence that would have been unthinkable in previous generations. In relation to these developments, various sports, which previously would have been categorised as elite sports, such as hockey, tennis, skiing, equestrian sports and golf, have enjoyed a huge rise in popularity throughout the past few decades (Bottenburg, 2001). The 14-fold growth in the number of Dutch winter sports participants from 200,000 in 1970 to 2 million in 2007 provides a good illustration of this.

The indoor ski centres create this popular winter sport atmosphere in different ways. 'It is all about the ambiance of a winter sport vacation' (interview with owner of the Indoor Snow Centre, June 2008). This vision is translated in SnowWorld's promotional material:

SnowWorld offers all the ingredients of a successful après-ski party. Together with your family, colleagues or business clients, you can enjoy an excellent culinary venue in the midst of a unique winter sports ambiance, which you usually only come across in ski resorts. (...) The six-person chairlift and original Austrian Almhut on the run make the winter sports sensation complete. A comfortable ride in the chairlift takes you to the top of the mountain, where you can begin your descent. To warm yourself up during the skiing, you can visit the Almhut for a warm hot chocolate with whipped cream or a glühwein [mulled wine]. Here you really get the feeling that you are in the Alps. Two green, one blue and even a red run offer enough variety to winter sports fans.

A successful popularisation ensures a significant growth in visitors. At the same time, an indoor centre can also run the risk of alienating the trendsetting public. Indoor Skydive explicitly calls itself trendsetting. Likewise, the wild water complex Dutch Water Dreams also characterises itself 'as sporty, innovative and rather hip'. They emphasise this meaning by referring to the innovative strength of the sports they offer. They did not only create new 'commercial settings' for the practice of these sports (Sassatelli, 2007), but have also stimulated the development of new sports, with their own rules, meanings and even their own championships. Flowboarding can be seen as a new board sport and is also experienced by the surfers as such. Indeed, the first flowboarding world championships have already taken place. Similarly, the American John Suiter won the new title 'World Champion Wind Tunnel Flyer' in 2002. Interestingly, these innovations conform to the mainstream sport model.

Meanings in relation to leisure experiences

The third field effect, which the indoor centres anticipate, concerns the competition with other providers in the leisure sector. 'We have to deal with countless providers of various leisure activities. How can we reach our target group that way, that they prefer us among all that other fun and exciting activities?' (interview with owner of Wild Water Centre, January 2008).

In this commercial struggle, the publicity materials produced by the indoor centres do not so much emphasise the sport itself, but rather the opportunity to undergo a pleasurable experience (with others). In this regard, Pine and Gilmore (1999) would undoubtedly have used the indoor centres for skiing, surfing and skydiving as typical examples of new enterprises in the experience economy. Following the expansion of the goods economy and then the service economy, according to the authors, the greatest growth that has occurred since the 1990s has been for enterprises that no longer

confine themselves to the supply of goods and services, but which also provide experiences. These experiences take place in specially created locations, which influence people's perception of time, space and matter.

Pine and Gilmore contend that this is not so much about the consumer paying for a service, but about their buying time to undergo a memorable experience. Although it is a study from the management literature that has found little resonance in the academic discipline of economics, the concept of experience economy has been widely used to explain developments in the sport and leisure sector. Pine and Gilmore have also referred to the development of extreme sports several times as an example of a successful application of the principles of the experience economy.

People are always looking for something new, something fun and something different. Nowadays, they want to go 'extreme', and they are willing to pay money for that experience. I think, indoor skydiving fits perfectly in this trend: it is trendsetting, new and exciting. (Interview with marketing manager, Indoor Skydive Centre, March 2008)

Nonetheless, there is an important difference between the meanings that the indoor centres propagate and the way in which, according to Pine and Gilmore, enterprises in the experience economy operate. Whereas the authors argue in favour of offering an experience to the individual customer ('given that an experience is in itself something personal, no two people can have the same experience', p. 236), the indoor sports centres are focused entirely on groups of consumers. Indeed, they emphasise the social meaning of group visits in fairly elaborate terms. Whether it is for birthdays, wedding parties, business events or school trips, the centres' message is still the same: undergoing the experience together gives pleasure and leads to bonding.

We can make an unforgettable event not only of your outings with family and friends, but also meetings with, for example, your sports club, student society or another network club. (...) From a theme or wedding party to birthdays and anniversaries, Dutch Water Dreams is *the* place to celebrate!

'Meet your business clients in a unique and informal environment. Taking part in a water sports activity certainly brings people closer together. No matter what, the mutual bond will be strengthened! The supply is geared to this meaning. The centres have put together a wide variety of packages with which they can cater to the needs of various target groups. They have special rooms for large groups where meetings, office parties and other events can be held. Special areas can also be fitted out for children's parties and other special groups.

In the first place, we have aimed to the business: meetings, team building, special programmes. Although this segment of our target group still encloses about 35% of our sales, nowadays these special arrangements, programmes and combinations, especially with the catering industry in our centres, are also loved by children's parties, school excursions and bachelor parties. (Interview with owner of Snow Centre, June 2008)

There are two aspects to the meanings that these indoor centres can convey in this regard. First, visits to these centres have a social character: they not only acquire meaning through being an exciting experience of sport, but also because they take place together with other people. As the introduction to this article suggests, in practice, fleeting single visits by individual consumers to these centres do not or seldom happen. Nearly all visitors are part of a group. Realising that the experience only

acquires a meaning within a social context, Dutch Water Dreams gives every consumer a chip so that a personal film can be downloaded onto one's cell phone. 'It's fun to show your friends', declares one of the advertisements. Even the homemade videos, which are uploaded to YouTube, have precisely the same effect: the consumption of a product or service acquires meaning through the interaction with others, whether it is through experiencing it together, broadcasting it on Internet or talking about it at birthday parties or other social gatherings.

Secondly, the sport is not presented as the primary goal. 'At SnowWorld you can find all the facilities to combine your business meetings with relaxation' claims the website of this indoor ski centre.

Along with the pistes, cozy restaurants, 'Tirol room' and an original Austrian Almhut, SnowWorld also offers several attractive large rooms. These rooms are extremely suitable for business and festive, as well as culinary gatherings. *It goes without saying that the meeting rooms can also be booked without making use of the ski pistes* (our italics).

Naturally all lunch and dining arrangements can be combined with an active snow programme. Enjoying a delicious buffet, followed by a descent of more than 500 metres (1640 feet) makes every occasion special. *If you are not interested in skiing or snowboarding, we have an extensive selection of other activities on offer on our pistes.*

This image is further reinforced by product differentiation. The Skidôme, for example, organises special afternoons where everything in and around the complex is set up for the benefit of children. The centre then does not focus so much on skiing, but on a variety of other activities, like tobogganing and trampolining. In the same way, SnowWorld offers 'playful activities' for adults, such as tug-of-war on skis, tandem skiing and herringbone runs.

SnowWorld offers you many options, even when you don't really like the cold. You can, for instance, make use of the most modern sport and health centre of the region. Here relaxation and exertion go hand in hand. After partaking in sport, you can relax wonderfully in the sauna complex, do weight-training or take an aerobics class.

Some companies visit our centre with a group of 1500 people. Some of them are really snow sport minded, some are not. So we also arrange other activities at other locations, so that everyone can enjoy the day out. (Interview with manager and ski instructors, Indoor Snow Centre, March 2009)

In the same vein, Dutch Water Dreams also reminds potential customers of the fact that 'they don't have to get wet for a successful meeting. A so-called "behind the scenes" programme or attending a sporting event are also among the possibilities'. All of these alternative activities serve to reinforce the notion that these are leisure centres. In this sense, in their competition with the other providers in the leisure market, the producers have created functions and meanings that transcend the sport itself.

Conclusion

The market for indoor lifestyle sports was developed under the influence of technological innovations and internationally operating entrepreneurs who have kept a careful eye on their competitors' activities. In so doing, these entrepreneurs have joined the trend of commodification of sport facilities, which has predominantly

taken place outside the system of national sports associations and international sports federations.

During the development of this market, the producers have attempted to ascribe a variety of meanings to the new products and services. Yet, these meanings do not stem from the intrinsic values of the products and services themselves. They may be better understood as social constructions, which have emerged not only through the interaction between producers and consumers, in which the initiative was from the producers' side, but also in relation to the structure of the sports and leisure fields and the cultural meanings, which are ascribed to a diverse number of existing activities that take place in these fields.

In the light of this structure, when launching and marketing their indoor centres, the entrepreneurs must particularly pay heed to the shared meanings around the subfields: the lifestyle sports, organised competitive sports and elite sport, and the experience market of the leisure sector. They define their indoor centres and supply of activities in these centres in competition with, or with reference to the dominant meanings of these subfields. In so doing, they must also determine their position in the field of tension, which emerges between the various layers of meaning, because placing an emphasis on one layer of meaning can have unintended and undesirable consequences for the meanings that, from another perspective, can be viewed as just as desirable.

The analysis of the construction of the indoorisation of outdoor lifestyle sports and its meanings demonstrates that, as Eichberg (1998) argued, there are more than just natural, health or medical and technological reasons for this development. We have shown that the rise of this economic market is embedded in and influenced by shared understandings and producer and consumer representations in structured fields of outdoor sports, mainstream sports and leisure experience activities.

Because of these representations and meanings, questions arise about topics such as the motives and experiences of consumers, the relationships between indoor and outdoor participants in lifestyle sports, interaction between consumers and producers and producer's goals. A better understanding of the indoorisation of outdoor lifestyle sports can thus be achieved by recognising how these structures and cultures, along with broader social processes, pervaded the production of indoor sports centres for outdoor lifestyle sports. A four-year PhD project, which highlights consumer demand as well as producer's supply, will focus on these issues. In this way, the sociological conditions under which the indoorisation of outdoor lifestyle sports has taken place, and how the producers create a new market and give meaning to it, become visible. How this packaging and marketing relates to the way in which consumers interpret and possibly reinterpret this indoorisation of outdoor sports is a topic for further research. Many research studies have already shown that the ascription of meaning by consumers can significantly differ from the meanings that have been promoted by the producers. It is also plausible that the interaction between producers and consumers in relation to these meanings can lead to modifications, so that, after a course of time, the service on offer (at least partially) acquires a form, meaning and function, which the producer had neither intended nor anticipated in advance.

Notes

1. Terms like 'alternative', 'extreme', 'lifestyle', 'action' and 'whiz' sports refer to different, but partly overlapping groups of sports that show 'family resemblances' in the Wittgensteinian sense of the term (Tomlinson, Ravenscroft, Wheaton, & Gilchrist, 2005).

2. Retrieved January 24, 2008, from <http://www.indoorsnow.com/english/worldindoor-new-e.htm> and <http://www.skiresort.de/allgemein/skihallen.htm>.
3. *FEM Business*, 28 June 2007.
4. Retrieved January 24, 2008, from <http://www.dakweb.nl/RH/96-8/96-8-32.htm>.
5. *Flowboarding*, flowriding magazine, WaveLoch, first issue, 2007. Retrieved January 24, 2008, from <http://www.flowrider.com/english/installations.html>.
6. See *The New Zealand Herald*, 31 March 2006. Retrieved January 24, 2008, from <http://www.surfparks.com/home.php>.
7. *New York Times*, 15 June 1993.
8. Prospectus of Dutch Water Dreams Bonds, June 2007.
9. See *De Ondernemer. Informatieblad voor ondernemers in Zuid-West Nederland*, February 2006. Retrieved January 24, 2008, from <http://www.zuidwest-nederland.nl/200602/r02.shtml>.
10. Prospectus of Dutch Water Dreams Bonds, June 2007.
11. What is particular to services is that production and consumption go hand in hand, while the consumption of goods takes place separately from the production thereof. This difference has consequences for the way in which processes of framing and reframing take place. The consumer of goods can reinterpret meanings by using them in a way that was not intended by the producer. The consumer can also show his or her own interpretation of a good to others in another context. As far as services are concerned, interpretations are made by both producers and consumers through their interaction with each other. Moreover, the acquisition of a service takes place at a location and cannot as easily be taken with and shown to others. The films on YouTube provide a surprising solution to this, which the indoor centres can usefully exploit (as will be discussed later in this article). Strikingly, the acquisition of services has received far less attention than the consumption of products (Korzynski, 2005). Lury thus describes the consumer culture as 'The culture of things-in-use' (1996). McCracken defines consumption more broadly, namely as 'the processes by which consumer goods *and services* are created, bought, and used' (our italics); nonetheless, this study also deals almost exclusively with consumer goods (1988). The same applies to the overwhelming majority of publications on the topic of consumer culture. For an exception, see, for example, Shove and Pantzar's (2005) study of Nordic walking.
12. The structure of a field can be understood as 'a state of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle, or, to put it another way, a state of the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies' (Bourdieu, 1980).
13. The complex relationship to the natural environment is an issue that we do not address in this article. It is clear that the indoor centres are major energy guzzlers. On the other hand, the use of such a centre can be viewed as a replacement of a comparable activity in the natural environment. The ambivalence behind this is possibly best expressed in a quote from a promotional film for the indoor ski jumping centre that is planned in Finland: 'We are completely independent of global warming.'
14. Prospectus of Dutch Water Dreams Bonds, June 2007.
15. Proximity is, however, not a sufficient explanation for the success of these indoor centres in itself. In Japan, there are various water parks with indoor surfing facilities situated at a stone's throw from the beach and ocean; also in thinly populated areas.
16. A case study of indoor snowboarders conducted in 2007 by two students of the Masters Program for Sport Policy and Sport Management at Utrecht University revealed that a majority of the selection team of freestyle snowboarders between the age of 8 and 18 years had not been introduced to skiing or snowboarding in winter sport resorts, but in the indoor ski centre itself.

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