

## **The Hotelier, the Politician and the Skier**

### **On the Founding Moment of Alpine Skiing in St. Moritz**

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#### **Abstract**

Beyond the competition between several alpine states (Austria, Switzerland, France, etc.), the emergence of the alpine version of skiing is a complex process that combines the rise of winter tourism, technical developments enabling access to the mountain regions and the increasing sportification of leisure practices. Thus, it focuses on a period of time from the end of the nineteenth century up to the interwar, with specific attention to the late 1920s. Straddling tourism study, sport history and elite sociability, it is a process that has not been studied that much in the historiography. Through this contribution, our aim is to analyse the local conditions presiding over the emergence of “alpine skiing”, considering an episode played out in St. Moritz at a particular moment – the years leading up to and after the organisation of the 1928 Olympic Games – as indicators of more global processes. We based our analysis on the rich archives of the city of St. Moritz (political authorities, tourist office, hotel infrastructures, ski club), never really used in historical work on the birth of alpine skiing, and several other institutions such as international sports federations and national organisations.

Keywords: Switzerland, Ski, Sport, St. Moritz, Elite

## Introduction

St. Moritz is one of the oldest and most famous winter sports centers in the Alps. There is no better place to observe the performance of the experts, no better place to enjoy the spectacularization of winter sports. (...) Winter sports enthusiasts are better served here than anywhere else.<sup>1</sup>

Who better than Arnold Lunn, British citizen and pioneer of alpine skiing, to tell us about the significance of St. Moritz in the history of winter sports. Although Lunn spent more time in another Swiss region, the Bernese Oberland, he is almost alone in embodying the international dynamics of the creation of modern skiing in the early decades of the 20th century and the advent of ‘alpine skiing’ in the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

In a special issue published in 1998, the journal *Traverse* examines the sociability of sport, offering various analyses of different sports, such as soccer, gymnastics and tennis, highlighting in particular how the unique context of Switzerland, a country with a high density of sports associations, influenced the development of modern sports.<sup>3</sup> The presence in this issue of a small booklet of illustrations from the collections of the Swiss Sports Museum – now defunct – on the advent of winter sports in St. Moritz around 1910 underlines the rarity of work on the history of winter sports and is also a call for further work.<sup>4</sup> In fact, certain aspects of the illustrations are immediately obvious to the reader, both the wide range of practices and the attitudes to social differences that are almost visible in the images, with the hotel infrastructure in the background, which reminds us of the inclusion of these dynamics in a history of tourism and the economic and technical development of the Alpine regions in the first decades of the 20th century.<sup>5</sup> In fact, in this dynamic, the history of winter sports in Switzerland has since produced some interesting analyses, notably in the writings of Thomas

Busset, one of the coordinators of the 1998 issue of *Traverse*, whose work focuses as much on downhill skiing as on other winter sports.<sup>6</sup> Other studies have been conducted by Peter Engel, Susan Barton or more recently by Quentin Tonnerre, Grégory Quin or Sébastien Cala,<sup>7</sup> and all of them point to the unique position of Switzerland in understanding the growth of alpine skiing, and yet the rich archives of the different winter sports resorts are rarely included in these studies, preventing the idea of understanding the local dynamics of the structuring of sports practices. In this sense, the pioneering work of Delphine Guex on the examples of Montreux, Finhaut and Zermatt is a real source of inspiration.<sup>8</sup> Works also exist on other countries of the Alpine region, notably by Andrew Denning and Rudolf Muellener in the case of Austria, but also by Pierre-Olaf Schut and Pierre Arnaud on the 1924 Olympic Games in Chamonix,<sup>9</sup> but also by Olivier Hoibian on a socio-history of mountaineering or by Jon Matthieu on the history of the mountains themselves as representations and concrete landscapes. As highlighted by several authors of a recent collective book about alpinism,<sup>10</sup> mountains are fantastic laboratories to understand the continuous rise of modernity. Mountains (and especially the Alps around 1900) are consequences of the commitment of several actors (guides, tourists, hoteliers, geologists, etc.); mountains also exist as representations (from paintings to shared memories from tourists on their way back home); and finally they often imply an intense work of innovation to adapt technologies to the severe conditions of the altitude or to invent new technologies at all.<sup>11</sup>

These works, beyond their conclusions, provide only a mere sketch of the importance of the local networks presiding over the growth of winter sports. Inspiration can still come from the historiography of tourism, which has undergone significant growth for at least two decades, notably at the initiative of Laurent Tissot and Cédric Humair for Switzerland.<sup>12</sup> However, these works, although they regularly mention the intricacies of the developments of tourism and sport during the winter season, also through the involvement of British tourists in

particular,<sup>13</sup> do not specifically mention the ‘sporting’ ins and outs of the tourist boom, leaving open a vast field of study. Nevertheless, their focus on technological innovations in the first half of the twentieth century is also inspirational for our analysis, especially as perspectives for the democratisation of alpine skiing after the Second World War with the huge growth in ski-lifts and other kind of cable cars.

With this contribution, our aim is to analyse the local conditions presiding over the emergence of alpine skiing, as an example of the sportivisation processes often described through the lens of continental-wide analysis, since the seminal book from Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning.<sup>14</sup> Thus our aim is also to focus on a particular moment – the years leading up to and after the organisation of the 1928 Olympic Games – and a precise place, the St. Moritz area – not to say the whole Upper Engadine, which would call for a much more detailed study at a later date – as revealing the consolidation of a singular elite-network in the sports domain, taking into account the multiple factors (political, economic, cultural, etc.) which influence those processes.<sup>15</sup> In the case of St. Moritz in particular, the 1920s were a very clear turning point for the positioning of the resort between the continuation of spa tourism, the affirmation of winter sports tourism since the 1900s and the advent of a new sporting logic which allows the consolidation of the new “alpine skiing modality”. Thus, our broad aim is to highlight local determinants and consequences of the “invention of alpine skiing”, from the development of funiculars and lifts, the creation of a ski school, the organisation of first competitions, the economic interest from hoteliers trying to fill their rooms, all those initiatives understood in a context of intense innovations, where the ice-stadium got its first lighting infrastructure for ice-hockey night sessions<sup>16</sup> and when car started to be increasingly the privileged way or travelling.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, our argument is also based on two empirical observations: the 1928–1929 financial year was a high point in the entire first half of the century – as the St. Moritz

municipal accounts balance reached one million francs<sup>18</sup> – and the winter seasons of 1927/1928 and 1928/1929 saw record attendance, with more than 350,000 overnight stays in the hotels of the commune, a figure that was not surpassed until 1960/1961.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, we can state that the 1928 Olympic Games were probably more important locally than the 1948 edition, also from the point of view of the affirmation of alpine skiing, creating a unique window to understand the local roots of the development of alpine skiing in the late 1920s.<sup>20</sup>

To conduct our analyses, we relied in particular on an extensive cross-reading of archives at different levels (local, national and international). We explored the archives of the municipality of St. Moritz (political authorities, tourist office, hotel infrastructures, ski club), the archives of the various institutions involved at that time in the development of skiing (International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Ski Federation (FIS), Association Suisse des Clubs de Ski (ASCS), Interassociation Suisse pour le Ski (IASS), Association des Ecoles Suisses de Ski (AESS), Société Suisse des Hôteliers (SSH), Swiss Olympic-National Olympic Committee (NOC)), and archives of the local and national press.

Thus, our aim was to successively observe the changes in the forms of sociability in St. Moritz in the decades preceding the organisation of the Olympic Games, then to analyse the networks at work around the organisation of the 1928 Olympic Games and finally to understand the impact of the event on the development of alpine skiing in the early 1930s.

### **From the Grand Tour to Palaces, beyond the First World War**

The history of the advent of winter sports is obviously connected with the history of tourism and seems to merge with the history of St. Moritz, insofar as legend has it, since affirmed by official documents, that winter tourism began with Johannes Badrutt, director of the Hotel Engadiner Kulm in the mid-1850s, who invited his summer visitors to return in winter to

enjoy the Engadine climate and the pleasures of 'snow in the sun'.<sup>21</sup> At the time, these were mainly British tourists and their influence would persist through the first half of the 20th century, with their ethos influencing physical activities towards an increasing sportivisation of those activities.

The British visitors symbolised a form of modernity<sup>22</sup> and pushed the hotel owners and the municipality of St. Moritz to innovate. In 1879, for example, Hotel Kulm was the first hotel in Switzerland to offer its guests electric lighting, thanks to the initiative of Johannes Badrutt,<sup>23</sup> after the commissioning of the first hydroelectric power plant in Switzerland and after discovering its benefits during a visit to the 1878 World Exhibition in Paris. However, it was still only a matter of a few light bulbs in the dining room, it was not about heating or too 'modern' conveniences. Winter tourism at the end of the 19th century still had an element of adventure, even in the Engadine hotels, where central heating facilities would allow the rise of winter tourism in the years preceding the First World War.<sup>24</sup>

After the first few years of winter tourism and initial attempts to develop the local tourist offering, notably through a first 'office for the beautification of St. Moritz', whose statutes were registered in March 1874,<sup>25</sup> on 24 June 1882, the general assembly for the establishment of a tourist office for the entire municipality of St. Moritz (Dorf and Bad) took place under the aegis of Florian Gengel, then director of the hotel 'Hof Sankt Moritz'.<sup>26</sup> As a member of the Graubünden Grand Council, the hotel owner and printer belonged to the active circles of Graubünden's radicalism, which was also very much involved in the beginnings of the canton's tourism boom.<sup>27</sup> A few years later, the presidency of the tourist office passed to Pastor Camill Hoffmann, who became involved without having a direct interest in any hotel establishment, even though his involvement in the early years of the Bernina section of the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) highlighted his eclectic interest in the development of the Upper Engadine.<sup>28</sup>

The new ‘tourist office’ still had a dual structure, with separate summer and winter management. Summer was still clearly the season that attracted the most visitors – in absolute terms – but in the early 1910s, winter became the most profitable season for the tourist office with longer stays on average than in the summer. The transition was easier in the case of St. Moritz because its mountaineering tourism was not as highly developed as in Zermatt or Chamonix.<sup>29</sup> Based on the proximity of the valley leading to Mount Bernina, it was Pontresina – and not St. Moritz – which hosted the alpine centre for the region, leaving the floor for other activities around the San Murezzan Lake.

**Table 1. Seasonal development of tourism in St. Moritz between 1910 and 1914<sup>30</sup>**

In fact, the increase in visitor number correlated with the increase in tax revenue directly related to tourism, which grew in parallel with the number of visitors and the duration of the stays, also driven by the increase in the number of beds of a very high standard: in 1896, Badrutt’s Palace Hotel was established by Caspar Badrutt – son of Johannes; and in 1912, Suvretta House was built by the Bon family. As models of the luxury hotel business, these establishments would make the reputation of the city and its founders, but they would also serve the networks of their managers.

Interestingly, it was for the winter season 1908–1909 that the tourist office published its first winter ‘sports programme’.<sup>31</sup> A couple of years later, when tourist numbers were at their peak in the Upper Engadine,<sup>32</sup> the opening of the Chantarella funicular in 1913 ushered in a new period in the history of tourism, a few years after the opening of the Albula railway line, which drastically reduced travel times between the Chur valley and the Engadine.<sup>33</sup> While the Chantarella funicular section did not open up a very large ski area, it did allow visitors to gain height above the village of St. Moritz and was a tourist attraction in itself. This



railway line allowed the Badrutt family to build a hotel – the Chantarella Hotel – at high altitude and it gave access to snowfields where one could practise Nordic skiing in winter, and to mountain pastures where one could go for walks in summer.

The funicular also gives us a better understanding of the networks involved in the organisation of British tourist stays in Switzerland.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, since 1912, Alfred Galland had been a member of the board of directors of the limited company Chantarella SA,<sup>35</sup> as Vice President first, with Rudolf Nater as President – who entered the central scene as director of the St. Moritzer Bank<sup>36</sup> – and Emil Thoma as an additional member, who was also the manager of the new Chantarella Hotel. Alfred Galland was the founder of a bank that also bears his name, and became Chairman of the Chantarella AG between the two world wars.<sup>37</sup> Galland was presented as a manager of British wealth but he was also the British consul in Lausanne and was opening branches of his bank in Grindelwald and Zermatt to better meet the expectations of his clients.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Alfred Galland's early participation on the board of directors of the Martigny-Orsières railway line – inaugurated in the summer of 1910 – shows his interest in the development of tourism and the involvement of the same networks in the promotion of tourism in various Swiss regions.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to hoteliers, other players were emerging in the Engadine landscape, especially the ski clubs, regarded as new venues for social interaction so valued by the local elite. Founded in December 1903, the ‘Alpina St. Moritz’ ski club immediately established itself as an important meeting point, with Emil Thoma as president and Philipp Mark as technical manager in its first committee.<sup>40</sup> Thoma, a hotelier and promoter of the Chantarella funicular, also established himself as a figure in St. Moritz by marrying an heiress of the Badrutt family; and Philipp Mark, still aged under thirty, was a skiing pioneer in the adjacent valleys of St. Moritz, reaching the summit of Piz Corvatsch on skis on 2 March 1899.<sup>41</sup> He then became a tennis teacher and police commissioner in St. Moritz in the 1910s, before

becoming president of the tourist office in the 1920s.<sup>42</sup> From that first winter, in January 1904, the ski club organised several kinds of competitions, and it is important to highlight that a downhill skiing race was very quickly introduced. The committee included Caspar Badrutt in this year of its foundation, as secretary, himself being the eponymous son of the director and builder of the Palace. At the beginning, only locals were members of the ‘Alpina’ ski club, but this changed with time and in the aftermath of the First World War, foreigners accounted for more than 30% of the 250 members.<sup>43</sup> In fact, tourists passing through – for a few days or a few weeks – then integrated the local skiing structures. But of course, this was not the only active ski club around St. Moritz at that time; in December 1905, ‘Ski-Club Suvretta’ was founded, in which the Nater brothers (Rudolf and Carl) would be active from 1906.

Rudolf Nater, the director of the St. Moritz Bank in those same years, was also on the board of the tourist office, where Philipp Mark served as secretary. In fact, it is also to the creativity of this network that we owe the inauguration of the first ski slopes<sup>44</sup> for tourists around 1915–1917,<sup>45</sup> but unfortunately, this innovation was not enough to counteract the effects of the war in a resort that had built its success on foreign and celebrity attendance.

In 1919, Ernst Theodor Zutt-Wetter, an internationally renowned publisher of tourist books and former editor-in-chief of the *Schweizerische Illustrierte Zeitung*, took over the management of the resort’s tourist office. Active in St. Moritz for five years, he was also the first person to be formally appointed as director of the Kurverein – the new name for the tourist office. While the change of name was primarily a formalisation of the organisation's aims, it also reflected a form of structuring of tourist promotion activities. Engaged in beautifying activities at the end of the 1890s, the office became the pivotal organisation of the commune, bringing together hoteliers, doctors, lawyers, politicians, and sportsmen and women, around more and more functions.

## **Table 2. Seasonal development of tourism in St. Moritz between 1924 and 1930<sup>46</sup>**

In the 1920s, St. Moritz was facing many uncertainties due to the international economic situation and economic difficulties, but in the prospectus published by the tourist office, St. Moritz was increasingly portrayed as the Mecca of winter sports, and sometimes as the ‘holy city of winter sports’.<sup>47</sup> Above all, against a background of real growth in the number of overnight stays between 1921 and 1928 – from 200,000 to 650,000 overnight stays per year during this period<sup>48</sup> – it is worth noting that it was already apparent just before the First World War that the winter season was now the season that generated the most overnight stays (Table 2). Although there were more visitors in summer, winter stays were longer and they became the primary source of profit for hoteliers and by extension for the commune.

### **Winter Olympic Games to be hosted where winter sports were invented ... but with a programme excluding alpine skiing**

From the first discussions about the project to organise the Olympic Games, in the summer of 1925, concern about the financing of the event arose, particularly in light of the difficulties encountered by Chamonix for the 1924 Games.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the situation seemed to be ‘different because St. Moritz already has a better infrastructure’<sup>50</sup> and it was indeed enthusiasm that seemed to prevail at that very moment, towards a bid for the 1928 Winter Games. In fact, the process for selecting host cities for the Olympic Games in the inter-war period was still relatively informal, and the time frame (two years before the organisation) for the selection process prevented very significant planning on the part of candidate cities. In the case of St. Moritz, the selection took place at the IOC Congress of May 1926 in Lisbon,

where the commune of Upper Engadin won the bid, notably against Davos and Engelberg, after the National Olympic Committee (NOC) did not wish to organise a pre-selection in Switzerland.

Locally, however, the process was launched in the winter of 1925–1926, even before the IOC's choice. Thus, in a meeting on 10 November 1925, within the municipal executive – and on the initiative of the Kurverein – there was talk of transforming St. Moritz railway station, whose inauguration dates more or less from the opening of the Albula line at the very beginning of the 20th century.<sup>51</sup> This included adding a post office and allowing more trains and passengers to arrive. On 22 December 1925, a meeting of the Council of the commune dealt in parallel with the expansion of the station and the organisation of the Olympic Games, with in particular the emergence of more specific discussions on the necessary availability of the infrastructures for hosting the Games.

While the expansion of the train station was a necessity, this issue was coupled with more directly sporting problems, in particular around the ski jumping hill. Indeed, the Julierschanze had existed since 1905, but it did not meet the requirements of Olympic competitions and a new ski jumping venue would have to be built. At that time, the estimated cost of such infrastructure was around CHF 400,000, and the risk was too great for the commune alone, with that sum representing almost a whole year of its operating budget.<sup>52</sup>

Negotiations between the local actors took place and, in June 1926, a guarantee fund was set up for the amount of CHF 200,000 (in particular from the Rhaetian Railway), with additional funds provided by the hoteliers. In fact, it seems that the Alpina Ski Club also played a key role in the discussions, notably through the discussions on the renovation of the Julierschanze. Indeed, during the winter of 1925–1926, significant sums were allocated by the club to renovate its ski jump, but the NOC made new infrastructure a necessity.<sup>53</sup> In its general assembly of June 1926, the club accepted a project that would see it cover up to CHF

40,000 for the construction costs of a new 'Olympia-Schanze',<sup>54</sup> before agreeing to cover costs up to CHF 60,000 in the autumn of 1927. Although the annual budget of the club was only a few thousand francs in the mid-1920s,<sup>55</sup> there was here a kind of cross-redistribution of the finances of the commune, which sponsored the club in exceptional proportions in these years. Moreover, the presence of the president of the commune – Carl Nater – in the ski club committee facilitated discussions, while the increase in the commune's resources made it possible to envisage significant involvement. As described in the columns of the *Gazette de Lausanne*, in September 1927, 'around fifty workers have participated in the building of the Olympic jump (...) [in the meantime] the construction of a huge pavilion is almost finished. From this platform, the president of the Confederation will open the Second Winter Olympic Games'.<sup>56</sup>

However, the organisation of the Games did not seem to have unanimous support in the hotel industry, as shown in a letter addressed by William Hirschy – then president of the NOC – to Rudolf Jilli, the president of the Ski-Club Alpina. Although the ski club had taken the initiative to create a sub-commission of the ASCS to plan the skiing events of the next Games, the exchange shows that some hotel owners were not enthusiastic about the idea of hosting the Games and the IOC managers in conditions that were too expensive for them. In fact, it seems that the boom in tourist traffic in the mid-1920s led some hotel managers to raise prices, a practice not appreciated by the organisers and the IOC. In fact, Hirschy underlines his displeasure by indicating that:

It is not the perfection of the facilities that will make St. Moritz the reputation that you hold dear, it is the perfection of the welcome, and the IOC, which is received with respect in all the capitals of the world, informed of the dissatisfaction that its presence could cause in you, will not fail to compare and will not hold back its comparison.<sup>57</sup>

In this context, the factors involved in organising the Olympic Games came up against those affecting the development of the resort, which would see a real recovery in tourist traffic in the 1920s, which benefitted some hoteliers – such as the Bon family, owners of Suvretta – to adapt their rates and increase their profits.<sup>58</sup> Thus, according to the tourist leaflets of the 1920s, prices increased especially during the years 1920 to 1925 at a rate of almost one franc more per night and per year during those five years (Table 3). However, a certain stability was established after 1925, although this stability must also be read, on the one hand, in the light of the diversification of the hotel facilities within each establishment, which were now able to offer heating, bathing and electricity with payment of a supplement, and on the other hand, in the light of the stability of the Swiss Franc at that period.

**Table 3. Hotel prices for two hotels in St. Moritz (1920-1930)**

However, from the previous exchanges between Hirschy and Jilli, it should be noted that the Ski-Club Alpina was considered a major interlocutor for the Swiss sports authorities. It was already an essential cog in an organisation that was in the process of deploying its project during the winter of 1927–1928. From this point of view, the question of the construction of the ski jump was decisive and here also it was the ski club which would pilot this project on a significant scale within the framework of an event where ski jumping occupied an important place, also given that there were still no downhill skiing competitions in the Olympic programme.

Locally, however, downhill and slalom competitions had been included in the winter programmes alongside ski jumping competitions for many years. Thus, as early as the winter of 1922–1923, a slalom appeared in the Ski-Club Alpina records, and in the winter of 1925–1926, there was a downhill competition.<sup>59</sup> Far from being an isolated case, St. Moritz was

then the scene of the emergence of a new form of skiing,<sup>60</sup> but which was still far from being much fun in the absence of a suitable system for climbing back up the slopes. Moreover, it was on the occasion of the congress of the International Ski Federation in St. Moritz during the Olympic Games that the formal recognition of 'alpine' forms of skiing would take shape. Indeed, the hosting of the Olympic Games in St. Moritz was also an opportunity for many international federations to hold their congresses on site, as many members travelled with their delegations. Thus, the IOC Executive Board met on 10 February 1928, the NOC organised a session on the same day, and the FIS held its congress from 14 to 17 February 1928, in parallel with the meetings of other organisations such as the sports press associations (both Swiss and international).<sup>61</sup> This convergence of events can obviously be explained by the presence on site of the delegates of each discipline, but also by a form of multi-positioning of the leading figures.

In the case of the FIS, the congress was opened with a speech by Dr Danneger, president of the ASCS that year, who invited the delegates to 'take Switzerland as an example and to work, in the same spirit of cooperation, for the good of skiing'.<sup>62</sup> In fact, this wish was significant at a time when the introduction of downhill and slalom races in the international racing regulations was to be discussed. The proposal – for the recognition of slalom and downhill races – was formally rejected by Arnold Lunn on the grounds that there was still a lack of experience in these competitions. They were still to be tested in the winter of 1928-1929,<sup>63</sup> including in Scandinavian countries where there was a certain mistrust of alpine skiing. Nevertheless, the organisation in St. Moritz seemed to have moved the lines, as the Swedish president of the FIS emphasised in his address at the end of the congress his recognition of the St. Moritz municipality. The latter 'has done a superhuman job. One of my best memories will be the collaboration I had (...) with Mr. Nater'.<sup>64</sup>

While it is impossible to stress how much the actions of the members of the local organising committee will have weighed in the balance of the FIS recognition of alpine skiing, it is clear that the local ski club contributed more to the 1928 Games budget than the federal government. While this should not be surprising at a time when the political authorities – especially the federal authorities – did not yet have a legal basis for supporting such sporting events, it nevertheless highlights the unique character of this key moment in the history of skiing. In fact, of the total budget of CHF 700,000, it turns out that the sum of CHF 60,000 was paid by the Alpina Ski Club,<sup>65</sup> thus marking its involvement in the organisation of a city that was in the process of successfully transforming into a winter sports centre, particularly for downhill skiing. In the winter of 1928–1929, the Alpina reported that it had 571 members, making it the second largest ski club in Switzerland, just behind the Neuer Skiklub Zurich, which had 648 members albeit from a much larger population base.<sup>66</sup> In addition, we should point out that it was also the composition of the ski club of St. Moritz that was interesting inasmuch as there were many big names, both local and from further afield, who attest to the international prestige that the commune seems to have regained, in proportions similar to the period before the First World War.

Above all, the structure of the final budget for the second Winter Games reveals that the involvement of the tourist sectors was important, inasmuch as half of the income came from the proceeds from the sale of tickets for events, which then implied at least one night's accommodation on site, given the transport options. Although 40% of this revenue had to be paid to NOC, according to the agreement between the institution and the local organising committee, the profits were nevertheless significant for the hotels in the region, and the deficit of CHF 45,000 was ultimately not too great a problem.

### **From chic society to the promotion of alpine skiing**



In the wake of the Olympic Games, St. Moritz entered a new phase and the resort of Engadine sought to develop its internal organisation by recruiting a new director for its tourist office. While this was obviously a key position,<sup>67</sup> it was also the personality chosen for the position that determined the development of the resort at the end of the 1920s. Indeed, this person – Walter Amstutz – was to succeed very early on in establishing the Graubünden commune in the alpine skiing landscape, using at the same time its heritage as a ‘place of invention of winter sports’, its new status as an Olympic city and the power of its socio-economic and political network.

Born in 1902, Walter Amstutz was ‘very much appreciated by the American tourists and businessmen with whom he was in constant contact at the Consulate. He had a perfect command of the English language, which he spoke without accent after studying in London’,<sup>68</sup> but above all he already had quite a long experience, for his young age, in tourist circles in the Bernese Oberland, where he was able to support his brother, ‘owner of a travel agency and director of the tourist office in Mürren’.<sup>69</sup> As such, the list of references given by Amstutz in his letter of 17 June 1929 constitutes a dive into the European and Swiss elite, from the King of Belgium to the editor of the newspaper *Sport*,<sup>70</sup> at a time when the continuing economic crisis would result in a change in tourist traffic at least as profound as that caused by the First World War. Walter Amstutz was also the former secretary (and founder) of the Swiss Academic Ski Club (SAS) between 1924 and 1927, which aimed to bring together students and academics through the practice of skiing and its technical improvement.<sup>71</sup> It was also through this institution that he helped organise the first international university ski competition in St. Moritz in January 1926, including a downhill race from Corviglia, which he won without contest,<sup>72</sup> as he did the slalom competition on hard snow. We can nevertheless point out that this organisation would cause some tension, for

lack of sufficient collaboration with local actors, as testified by a critical letter from the then director of the tourist office.<sup>73</sup>

Since the summer of 1928, with the extension of the Chantarella funicular to Corviglia, St. Moritz had benefited from an infrastructure that had opened up new snowfields for snow sports enthusiasts and especially for downhill skiing, making access to the snowfields easier. Thus, at the end of November 1928, the newspapers reports around Switzerland were numerous, highlighting the fact that ‘Engadine is under 40 centimetres of snow and that the slopes are excellent’,<sup>74</sup> and in the same winter, the network of Amstutz also allowed St. Moritz to host the Oxford-Cambridge ski championship for the first time.<sup>75</sup> In the same year, the Gornergrat funicular in Zermatt started to operate twice a week in winter,<sup>76</sup> as the late 1920s were clearly seeing a major expansion in this new practice of alpine skiing, where the pleasure of the descent could begin to free itself from the constraints of the ascent.<sup>77</sup> This new infrastructure towards Corviglia was also part of a deeper process of professionalisation of political work within the municipality. Indeed, from 1926, the minutes of the various political bodies were typed and the tourist office was strongly structured under the impetus of a new committee in March 1927, with in particular the hoteliers Hans Badrutt and Hans Bon – directors of the Palace and the Suvretta respectively – or the president Carl Nater. At the end of the decade, the commitment of Walter Amstutz led to some changes in the governance, with here also from 1929, minutes of the Office’s meetings more structured and typed.

In the spring of 1928, the tourist office approached Giovanni Testa, one of the most active ski instructors, and the Alpina Ski-Club, to open a ski school, whose lessons would begin in the winter of 1928/1929.<sup>78</sup> Although more than fifty of the instructors already had a ski instructor licence in St. Moritz and had been teaching since the beginning of the 1920s, the

existence of a school centralising activities highlighted the transition from only-adventure skiing to a practice of skiing that would appeal to a much broader population:

St. Moritz has, in its immediate neighbourhood and at a little distance, one of the finest ski districts for long and short excursions of every degree of difficulty for beginners and for expert ski runners.<sup>79</sup>

This was not yet a true democratisation of skiing as, on the one hand, it was still largely before the existence of ski-lifts – St. Moritz only having then the Chantarella-Corviglia funicular – and on the other hand skiers were still part of an elite, with St. Moritz attracting political leaders like the first minister of Yugoslavia, M. Stoyadinovitch,<sup>80</sup> or the foreign minister of Romania, M. Titulescu,<sup>81</sup> or even cultural figures such as the French author Colette. Thus, they often posed while skiing in front of famous landscapes. Colette even mentioned in a letter, written in 1924, to Marguerite Moreno:

As soon as I arrived, I felt that I would never be able to stop myself from living physically with great intensity. On the first day, I took my first ski lesson. Then I skated and then I luge. No chance of falling will escape me!<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, at the beginning of the 1930s, competition with Austria intensified.<sup>83</sup> The new ‘Schneider School’ or ‘Aarlbeg School’ established in Austrian resorts attracted more and more tourists who had previously come to Switzerland.<sup>84</sup> In a letter to President Carl Nater, store manager Maurice Och pointed out that he had ‘the impression that rates are far too high, especially in the midst of such a crisis. [He] fear[s] that these prices will be compared with those in the Tyrol and hurt us.’<sup>85</sup> In fact, these debates spotlight the extension of the networks to players with more directly economic interests linked to the practice of sports, such as the new sports stores that opened in the inter-war period in the resorts. While the threat was felt throughout the Swiss Alps, it was even greater in the Engadine because of its proximity to

Austria. Thus, St. Moritz was also the scene of some rivalries between several promoters and the group of “ski-teachers” did not speak with one voice.<sup>86</sup> Giovanni Testa, the founder of the first ski-school,<sup>87</sup> was in an ambivalent relationship with Walter Amstutz, who initiated a second ski-school under the umbrella of a self-launched St. Moritz International Ski-club (SMISC) in February 1932.<sup>88</sup> Regarding limited democratisation, the prices announced by the two schools offer interesting view of the specificity of skiing in the early 1930s, with the first school announcing a half-day course for CHF 3.-<sup>89</sup> and the one from Walter Amstutz CHF 5.-<sup>90</sup> for one half-day (after payment of a membership fee of CHF 12.- in the SMISC), fees that need to be considered alongside the price of a hotel room (Table 3).

Thus, the St. Moritz network played a key role in the development of more structured organisations for alpine ski instruction, as many of the city's delegates were already involved in the new bodies promoting skiing in Switzerland before the Second World War: the Interassociation Suisse pour le Ski and the Associations des Ecoles Suisses de Ski. Thus, at one of the first meetings of the IASS in January 1933, St. Moritz was represented by Hans Kasper, ski instructor in Pontresina and director of the forthcoming training course in the Engadine region – but also father of Peter Kasper who became director of the tourist office after the Second World War and grandfather of Gian-Franco Kasper, president of the FIS between 1998 and 2021.<sup>91</sup> However, in the months that followed, St. Moritz became no longer directly involved in IASS, mainly because of the structuring of the institution which sought to build a learning method above all. In fact, according to the IASS statutes, it was the cantons or umbrella organisations (such as the Swiss Hotel Association) that were involved in the governance of the organisation.<sup>92</sup> However, the hotel owner Hans Bon was present at the first meetings for the launch of the Associations des Ecoles Suisses de Ski, which opposed the approach of the IASS, which it accused of not understanding the interests of tourist resorts. More oriented towards the economic interests of skiing, the AESS sought to ‘bring together in

one organisation all the institutions interested in ski instruction'.<sup>93</sup> At the founding general meeting on 13 September 1934, Hans Bon was elected president of the AESS in his capacity as representative of the Graubünden region.<sup>94</sup> Here, the individual interests of the hotelier intersected with the interests of the ski instructors in his community, while at the same time he inaugurated one of the first ski lifts in the mountains behind his hotel.<sup>95</sup>

It should also be noted that alpine skiing had been formally recognised by the FIS since 1930. Indeed, after the successful trials since the 1928 Congress, the Scandinavians rallied to the idea that it was now necessary to allow the organisation of downhill competitions. It was then the Swiss member of the FIS Central Committee who defended the idea that in Switzerland:

... long-distance races are organised, but due to the lack of suitable terrain, these events are met with less interest than downhill races. It is therefore necessary to consider the different conditions in different countries and to allow their national associations to organise other races, apart from long-distance and cross-country races. These races will not be obligatory; the national associations should be free to organise them or not.<sup>96</sup>

Dr Walter Amstutz represented Switzerland at this decisive congress in Oslo, while already being the director of the Kurverein of St. Moritz, together with Colonel Luchsinger and Fritz Erb, the latter being editor of the newspaper *Sport* and an ardent promoter of skiing. In fact, the impact of the growth in alpine skiing was significant for many resorts in the Alpine region, and it is clear that the debates that led to the invention of a 'Swiss method' within the framework of the IASS highlights that learning to ski was becoming a major issue,<sup>97</sup> while on the hotel side, the pricing structures were overhauled. Although basic prices did not change significantly, as we have previously indicated, especially when they were charged by the night, different offerings began to emerge, with full board and seven-day packages.

While it was still too early to see the ‘one week on the slopes’ become the norm, the organisation by the ski school of a race every Saturday to award small local prizes indicates that new time frames were taking hold and skiing was a key factor in these.<sup>98</sup>

In 1934, St. Moritz hosted the FIS World Championships from 15 to 19 February, and this organisation seemed to complete a process of recognition for alpine skiing. Describing the resort of Engadine, the advertising brochure for the winter of 1933–1934 stated that:

... all sports are cultivated, practised and taught there. Today, skiing is at the top of the list. St. Moritz has excellent schools where beginners can learn the ‘white art’ in a short time. There are ideal practice areas in the vicinity and the surrounding mountains are an inexhaustible source of ski races of all kinds and difficulties.<sup>99</sup>

For the first time, in the winter of 1934–1935 (Figure 1), the town’s tourist brochure included a map of the ski slopes around the Corviglia funicular through the snow fields above St. Moritz-Dorf.<sup>100</sup>

### **Figure 1. Map of ski slopes (winter 1934-1935)**

This reflected the confirmation of a new way to enjoy the mountains in winter and soon the inauguration of a ski-lift on the slopes behind the Suvretta would crown these developments as a further expression of the commitment of a local network of hoteliers, ski promoters and tourist interests.

## **Conclusion**

Of course, the invention of alpine skiing did not take place in St. Moritz alone and on the exclusive initiative of local actors from the Engadine resort and networks.

Nevertheless, our analyses of local dynamics underline that if there are obviously strong transnational trends in the process of sportivisation – encouraged by a British ethos that tourists from Great Britain circulate – the example of skiing also shows that the affirmation of a new modality of practice is the result of the commitment of many local actors, and our conclusions around the case of St. Moritz would like to open the floor for further research on the same town but also to foster some comparative study with other emblematic winter resorts in Europe. The process goes from “sublime landscapes to ‘White Gold’” to quote Andrew Denning’s title of an inspiring article about the transformation of the Alps after 1930.<sup>101</sup> It is therefore the combined sporting, economic and political interests that allow the consolidation of ‘alpine skiing’, also encouraged by the rise of new competitions, where initially alpine skiing was not included – as for the 1928 Olympic Games – but then soon became part of specific alpine downhill and slalom competitions.

‘St. Moritz is generally regarded as the cradle of winter sports, and with its classic backcountry – Corviglia, Surlej, Bernina – for downhill skiers, it will be destined to provide a worthy milieu for future international competitions.’<sup>102</sup> Through these words, published a couple of days before the 1934 FIS World Championship, the journalist of the *Engadiner Post* offered an overview of several decades of a gradual growth in winter sports that culminated in a two-year process leading to the recognition of the “downhill” version of skiing, paving the way for the next steps towards the creation of a true rush towards snow as a new “white gold era” after the Second World War.

Thus, 1934 is also very important as it is the year that saw the first ski lifts being opened, just a couple of valleys along the Engadine in Davos. In St. Moritz, the owner of the Suvretta hotel, Hans Bon, opened the hotel's own ski-lift, one year later, just behind the Suvretta, creating easy access to the Corviglia area, but also developing new opportunities to access the slopes directly from the hotel lobby. With the development of ski lifts (and all sorts of cable lifts), downhill skiing would become the easiest and the most fun way to slide on snow. Winter tourism then became something that had more to do with skiing than with a broader definition of winter sports, creating a 'St. Moritz – Corviglia, skiers paradise' as stated in the 1937-1938 seasonal prospectus.<sup>103</sup>

The Second World War would then, again, change everything for international tourism, emptying hotels in Switzerland and everywhere in Europe, slowing the development of downhill skiing all across the Alps, cutting the routes for tourists and cancelling international competitions for many years. When St. Moritz hosted the Olympic Games a second time, in 1948, the situation was very different from 1928. Of course, the neutrality of Switzerland played a key role in the IOC's choice,<sup>104</sup> but the fact that the country broadly escaped the ravages of the war gave it a unique position.<sup>105</sup>

Interestingly, the St. Moritz networks didn't fade away after the war. Hans Bon in the twilight of his life – he died in 1950 in St. Moritz – often travelled to London in the aftermath of the war, where he met with Winston Churchill and other British politicians, hosting meetings in hotels, part of his network, in the British capital. As the president of the Tourism office in St. Moritz, he also appointed Peter Kasper as director from 1948, giving the city one of its most influential actors from the 1950s to the 1980s. Peter Kasper, the local architect of the 1948 Games, also became president of the AESS from 1955 and 1962, and contributed to structuring the tourist landscape of Switzerland, where of course St. Moritz remains a significant centre.



## List of tables

<b>Season</b>	<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Taxes collected (in CHF)</b>	<b>Nights</b>
Summer 1910	23,065	60,415.25	Ø
<i>Winter 1910/1911</i>	<i>10,531</i>	<i>61,158.90</i>	<i>Ø</i>
Summer 1911	25,042	78,253.95	239,664
<i>Winter 1911/12</i>	<i>1,1331</i>	<i>62,780.00</i>	<i>191,103</i>
Summer 1912	21,447	69,372.95	211,042
<i>Winter 1912/13</i>	<i>13,915</i>	<i>73,912.85</i>	<i>224,358</i>
Summer 1913	22,458	63,672.85	200,824
<i>Winter 1913/14</i>	<i>14,710</i>	<i>78,138.30</i>	<i>237,399</i>

**Table 1. Seasonal development of tourism in St. Moritz between 1910 and 1914**

<b>Season</b>	<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Nights</b>
Summer 1924	20,437	Ø
<i>Winter 1924/1925</i>	<i>17,237</i>	<i>Ø</i>
Summer 1925	19,656	Ø
<i>Winter 1925/1926</i>	<i>14,653</i>	<i>Ø</i>
Summer 1926	18,806	Ø
<i>Winter 1926/27</i>	<i>17,993</i>	<i>318,723</i>
Summer 1927	22,875	232,686
<i>Winter 1927/28</i>	<i>19,806</i>	<i>362,661</i>

Summer 1928	27,044	284,501
<i>Winter 1928/1929</i>	<i>19,825</i>	<i>384,278</i>
Summer 1929	30,588	307,141
<i>Winter 1929/1930</i>	<i>19,830</i>	<i>342,018</i>

**Table 2. Seasonal development of tourism in St. Moritz between 1924 and 1930**

1920	Suvretta	CHF 25
	Schweizerhof	CHF 18
1925	Suvretta	CHF 28
	Schweizerhof	CHF 20
1928	Suvretta	CHF 30
	Schweizerhof	CHF 21
1930	Suvretta	CHF 30 (75 with a bathroom)
	Schweizerhof	CHF 21 (48 with a bathroom)

**Table 3. Hotel prices for two hotels in St. Moritz (1920-1930)**

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Holt, 'An Englishman in the Alps: Arnold Lunn, amateurism and the invention of Alpine Ski Racing', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 9, no. 3 (1992): 421-432.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Busset, Sébastien Guex and Markus Lamprecht, 'La sociabilité sportive', *Traverse* 3 (1998).

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<sup>5</sup> Cédric Humair, Marc Gigase, Julie Lapointe Guigoz and Stefano Sulmoni, *Système touristique et culture technique dans l'arc lémanique: analyse d'une success story et de ses effets sur l'économie régionale (1852-1914)* (Neuchâtel: Alphil, 2014); Marc Gigase, Cédric Humair and Laurent Tissot, *Le tourisme comme facteur de transformations économiques, techniques et sociales (19<sup>e</sup>-20<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Neuchâtel: Editions Alphil, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Busset, 'Les balbutiements des sports d'hiver dans les Préalpes vaudoises', *Revue Historique Vaudoise* 116, (2008): 41-55; Thomas Busset, 'La diffusion du ski en Suisse jusqu'à l'entre-deux-guerres', *Traverse* 1 (2016): 25-35.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Engel, 'The Discursive Construction of National Identity through the Swiss Magazine SKI Before World War I', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 6 (2013): 598-616; Susan Barton, *Healthy Living in the Alps: The Origins of Winter Tourism in Switzerland, 1860-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Quentin Tonnerre, 'The 1928 Olympic Winter

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<sup>8</sup> Delphine Guex, *Tourisme, mobilités et développement régional dans les Alpes suisses. Montreux, Finhaut et Zermatt du XIXe siècle à nos jours* (Neuchâtel: Éditions Alphil, 2016).

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick Clastres, Delphine Debons, Jean-François Pitteloud and Grégory Quin, *Gravir les Alpes du XIXe siècle à nos jours. Pratiques, émotions, imaginaires* (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> Olivier Hoibian, ‘Sociogenesis of a Social Field: The Cultural World of Mountaineering in France from 1870 to 1930’, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 41, no. 3-4 (2006): 339-355; Jon Matthieu, ‘Alpendiskurs und Historische Forschungspraxis in der Schweiz’, *Histoire des Alpes* 1 (1996): 47-56; Jon Matthieu, ‘Conditions historiques de la spécificité montagnarde’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 52, n° 2 (2005): 9-25; Jon Matthieu, ‘The European Alps – an exceptional range of mountains? Braudel’s argument put to the test’, *European Review of History* 24, n° 1 (2017): 96-107.

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- <sup>90</sup> CSMA, Documents related to the Ski-School of St. Moritz (Box 43/21/1), *Die Ski Schule*, p. 4.
- <sup>91</sup> Sébastien Cala and Grégory Quin, 'Le ski... un sport "alpin" et dirigé par des Suisses?'. *Revue STAPS* 125/3 (2019): 89-105.
- <sup>92</sup> Fritz Pieth, *50 ans de l'Interassociation suisse pour le ski* (Bern: IASS, 1982), 53.
- <sup>93</sup> Association des Ecoles Suisses de Ski, *50 ans de l'AESS, rapport annuel pour l'année 1983-1984* (Andermatt: AESS, 1984), 14.
- <sup>94</sup> Association des Ecoles Suisses de Ski Archives, Minutes of the General Assemblies (1933-1991), Minutes of the meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> September 1934.
- <sup>95</sup> Michael Lüscher, *Schnee, Sonne und Stars. Wie der Wintertourismus von St. Moritz aus die Alpen erobert hat* (Zurich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2014), 83-85.

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<sup>96</sup> FISA, Documents about the congresses, Minutes of the 1930 Congress, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Quin, 'De la cure d'air à l'or blanc', 139.

<sup>98</sup> CSMA, Documentation Library, Documents from the tourist office, Prospectus (1934-1940), winter sports programme for 1933-1934.

<sup>99</sup> CSMA, Documentation Library, Documents from the tourist office, Prospectus (1934-1940), winter sports programme for 1933-1934, 3.

<sup>100</sup> CSMA, Documentation Library, Documents from the tourist office, Prospectus (1934-1940), winter sports programme for 1934-1935, 5-6.

<sup>101</sup> Denning, 'From Sublime Landscapes to 'White Gold''.

<sup>102</sup> *Engadiner Post*, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1934.

<sup>103</sup> CSMA, Documentation Library, Documents from the tourist office, Prospectus (1934-1940), winter sports programme for 1937-1938.

<sup>104</sup> Tonnerre, 'The 1928 Olympic Winter Games in St. Moritz'.

<sup>105</sup> Quentin Tonnerre, Grégory Quin, "'Les Suisses n'iront pas à Melbourne pour n'avoir pas trouvé d'avion convenable". Histoire d'une non-participation Olympique (1948-1956)'. *Revue Suisse d'Histoire* 67, n° 3 (2017): 343-360.