



Pre-task 3:

How Is The Savoie Mont-Blanc Region
Perceived Abroad As A Tourism Destination?

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Academic year 2015 - 2016

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1. Introduction

In this paper we will explain how the Savoie region is promoted in Belgium, which tour operators and travel agents offer holidays to the Savoie region and which promotions are being held in Belgium. We will also give an overview on how the region is perceived by Belgian students of the Thomas More University College in Mechelen.

To conclude, we will set out recommendations for the promotion of the region.

2. Deskresearch

2.1. Health fund

The Christian Care fund (a Belgium health fund) has been organizing trips to the Alpine region for ages. They have their own Dutch hotels and special services for kids. It is a Belgian island in the Alps. In the Savoie region, Intersoc, a holiday service organized by the Christian health insurance, has two hotels and so they promote the beautiful and versatile region.



Aussois - Châlet l'oërine

- Attractive and cozy
- Many ski opportunities
- All-in service



Valmeinier 1800 - Hôtel Intersoc

- Connected to Valloire
- Ski area covers a total length of 150 km
- Snowboard possibilities
- Oekkie formula

2.2. Tour operators

2.2.1. *Thomas Cook*

They promote mostly ski holidays in and to this region. From November till March/April (depending on the forecast), the region is covered in snow, which makes it an interesting spot for winter sports. Thomas Cook also offers hotels only for tourists who prefer travelling on their own. Another interesting feature is that Thomas Cook gives the possibility to depart whenever the traveler pleases (in collaboration with Neckermann, which is also a large tour operator in Belgium and a partner of the Thomas Cook Group).

2.2.2. *Corolus tours*

This tour operator also offers and promotes the winter sport facilities by distributing brochures and providing the information on websites.

The aspect of skiing stays the most important product, but also summer holidays, hiking, sightseeing and many others is being offered. An example of a package deal is a 7-day bus tour which begins in Liège, a major city in Wallonia. Along the way, tourists will see the 'Mont Blanc', Morzine, Mont Caly and the lake of Annecy.

2.2.3. *Decuyper travel*

Decuyper travel also offer a 7-day bus journey throughout the Savoie region, starting in Belgium and going through Luxemburg, the neighboring country.

The tour passes Dijon, the beautiful national park Sixt Fer à Cheval, Annecy, Chamonix, Châtel, the lake of Genève and many other touristic places.

In their tours, they try to be as diverse as possible, addressing both city-trips and natural beauty. Their trips start either 12th of June (until 18th of June) or 31st of August (until 6th of September). Their avoidance of the peak season suggests they don't aim for families with young children when promoting their product. Price per person is € 760.

2.3. Other organizations

2.3.1. *France-voyage*

France-voyage is a French tourism organization that regularly publishes detailed information on the French tourism sector (accommodation, gastronomy, activities,...) and also maintains a website on which the traveler can easily find practical information about all aspects of traveling in France. The organization's origin lies in France, but the website has been translated in Dutch so the Belgian/Dutch market is reached as well. This organization is different from the Belgian ones because they offer trips throughout the whole country. Belgium organizations mostly only offer holidays to popular regions in France, France-voyage focuses on each department (regions in France are divided in departments) in France. The fact that they provide very detailed information and update it very regularly shows great competence, experience and prominence on the French tourism market.

2.3.2. *Flanders ski*

Flanders ski is a Flemish organization which promotes winter destinations. An important part of their supply is the Mont Blanc region, for example Les Trois Vallées in Méribel, about which they offer not only winter sport activities, but they also provide practical information like the weather, the condition of the ski slopes, equipment renting prices, decent accommodation,...

2.3.3. *Vlaanderen Vakantieland*

Vlaanderen Vakantieland is a commonly known TV program on Flemish television which broadcasts infotainment in the form of reportages, each time putting another destination in the spotlights.

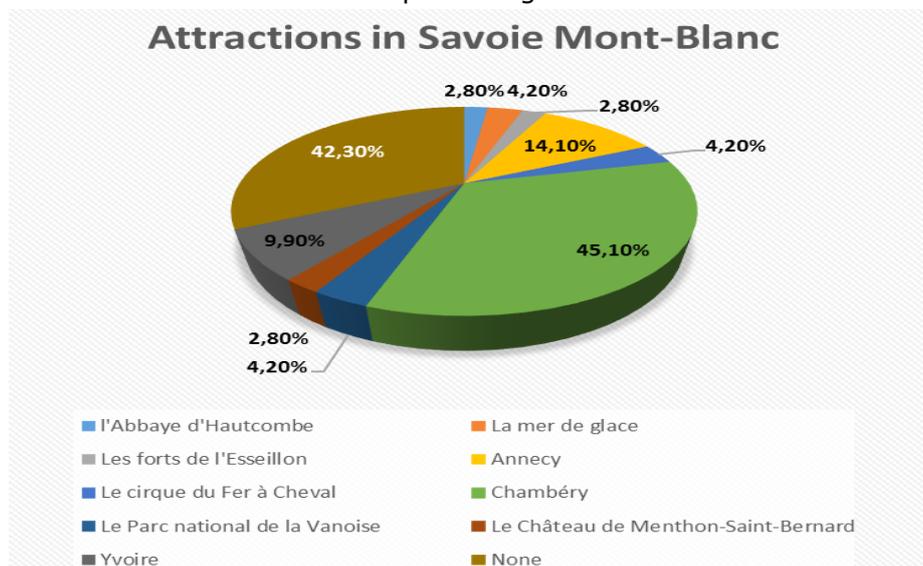
They made a reportage about Savoie, pointing out the potential it has for bicycle tourism. On their website they also provide some general information about where to go and which tracks to take (like Col du Mont Cenis and Cols des Sybelles).

3. Questionnaire

For this research about the Savoie Mont-Blanc region, we made a questionnaire to send out to the students of our University College. In total 71 students filled in our survey and gave their thoughts about the region. These 71 persons were all between the ages of 18 up to 24 and older.

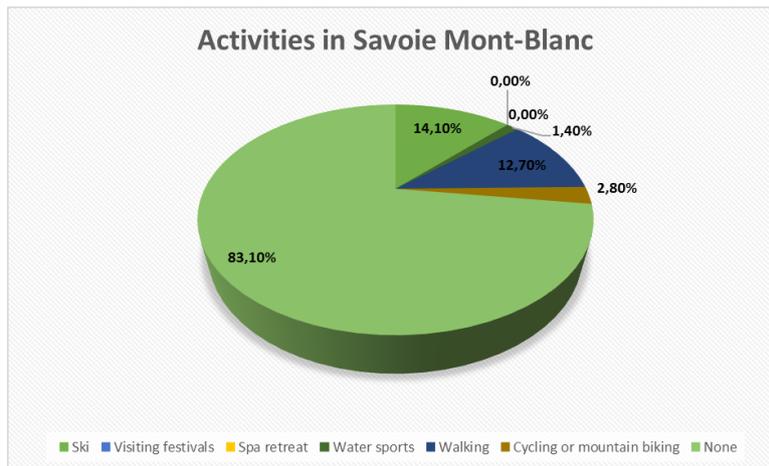
First, we asked if they had ever heard of the region. The answers were almost evenly divided; 45,1% had heard of Savoie Mont-Blanc, 54,9% didn't. When we asked how they had heard of it, the answers were very varied. Some people had been there for holidays, school or because of relatives living there. Others had heard of the region through different online and offline media like the news, brochures and internet. What was interesting to discover, was that Savoie Mont-Blanc is very known by name, mostly because of the mountain chain or because they had heard stories about the region from friends, family or tour operators. Most of the participants also knew that the region is situated in France (81,7%), although some people placed the region in Switzerland (16,9%) or in Austria (1,4%).

A following question was if the participants have visited the region. This resulted in a clearly indicated 'no' (88,7%). In the same trend, we asked which of the attractions in Savoie Mont-Blanc region they knew. We made a difference between the attractions and the activities because not everyone visits a place for the same reason. We created this question based on the list given by the tourist website of Savoie Mont-Blanc. This included the following attractions with their indicated percentage as known attraction:



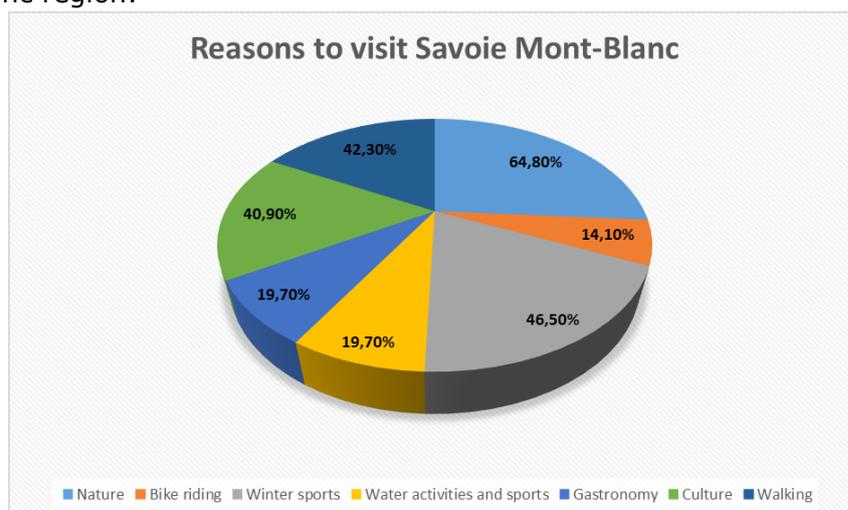
We had a result of 42,3% of the participants that didn't know any of these attractions in the region. There were other known attractions given by the students: Grenoble, Aix-Les-Bains, Lac du Bourget, Site Jacob Bellecombette and Lyon.

We created the question with the activities the same way as the previous one, based on the list given by the tourist site. This included the following activities with their indicated percentage as favourite activity:



Of course, because of the high percentage (88,7%) of students who have not visited the region, the percentage of participants who have not done any activities in the Savoie Mont-Blanc region was high as well (83,1%). Other interesting answers were that they studied in the region or that they celebrated the 14th of July in Annecy.

After a global view of the region and its tourism offers, we wanted to find out how people would inform themselves if they wanted to visit the region. It became very clear that websites are by far the most important sources for the participants to check out. The high percentage of 94,4% was followed by asking friends for advice (39,4%), then going to a tourism office (31%) and as a last source for information the participants indicated using an app on their smartphone or tablet. Other source suggestions that were given, were the classical things like a travel guide or a travel magazine. We also asked what would be the reason or reasons to visit the Savoie Mont-Blanc region. For this question we took the themes as given by the tourist site why to visit the region. The highest scoring reason was nature with a percentage of 64,8%. The lowest scoring reason was bike riding in the region with 14,1%. In between these high and low numbers, there were other reasons to visit the Savoie Mont-Blanc region:



Not everyone who answered 'none of the above' gave an explanation for their answer. If they did, they indicated that they would not have a good reason to tick the list given by us because they had not heard of the region or they just don't know much about the region. The following question gave an idea of the knowledge of activities for students in Savoie Mont-Blanc. The percentage of people marking 'I don't know' rose up to 78,9%.

We asked the possibility of future visits by the participants to the region. This resulted in a high percentage of people really interested to go to Savoie Mont-Blanc (73,2%). The others that answered 'no' gave explanations like that they're not sure or that they don't know if the place would be interesting to visit.

4. Facts and figures¹

Last year the 'Observatoire du Tourisme' of Savoie Mont-Blanc concluded that 12% of Savoie's visitors in 2012 were from Belgium. Compared to others, Belgium takes the third place of visitors. Great-Britain takes the first place with 37% and second is The Netherlands with 15%. The Savoie's visitors in winter 2012-2013 included 13% Belgians and the Savoie's visitors in summer 2012 included 11% Belgians.

5. Recommendations

In the last questions of our survey, we gauged the promotion for the Savoie Mont-Blanc region. We wanted to know if the participants had ever seen any promotion for the region. The majority of the answers was 'no' with a percentage of 94,4%. Those who had seen promotion found it via brochures and websites. Then we asked them if the region should focus more on international promotion and we came up with an almost tie between 'yes' (46,5%) and 'I don't know' (43,7%).

Last but not least, we asked the participants to give some suggestions to expand tourism in the region. These responses were really focused on the promotion part of tourism in Savoie Mont-Blanc, with recommendations like the use of social media and making the name more popular. Other options could be to promote the region with a niche market and really try to stand out for one thing that everyone would link with that region. Thinking about the Savoie Mont-Blanc, winter sports could be a possible focus or brand for this region. Concluding from the survey, we would recommend to focus on international promotion. Students are not familiar with this region. They don't even know why they would not go there because the knowledge about this region is very poor. Students could be a new target group for the region if only they knew what this region had to offer for them.

6. Conclusion

The Savoie Mont-Blanc offers a lot of different activities but winter sports is the most important one. We made a survey to ask students if they know the Savoie Mont-Blanc region and about 54% of the students doesn't. Only 11,27% visited the region already. Most of them know Chambéry and went skiing.

Students still believe that the internet is the easiest way to inform themselves about the region, but the reasons why they would visit the region are winter sports, nature, culture and walking. It was very interesting to take a look at the Belgian promotion of the region and we can conclude that the region is not promoted very well since only 45,07% of the students had heard of the region already.

¹ Observatoire du tourisme, édition 2014, consulted October 17th 2015, http://pro.savoie-mont-blanc.com/var/ezwebin_site/storage/original/application/0aaffeaf95e4a18a85e3241517eb397f.pdf