

# Extreme Sports: An Integral View and the Quest for Applications

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## Abstract

*Although it replaces religion for more than a few people, the field of sports is barely tapped by Integral Theory. This contribution deals with an Integral view on the latest phenomena in the evolution of sports, often signified as „extreme sports“. These movement practices represent the tip of increasingly popular outdoor recreation activities, lifestyle and action sports. Several types of extreme sports are described and located in the context of sociocultural evolution. Beyond this flatland view we will take a more integral look by opposing media and academic interpretations of extreme sport engagement on the one hand with the view through an athlete’s eyes on the other hand. Holding these perspectives we may understand the problems and possibilities of extreme outdoor sports today, in order to outline some approaches to this area of sports. Practical applications should consider the athlete’s personal development, their sporting practice and culture, as well as an educational and ecological impact.*

The human body and its role in individual development are highly emphasized in integral circles. It is the gross basis of our manifest and our unique self. If our body dies, our manifest self dies with it. Our body is the instrument for intentional action and skillful means. There is no embodiment without a body. Our body is a medium of communication. We cannot not communicate, as Paul Watzlawick would say, if someone watches and interprets our body’s language and the messages it sends out to the world, for example in terms of posture or actions. Furthermore, our human body offers an essential leverage point for the development of our individual and collective consciousness; think of all the body-based practices we do in order to train our mind or to get in touch with each other.

A well-established area of body practices in modern and postmodern culture is the field of sports. In relation to other areas of application, this field is barely tapped by Integral Theory and Practice. Recently, Wilkinson, Thompson, and Tsakiris fortunately contribute to a concept of Integral sports. In my opinion, further examination is necessary to pave the way for a more in-depth and greater-span reflection and application in an area of physical culture that already replaces religion for millions of people. This contribution deals with an Integral view on the latest phenomena in the evolution of sports, often signified as “extreme sports”, which represent the tip of outdoor recreation activities also called adventure sports, risk sports, extreme endurance sports, lifestyle sports or action sports. As these different terms are confusing enough, I will use the term “outdoor sports” to signify the phenomena in a broad sense, and the term “extreme sports” to signify the phenomena in a more narrow or extreme sense. Since their sociocultural breakthrough in the second half of the last century, both outdoor sports and extreme sports are gaining more and more popularity.

Following integral semantics, the article is structured in three main steps. In the first step I will take a *look at* the history of sports and the rise of extreme sports (the What). Here I will offer a general definition of extreme sports. In the second step I will have a *look from* the perspective of the extreme and outdoor athletes (the Who) by examining the individual modes of awareness on different lines. The third step is the quest for Integral *applications* to this field (the How).

## **The Development of Sports and the Rise of Extreme Sports**

Let's start with an overview over the sociocultural development of sports using the general AQAL stages of development: infrared, magenta, red, amber, orange, green and the second tier stages, beginning with teal. In this evolutionary context, the rise of extreme outdoor sports is of special interest in this paper. In some steps of the following overview I will concentrate on the history of physical exercise and sports in Europe.

In the earliest stage of the development of human kind, the *infrared* stage, there were no activities that could be called sports or physical exercises in our current understanding. People lived in small bands of family kinships. We know that *Homo erectus* used spears, stones and throwing sticks. Today, similar pieces like javelins, balls or boomerangs are thrown in sports, but the purpose of the pre-historic tools and the related physical activities was to gain food and hence to fulfill the most basic human needs.

Around 15,000 years ago, humanity started to step onto the *magenta* stage of development. This stage is labeled as "tribal" or "magical" by some authors. Safety and security are the bottom-line needs at this stage. People began to associate in small tribes, lived in relatively save caves and organized collective hunting and gathering. In their view, the world was full of good or bad spirits that can be invoked or banished by certain rituals, such as dance. On the magenta stage of consciousness, an individual is capable of using simple images and symbols, as we can see in the examples of pre-historic imagery: The well-known cave paintings in Lascaux (France) are estimated to be 17,000 years old. The paintings show hunters and swimmers, but the purpose of these activities were practical in nature – e.g., to get food, to cross rivers or not to drown – rather than to exercise physically. What is important for the development of movement practices is the occurrence of rituals and dance. Until today, dance is an aesthetic form of processing experiences and communicative expression. Concerning extreme sports, I will show that aestheticization is a primary feature.

The shift to the *red* paradigm was another major step in the sociocultural development of humankind and physical practice. At this stage, everything is about power: If I am weaker than you, I'll subordinate myself. If I am stronger than you, I can take anything I want without regrets. This was the time when the first chiefdoms and early feudal empires arose, where strong chiefs ruled with force and violence over physically weaker and underprivileged people. An impressive example is decentralized Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire: The warrior lords owned underlings, who served them by maintaining their land. In return, underlings could hope for protection from enemy attacks. The red level of consciousness gives physical culture an additional orientation: the simulation of warfare. The warrior elite and foot soldiers exercised in military practices like sword fighting, jousting and archery. A number of terms that are used in today's competitive sports reflect this red stage of cultural development: We talk about sporting heroes and heroines, conflict and struggle, defense and offense, victory, defeat and glory. Around the year 1100 AD, knights' games spread across Europe and over the decades, these events

developed from war exercises with public audiences to exclusive tournaments for members of the aristocratic class. The process through this red stage was accompanied by the formation of codes of chivalry and honor, which could be seen as a feature of the next stage of development, often called amber.

From the Middle Ages, we go a couple of centuries back to the ancient empires, which are sometimes referred to as early democracies. In addition to the preparations for war, physical exercises and competitions in ancient Greece played an important role in religion, youth education and politics. During the Hellenistic period physical education was designed to prepare adolescents for life and civic duties in city-states like Sparta and Athens. The educational ideal of both a healthy body and healthy soul reflects in the phrase “Kalos kagathos”, which means the beautiful and the good. Greek history is also connected with the ancient Olympic games that were held the context of cultic and sacrificial feasts for the mythical gods Zeus and Pelops. The date of the first Olympic event is estimated to have been held in 776 BC. Athletes from all over the Mediterranean region competed in running, pentathlon, in combat disciplines like wrestling and boxing, as well as in horse and chariot races. We also know that in 366 BC, the first religious festival called “Ludi Romani“ was held in ancient Rome. These games, held in honor of the god Jupiter, involved chariot races and competitive horseback riding. The first gladiator games took place a few decades later. This large-scale phenomena of “spectatorship” is very typical for ancient Rome, where the masses cried for “panem et circenses” (bread and games). Although the cultures of Greek and Roman empires showed some characteristics of modern democracies, they did not reach the stage of sociocultural development on a broad scale (Wilber, *Integral Psychology* 276). Both societies displayed rigid inequality, slavery, dictatorship and physical violence, that can also be seen in their pre-sports culture: Most gladiators were kept as slaves and had to fight against criminals, other soldier-prisoners and wild animals. Men, women and children were exposed to the arbitrariness of a sensationalist audience and died under anything but fair conditions in the dust of the arenas. In addition to medieval physical culture, which mainly served a military purpose, the ancient body cultures emphasized aspects of civic education and health. Moreover, they recognized the political dimensions of public games and built stadiums for organized competitions, not only in honor of the gods, but also for a large number of spectators. It is hardly surprising that *drama*, a genre of literature usually performed on stage, has its origins in these times. In their study on skydiving, Celsi, Rose, and Leigh go even further and relate high-risk activities to our inherent dramatic enculturation that stems from ancient theatre (2-4).

An *amber* worldview in the development of sport and physical culture can also be seen in the emergence and institutionalization of gymnastics in Germany. The Napoleonic Wars around 1800 encouraged patriotism and a romantic worldview, driven by the idea of a united people. At this time, Germany’s territory was politically fragmented and under French occupation. The early gymnastic community, the “Turnbewegung”, was a civic movement with the goal of national unity and freedom. Gymnastics were a means to promote physical health and community-building in the struggle against the “enemies of freedom”. Interestingly, freedom and independence from an oppressive mainstream culture is highly emphasized by several youth-cultural scenes of today’s alternative sports (e.g. “youth against establishment” is a slogan of a contemporary board sports company)

The *orange* worldview came hand in hand with modernity, the differentiation of the value spheres of art, morals and science (Wilber, *Integral Psychology* 66-67). This developmental stage of humankind was ushered by the Enlightenment and has unleashed at least two revolutions: the

“social” French revolution in 1789 and the industrial revolution, that picked up pace during the 19th century. Over the decades, industrialization brought growing wealth and a differentiation of work and leisure for an increasing number of people. More wealth and less working hours led to an expansion of leisure activities, not only for English gentlemen but also for middle and working class people. Originally, young noble men in England practiced sports like horseback riding, hunting, rowing, races and games like golf, tennis or soccer just for pleasure, for compensation and recreation; a purpose that was relatively new. English sports spread from England to the colonies and across Europe. Next to gymnastics, these physical activities became the second backbone of movement culture. Modernity not only brought forth a fair competitive mode and a culture of sports for all, but a few more aspects that are typical for the orange stage of development: The first key feature is a strategic orientation towards high achievement. Athletes and teams strive for absolute and individual performances that are measurable and can be attributed to the actors. The progressive principle of this mode of sports is expressed by the Olympic slogan “higher, faster, further” and its record-seeking orientation, while the principle of meritocracy can be seen in leagues, rankings and championships. A second key aspect of sports in modernity is the techno-economic mode: setting long-term goals that could be reached by systematic and scheduled training, based on approved methods and scientific knowledge. This led to the institutionalization of academic sport sciences, which occurred in the second half of the 20th century. In my view, the third major aspect is the specific form of competition. Modern sport competitions are tied to results that are as objective as possible, which should be largely guaranteed by measurements in the exterior realm, respectively in the Right-Hand quadrants. Think of the quantified recording of athletic performances in centimeters, grams and seconds (cgs-system) or the comparison of hits and points. Objective comparison of performance is also ensured by constant and equal conditions, given by a set of written rules and highly standardized sporting facilities. Besides the major team sports or individual sports such as soccer, handball or track-and-field disciplines, other body cultures like dance and gymnastics aligned to this orange model of sports. As in ancient and medieval times, modern athletic competitions are designed to be followed by on-site spectators. What’s new is the size of modern sports events and their media coverage, recorded or live. Sports have become more popular, more professionalized, and more commercialized. On the technological line, the innovative improvement and range of sports equipment is growing rapidly. For many activities of sport today, you do need special and often high-tech equipment (e.g. shoes, ropes, bicycles, skis, boards, parachutes or wing suits). Orange breakthroughs go along with massive shadows: chronically injured and burned-out athletes, doping and corruption, the creation of needs (e.g. for the latest equipment), political abuse and destructive ecological impacts, especially if paired with an amber worldview. Besides that, amber hierarchies dominate certain areas of modern sports up to the present day. This can be seen at the strict separation of roles in long-established associations: athletes/audience, coach/team, functionaries/athletes. A past example is the pyramid model of sports, which was discussed in the 1950s and 1960s: In this model, the overall structure of sports was pictured as a rigid pyramid, with high performance athletes on the top and the sporting masses at the bottom. In sports science, the “modern” model of sports is often referred to as “traditional sports” — often in contrast to the upcoming “alternative sports”.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the emergence of some additional streams of body and movement culture can be observed. Many people searched for another practice and theory of physical culture. New patterns of motivation like health and fitness increased in demand and gave way to subsystems that are named “sports for health” or “fitness sports”. Eastern movement and spiritual cultures (e.g. Tai Chi, Yoga) were imported into the Western countries, often only in bits and pieces.

Variations of games, gymnastics and dance gained significance on a larger scale, such as New Games, artistry and circus arts, gymnastics as body experience, contemporary dance as well as dances and arts from other cultural circles (e.g. Flamenco, Hip Hop, Capoeira). This so called “alternative sports culture” developed as a part of a broad countercultural movement that swept the USA and Western Europe in the 1960s in forms such as the peace movement, the civil rights and feminist movements, the environmental protection movements, as well as the newly-established green political parties, to name a few (Krüger, “Was ist alternativ am alternativen Sport” 142-147). Alternative movements regard themselves as both a critique of and a sustainable alternative to traditional values, politics and lifestyles, and not least to, traditional sports. For this reason, these movements propose play instead of competition, commonality instead of difference, diversity instead of specialization, naturalness instead of rationalization, creativity instead of imposed limitations, self-determination and autonomy instead of top-down codes and standards, personal communication instead of a set of written rules, authenticity instead of discipline, aesthetics instead of technics, interior experience instead of exterior results, self-organized meetings instead of formalized competition systems, and last but not least, outdoor and public spaces instead of standardized sporting facilities.

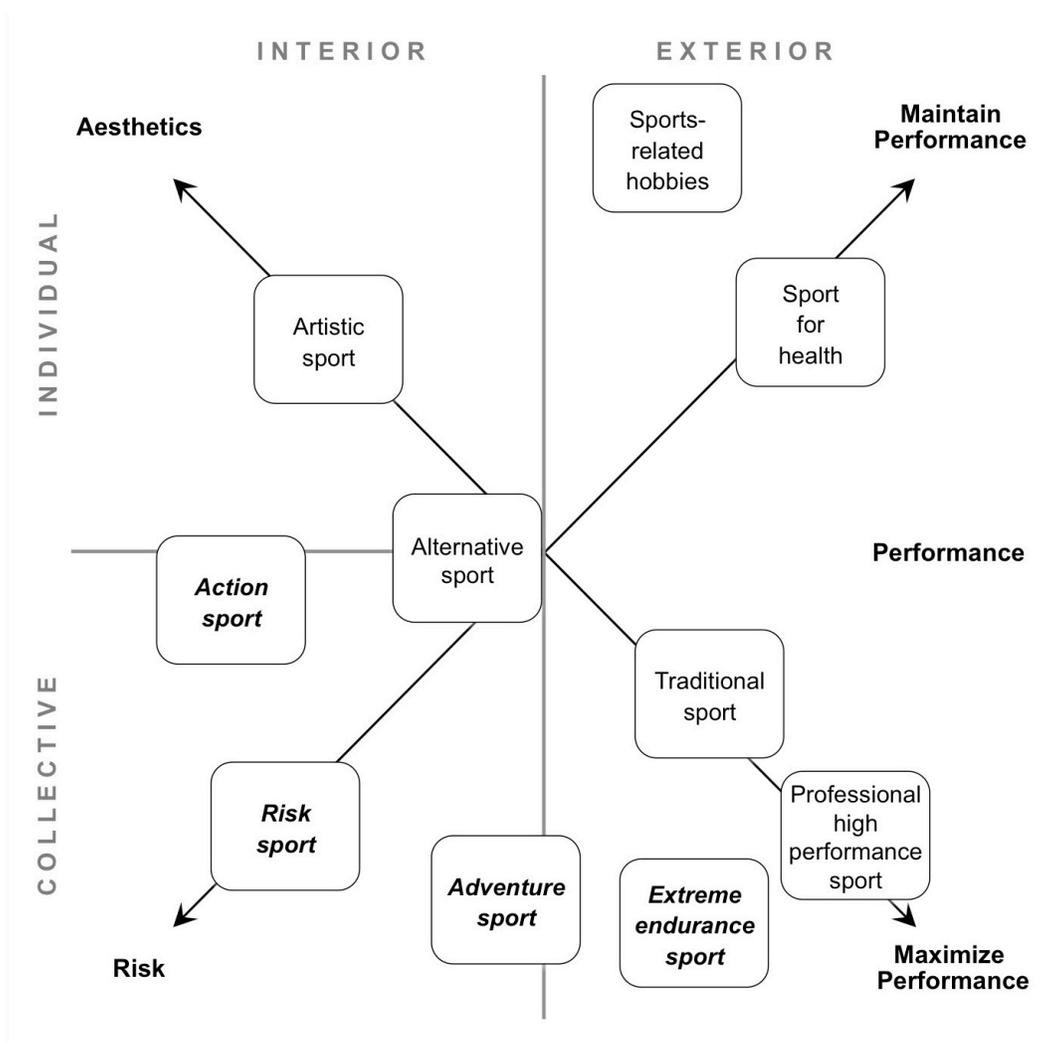


Figure 1. Types of contemporary sports (regular font) and extreme sports (bold font) located in AQAL

These ideas and their connections with physical exercise were not entirely new. They were already pursued and practiced by the first progressive educators such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau or the German philanthropists. Some representatives of the postmodern alternative sports movement started a rather ideological discussion against traditional sports (Wopp and Dieckert, 11-21), claiming that the traditional values of sport – performance, competition and record – should be rejected, individuals should be unchained from oppressive sports associations, and physical exercise and games should not be separated from work and everyday life. The green worldview denies its predecessors. The *green* stage of sociocultural development changed the structure of society as a whole and flattened its hierarchies: According to sociologist and systems theorist, Niklas Luhmann, society differentiated itself into a constellation of functional subsystems such as art, economy, education, health care, politics, religion, science or sports, all of which are more or less on an equal level. In this Lower-Right quadrant view, differentiation on the one hand means lateral interconnection of social systems on the other hand. A similar developmental process happened within the societal subsystem of sports, as the bipolar pyramid model was replaced by a pluralistic constellation of areas of sport.

At this point, we can at least specify six contemporary models or *types* of sport. In figure 1, I suggest to locate these types, depending on their main orientation, in the four quadrants of the AQAL model; respectively, in the three value spheres of subjectivity (Upper-Left quadrant: aesthetic experience and expression), intersubjectivity (Lower-Left quadrant: risk taking and risk management), and objectivity (Right-Hand quadrants: maintaining or maximizing physical performance). Based on a prototype semantic study, Willimczik identifies the *traditional sport* model as the core of sport, which is typically characterized by competition, performance, team and typical disciplines like the larger games (soccer, basketball, handball, volleyball, hockey etc.), tennis, artistic gymnastics, track and field athletics, bicycle racing and rowing. This model correlates on a high degree with *professional high-performance sport* or top-level sport, which is additionally marked by stress, high risk of injury and hardness. *Artistic sports* subsume activities like dance, acrobatics, figure skating or juggling and are typically characterized by aesthetics, expression, creativity and presentation. *Sports for health* are distinguished by health promotion, recreation, relaxation, wellness and everyday life. Walking, back therapy training, fitness training and yoga are quoted as typical examples for this model, which provides the opposite pole to high-performance sports, but a positive correlation to *sport-related hobbies*. Fishing, hunting, chess or bowling are categorized as typical sports-related activities that are characterized by chance, coincidence, monotony and distraction, if not practiced with higher aspirations and expertise. *Alternative sports* or *outdoor sports* are identified as a separate category in this pluralistic understanding of sports. Today, the conceptual meaning of “alternative sports”, “outdoor sports”, “nature sports” and “extreme sports” is very similar, but their relation to terms like “action sports”, “adventure sports”, “fun sports”, “lifestyle sports”, “risk sports” or “whizz sports” is unclear and quite confusing. Hence, in my thesis on extreme sports, I examined the concepts and the interpretations of extreme sports from the perspectives of science, extreme athletes, non-extreme athletes and the mass media. In one sub-study, an online-survey with an international range, participants were asked if they see themselves as “extreme athletes”. Those who affirmed were clustered by their statements on mainly closed questions like “what would you define as extreme in your extreme sport?”. The cluster analysis showed four main groups, which could be seen as areas or models of extreme sports. As shown in fig. 1, these groups are translated in four main types of extreme sports and could be ranged in the field of sport, in between outdoor sports, high-performance sports and artistic sports, but in further distance to sports for health and sport-related hobbies. In the following, I will offer a brief description of each type:

*Extreme endurance sport* is characterized by long distances or a long duration of a physical activity that usually involves constant repetition of the same movement. Typical examples are long-distance running, swimming, cycling, or a combination of these in the discipline of triathlon. These activities are often called extreme sports because of their extreme duration, but with a regulated competition system, leagues, licenses, worldwide rankings and an international governing organization they are closer to the model of traditional sports and high-performance sports than to outdoor sports.

*Risk sports* focus on the accomplishment of difficult movement tasks in a close-to-nature environment. Typical activities like wild water kayaking, base jumping, acrobatic paragliding, free skiing, cliff diving, big wave surfing, freeride mountain biking or certain variations of rock climbing are connected with unusual movements or body positions (climbing, flying, gliding, sliding, jumps, turns, high speed) in non-standardized places. This is a reason why they involve a higher risk of serious injury or death.

*Adventure sports* labels a type of extreme sports that combines features of risk sports and endurance sports. A cross country skier who participated in my study and was allocated to this group describes the characteristics of adventure sports like this: “It involves travelling alone for hundreds of miles across some of the most dangerous terrain on earth in some of the most extreme conditions and temperatures on earth”. Typical activities are mountaineering, sailing, trekking or cycling tours that take several days or weeks, sometimes solo, in wild settings far away from civilization.

*Action sports*, in contrast, don’t take place in remote settings but they often use nature or natural elements, like snowboarding, freeskiing or kite surfing. Other typical examples are skateboarding, BMX freestyle, aggressive inline skating or street luge. Mostly, they are practiced outdoors, but in a more urban architecture. Movement tasks in action sports are oriented towards an increase of the level of difficulty and style. That’s why they are associated with a higher risk of injury and hold a fluid transition to risk sports. The X-Games are a popular example for a media-packaged and commercialized format of this kind of sports. Wheaton uses the more general expression “lifestyle sports”, as it “reflects both the characteristics of these activities and their wider socio-cultural significance” (4).

In academic literature, a consensual understanding of extreme sports and its different types does not exist. Several scientific disciplines make their own research on this topic and build their own partial truths. Interdisciplinary approaches can rarely be found, transdisciplinary or integral approaches do not yet exist. Therefore, at the end of my thesis, I proposed a first descriptive definition to the scientific community:

“Extreme sports” is a generic term for areas of sport, where unusual body movements and body-positions are realized in a physically active manner and/or the athletes cope with long distances, respectively long-lasting exercises or movement tasks. This is connected with the use of special (sports) equipment and/or the abandonment of equipment and takes place in variable, typically natural spaces under unfavorable environmental conditions and a low level of formal regulation. Typical activities are nature-based sports, endurance sports and activities of skydiving, motor sports and action sports. Extreme sports are oriented to the achievement of high or peak performance, risk taking and risk management and the aestheticization of the sporting practice. (293)

This proposal is based on the AQAL-model, as it considers the quadrants and several characteristic lines of sports (figure 2): movement and body positions in time and space are placed in the Upper-Right quadrant; social regulation, technological aspects as well as spatial and environmental conditions can be found in the Lower-Right quadrant; three key motives or key values of extreme sports are arranged in the Left-Hand quadrants. The higher the degree on the lines, the more extreme the sporting practice. May I give a simple example: Because of the extreme environmental conditions it is more extreme to freeclimb a big wall in Patagonia than a big wall with the same protection possibilities, height and difficulty in Yosemite Valley. Although this is a rather superficial “flatland” description, it is more comprehensive and concise than any other definition of extreme sports in academic literature that I know.

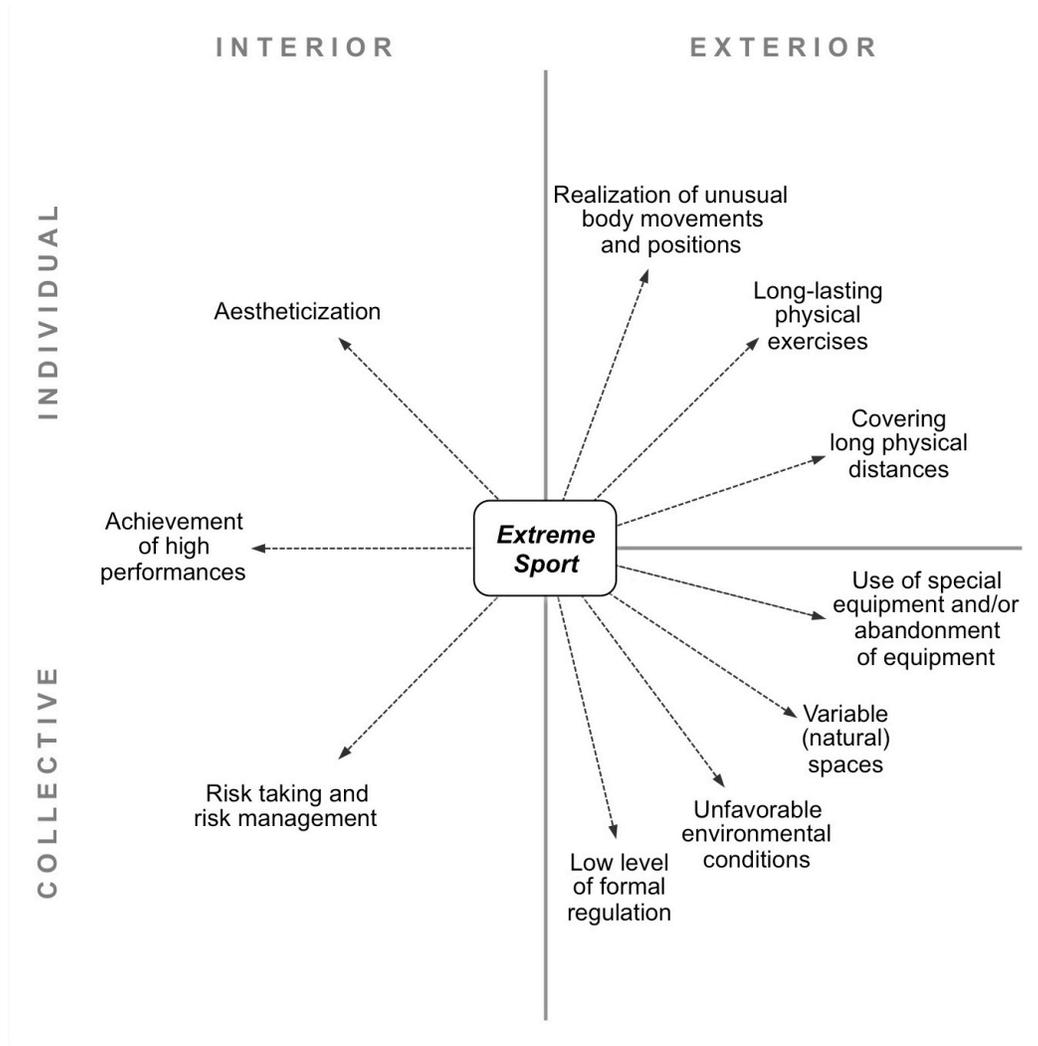


Figure 2. Description of “Extreme Sport” using quadrants and lines

So, where can extreme sports be seen in the sociocultural development of sports? To give an answer, I will concentrate on risk, adventure and action sports. Extreme endurance sports are a special case. It seems that extreme sports had their rise in the second half of the 20th century and combine some central features of green and orange. We can see that in the history of mountain biking in California: Many of the pioneers of mountain biking were road bicycle racers taking

part in a formalized competition system. Road racing is orange. With the green countercultural movement these young men got into hippie culture and lifestyles. They took heavy but stable bikes from the 1930s to ride with friends into near-nature settings aside the asphalt roads. The fun in riding was going downhill. It did not take many years until the first downhill race was held at Mount Tamalpais, in 1976. Technical innovations and self-made bikes were not long in coming. Some pioneers became entrepreneurs and started bike companies. In the 1980s, the activity of mountain biking and its industry flourished. Today, mountain biking is a pluralistic sport that can be divided in the Olympic discipline of cross-country racing, marathon, orienteering, downhill racing, mountain bike tour as well as dirt jumping, freeriding, street-trial or bike-mountaineering. As Lamprecht and Stamm note other outdoor sports, rock climbing and snowboarding for example, followed this very similar developmental structure.

The image of extreme sports is ambivalent. Especially in mass media, but also in academics, the interpretations and value judgments of extreme sport range from extremely negative to quite positive. On the one hand, extreme sports are seen as ecologically harmful, aggressive, discriminating, exclusive, dangerous, psychopathological and oriented towards hedonistic short-term rewards. On the other hand, they are seen as sustainable, fair, community-building, inclusive, risk-aware, health maintaining and oriented towards long-term personal growth. These perspectives are true, but partial, as they only illuminate one side of the *What*; that is: the sports activities. But what also matters is *Who* is taking part and the *How* of an individual's practice.

## **Individual Development in Extreme Outdoor Sports**

In the next passages I will take a first-person perspective of an extreme athlete. To do this, I draw on several sources: (a) verbal and visual self-descriptions of the athletes, (b) an interview I conducted with a professional extreme mountain biker in February of this year and (c) my own experience as an athlete in mountain biking, BMX riding, rock climbing and slacklining. As a structural lens I use two elements of the AQAL model: first, *lines* of individual development (self, cognitive, affective-emotional, needs, body, interpersonal and the relation to nature or spaces of practicing extreme sports); and second, *levels* of consciousness or *modes of awareness*, roughly divided in preconventional (magenta, red), conventional (amber, orange) and post-conventional (green and beyond). At several points I will underline my considerations with scientific approaches and academic research findings on the topic of extreme sports.

Take into account that there are multiple lines of development, which are more or less independent. So if we look at a person and notice a specific level on one line, this does not mean, that the person's consciousness is totally on this level. Furthermore, as Cook-Greuter and Soulen underline, "[i]t is critical to keep in mind that ego functioning in an individual varies widely in response to circumstances, context, and stresses" (191). Just because we perceive one quote or behavior that fits with a certain mode of awareness, we should not conclude that the person's center of gravity is frozen on the corresponding level of development. The purpose of levels is to increase communication and understanding of others and our self.

### *Preconventional modes of awareness*

*Magenta*: "When I am out on the mountain, I become one with nature. When I put on my board on the mountaintop, I feel free. When I drop in the snow field, I feel fine and safe. Cold air rushes in my face. Here is the place I belong to. This is me" (a female freeride snowboarder).

The magenta mode of awareness is almost entirely reduced to experiences in the sensorimotor

realm. Individuals are attracted by simple sensory perceptions. In outdoor sports, these sensations may be evoked in seeing, touching or feeling natural elements like rock, snow, wind or water. With reference to the origins of surfing in Polynesian culture, Krüger assumes that there exists a universal human longing for oneness with nature and its forces (*Einführung in die Geschichte der Leibeserziehung und des Sports* 57). Although I don't think that many individuals with a magenta center of gravity participate in extreme sports, I recognize that the experience of concrete or "authentic" sensorimotor impressions is one of several motives for taking part in outdoor sports. This mode of awareness also might be reflected in the yearning for silence and deceleration in outdoor settings, as individuals on an impulsive level tend to be easily overwhelmed by the complexity of today's world.

*Red:* „Here I am. There are some slow suckers in the park and I'll show who is the king here. Get outta my way folks, here I come. Now!” (male full-protected mountain biker, just getting off the lift); “Pain is temporary, glory lasts forever” (slogan of an extreme sports company).

On the red stage of consciousness, the realm of the five senses still plays an important role. But with the first distinction of self and others the focus rests on feeling strong and on personal advantage. In a red mode of awareness, short-term rewards and getting attention for an egocentric purpose is central. Extreme sports, in particular risk and action sports, are kind of predestinated to meet these needs. As this form of risk taking is nonreflective and hazardous, it is not much more than thrill seeking, connected with daredevilry and naïve heroism. The aesthetic motive is reduced to the need for arousal in the interiors and getting immediate attention from others in the exterior dimension. Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmermann provide the “stoic mountain climber” (231) as an example for an ego-self of this stage. Indeed, heroic approaches to mountaineering and other adventure sports are still present, although, according to Meineke, the era of heroic alpinism came to an end. On this level, the value of achievement is translated into conquering and fighting against. In risk and action sports, this mode of awareness is seen in kamikaze-like bicycle riding, skiing or snowboarding. If at all, athletes at this level loosely organize in a street-gang style or in spontaneous meetings to fulfill hedonistic needs. Usually, this mode takes an aggressive “fuck off” attitude towards rules and norms, often with harmful impact on the environment and other people. A relationship to the body and sporting skills hardly occurs, as a differentiation of mind and body is almost non-existent. Actually, extreme athletes in this mode of awareness are likely to make serious mistakes and hurt themselves.

### *Conventional modes of awareness*

*Amber:* “It is all about having fun, being out there, having a good time with friends. I love this sport, it means so much to us” (male rock climber).

Following the general stages of development beginning with the birth of a human being, individuals transcend and include the red, egocentric or self-protecting stage and move to an amber, ethnocentric or conformist level of consciousness. On the moral line of development, awareness expands from “me” to “me and my group”, but not any further. Self-perception and self-worth are based on the opinions and acceptance of other group members. This mode of awareness can be seen in individuals who assign themselves to a particular outdoor sports culture, scene or group: “I am a mountain bike freerider”; “Yes, I like rock climbing, but I don't like this bouldering and sport climbing stuff. Trad climbing is the real thing”. The group you think or feel that you belong provides values, status, stereotypical attributes and, for this reason, identity. Membership and belonging to a sporting scene tends to be measured by superficial traits and objective qualities: You are fully accepted, if you can do this move, if you climb a certain

difficulty, if you appear in this cool brand's clothes, if you did a highline, if you have scars all over your body, if you go skateboarding every day, if you have this kind of skis, if you ride flat pedals and not clipless pedals, if you were at this or that spots and places. "Have to's" and "must do's" – or: should's and ought's – play an important role in cultures and individuals in this dominant mode of resonance and awareness. It seems to me that, on this level, there are not more than two reference points for right or wrong: The first source is one's perception what "all the other members" say, do and wear (what is "in"). The second reference of what is right or wrong is, what professional and popular role models do, wear and say literally. In this sense, popular athletes are much more than representatives; they are leaders and authorities to be followed. Against this background, the three key values or motives I proposed for extreme sports tend to be filled in the following way: Achievement happens when the individual reaches conformist goals (e.g. a trick of a certain difficulty level, a classic summit or route). Risk is embraced because it is a fundamental value in the scene. Aesthetic aspects show up in the interior experience in a one-sided accentuation of positive affects, often in an exaggerated way ("That was huge!"). In the exterior realm, aesthetic expression finds its way in verbal and visual narratives of actions that are accepted in the group or follow the group's implicit and explicit standards. Amber goes along with rigid digital categories on the cognitive line, and therefore, over-identification with the in-group is connected with over-emphasized boundaries to out-groups and their members, whether they are obvious or suspected. Cultural and sociological studies underline this "us versus them" attitude in extreme sports scenes and subcultures. Social distinction, exclusion and discrimination take place, for instance, in terms of gender (Anderson 55-79, Beal and Wilson 31-54, Laurendeau 24-47), authenticity of practice (Donnelly 219-224, Wheaton and Beal 155-176) and ethnicity (Brayton 356-372). Athletes are organized in relatively closed groups with certain codes of membership, semantics, rules and rituals, that provide stability and continuity. On the kinesthetic and somatic line, an ownership of the body and body-related abilities develops. The self progressively becomes aware of its body and its athletic skills. Thus, the body can be seen as something that can be used for gaining acceptance and self-esteem. In order to do that, it must be disciplined through hard and frequent training. Once the physical skills and expertise are attained, they should be preserved by all means, as amber is very suspicious towards discontinuity and change. For this reason, athletes are hardly aware that they can't do their sporting practice in this way forever.

*Orange:* "You can get it through intense focus, realizing your ideas and pushing your limits day by day" (male slackliner); "forward" (title of an avant-garde BMX video).

Strategic orientation towards high achievement is not only a key feature of the orange stage of sociocultural development, but also a main characteristic of the corresponding individual mode of awareness. At the orange level of consciousness, a sense of separate self-identity emerges; an identity, that is not reduced to stereotypical or group specific traits. An individual at this stage can maintain some sort of critical distance to the unquestioned norms and rules of the group and follow its personal course. Athletes in this mode of awareness question and revise group standards and often add self-evaluated ones. Possibilities of thinking and acting that are different of the group's patterns are seen and acknowledged. At this level, many athletes decide to become professionals in their extreme sporting activity, start or work with companies that are related with outdoor sports and engage in larger social networks. Scene-specific values or general values of extreme sports are critically evaluated and accepted with rational and personal modifications. Achievement and success is measured by pushing personal or absolute limits, not only in terms of difficulty and risk, but also in aesthetic terms: Athletes try to increase self-produced medial staging of their actions, coverage in magazines or video parts. Professional extreme athletes know

that they have to progress continuously. They have to present themselves, at least in sport-specific media and in the scene. Whether pro athlete or grass-roots enthusiast, individuals in this mode of awareness set long-term goals and prepare themselves conscientiously and strategically. If a project is completed, they seek new challenges. If a project does not go ahead, they initiate reorientation or modifications. This is possible, as an orange level of cognition sees more possibilities and allows more flexible control. This also becomes visible in the case of risk-taking, which is a central part of risk sports, adventure sports and action sports. In an orange mindset, risk management is more fluid and complex, because they are capable of rational assessment of one's own competencies and external circumstances in a long-term perspective. Risk is seen in a way that it does not only imply the potential for serious injury, death or any other kind of loss, but also the chance of high gain. And risk can be compensated by competence and preparation. This worldview of risk and achievement is one reason for the overrepresentation of management-level corporate participants in adventure races, also known as eco-challenge (Kay and Laberge 21). Another example is the chase for the speed record in climbing up the "Nose" of El Capitan, a 900 m high rock formation in California's Yosemite Valley. The X-Games or Red-Bull-sponsored extreme sports events deliver further examples in the area of action sports. Extreme athletes with an orange mode of awareness employ a techno-economic approach to nature that is similar to an Eco-Strategist's view (Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmermann 231-232): That means, they manage, use and exploit nature for profits and play. For instance, a monster halfpipe was built in a remote mountain region for a single professional snowboarder ("Red Bull Project X"). In this sense, nature is not much more than scenery. Concerning the kinesthetic or body-related line, an orange mode often understands the body as a machine: Its functions and skills can be trained in a smart and systematic way, in order to reach higher performances and expertise as well as to reduce the risk of injury or death. For the same reason, athletes are not satisfied with less than the best and most functional equipment available. It appears as if extreme athletes partially apply the techno-economic mode not only to improve their equipment and physical abilities, but also in rather superficial methods of psychological skills training like goal setting or imagery, as orange performance psychology recommends.

### *Postconventional modes of awareness*

"There is a lot of life lessons, in climbing, in anything we'd like to dedicate our time to, we inevitably learn a lot of ourselves through the process. ... I do not force it, and so that way it comes, it's like natural and genuine" (male professional rock climber).

In integral theory, postconventional consciousness begins with the *green* level and goes on with the second tier levels of *teal* and *turquoise*. As the Integral Glossary puts it, the stages of second tier "are defined by their capacity to see the relative importance of all value systems, as opposed to First-Tier value systems, which declare their values to be the only correct values". In a green mode of awareness, the self starts to develop a more sensitive and a more subtle sense for itself, others, and the world. Whereas the orange mode accentuates exterior action and superficial motives, interior experience in greater depth and span becomes more important from the green level onwards. Cognitively, individuals at a postconventional level of consciousness realize that one's look at the world is partial. They accept, often painfully, that there are other perspectives that also are true. If they move on, they get interested in other's perspective and work on themselves to understand multiple views and to dive into deeper meaning, communion and truth. At this point, extreme athletes start to get seriously interested in what people from other cultures have to say and how they feel about certain topics; topics that hold not necessarily a direct connection with one's own life and practice – no direct connection on the surface, but perhaps on

a deeper (or higher) level. While interpersonal alliances on an orange level are rather task-oriented or project-related, for instance to train together or to climb a first ascent cooperatively, athletes on a postconventional level are further concerned about care, compassion and a common vision. This goes beyond an orange mode, that is vary of the spectrum of emotions and questions of meaning. In carrying out the sporting practice together, a postconventional mode of awareness additionally puts emphasize on a state of shared consciousness, which Celsi describes with “communitas” and “shared flow”: “Often communitas may be experienced as a feeling of flow, but just as often it is a conscious sense of ,team’, common language, and a shared responsibility. As such, communitas is inclusive of, but not limited to, feelings of shared flow“ (638). As postconventional morality is worldcentric and beyond, some extreme athletes in this mode of awareness participate in, initiate or run long-term developmental or ecological projects on this level. To do this, they often work together with other athletes sharing a common vision of contributing to the world. To give an example: The pro mountain biker I interviewed supports an enterprise that mobilizes people in developmental countries by providing them with bicycles. According to Esbjörn-Hargens’ and Zimmermann’s classification of eco-selves (217-241), individuals at a green “eco-radical” level seek to save nature for its intrinsic value. But they also point out, that worldcentric morality concerning all humans is not inevitably tied to ecocentric morality concerning all animals or nature (223-224). Not all ecologists or outdoor athletes that care and engage in an ecocentric manner for the natural world do care for humans at the same worldcentric level. The authors refer to the research of Peter Kahn Jr. and assume that a biocentric line of development unfolds relatively independent of an anthropocentric line. That means: Not every extreme outdoor athlete who is engaged ecologically has its center of gravity on a postconventional level of consciousness. With regard to sports-related technologies, athletes keep their claim for high-quality and reliable equipment. Besides that, fair production conditions and ecological responsibility of equipment companies and sponsors gain more weight. Unlike the amber mode of awareness, apparel and pieces of sport equipment does not serve as a symbol of status on postconventional levels.

At a postconventional level, the human body and sporting practice itself gets further meaning. As Atkinson notes in his study on Parkour enthusiasts in Toronto, orange or “traditional sports practices contain, discipline, and enframe physical bodies as resources to be deployed toward the attainment of external goals (i.e., competitive and performative sport outcomes)” (179). In contrast, it seems to me that on the achievement line of extreme sports, postconventional athletes value profound individual (and collective) development in and through dedicated sporting practice higher than exterior peak performances or pushing absolute limits. With the step on second tier consciousness, the course and goal of movement practice develops towards the integration of physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual realms. In integral terms, the integration of the body-mind is initiated at the sixth fulcrum (or teal), followed by the integration of soul and spirit on the next levels, if things go well (Pearson 213). Thus, increasing interest in spiritual aspects and regular spiritual practice is a sign that athletes move toward second tier. In this process, individual athletes become aware, in all layers of being, of this temporary experience “of holistic oneness, that makes them feel good and somehow changed” (Celsi, Rose and Leigh 11), formally known as flow, is nothing else than a transcendent state of nonduality (Wilber and Meggyessy). The concept of flow was introduced in mainstream academia by Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He believes that flow experiences are manifestations of a person’s true self. This transcendent state of consciousness reflects the interior aesthetic dimension, which is deeply experienced and highly valued by postconventional athletes. Flow is frequently used in scientific studies as an approach to understanding the

motivations of extreme sports athletes. Athletes on conventional levels of consciousness frequently quote flow experiences as a central motive for their actions, often without realizing what the deeper meaning could be. Concerning the exterior dimension of aestheticization, postconventional extreme athletes skillfully use their means of expression not only in practicing their sport, but also in terms of medial presentation and narration. On second tier levels, a coherent integration of life and extreme sport practice becomes a public expression of their unique self. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, athletes step onto the levels of self-actualization and self-transcendence. Whereas risk taking and risk management in an orange mode of awareness is reduced to rational and analytical approaches and methods, it includes more variables and their systemic interdependence on a green level and beyond. Risk perception, assessment and decision-making are enhanced by high-level cognition, intuitive felt sense and worldcentric morality.

In a phenomenological study, Brymer and Oades explored the positive transformations in courage and humility in extreme sports participants (e.g. BASE jumping, waterfall kayaking, extreme skiing and mountaineering). They conclude that participating in activities in nature, where a mismanaged accident or mistake would most likely result in death, "transforms the human tendency for anthropocentricity and replaces it with ecocentricity and the realization of true courage and humility" (124). I partially agree with this statement: Extreme outdoor sports provide the possibility to develop human virtues; not only humility and courage, but also other positive traits like diligence, patience or temperance, to cite a few examples of Christian catechism. I also believe that these virtues could be transferred to everyday life. But I do question that the possibility to induce personal growth needs only a natural environment and an activity of deadly risk, even if this risk is balanced with skills and expertise. There are several approaches that emphasize the positive potential of (extreme) outdoor sports, but they usually take into account only a few aspects of the Right-Hand quadrants, in this case: high physical risk, skills, and natural environment. I am convinced that an integral approach to these sports practices will convey outdoor athletes on all levels toward less risky and more effective personal growth, with positive consequences on their sporting practice and culture, as well as in ecological and educational terms. But how to apply Integral approaches to outdoor sports?

## **How to apply Integral to (Extreme) Outdoor Sports?**

Above all, Roger Walsh points out that there are two key requirements for optimizing integral contributions in general: First, we must work very carefully and precisely. Second, we must act as gnostic intermediaries. This is a term that was used by Carl Jung. Walsh defines "a gnostic intermediary as a person who is able to effectively translate and transmit wisdom from one culture or community to another" (2). Integral contributions in the field of extreme outdoor sports require to understand and to use the language and the concepts of the athletes and their subcultures. Another requirement is the ability to translate Integral ideas and practices to the athletes, so that they understand theoretically and practically. Therefore it is important for gnostic intermediaries to talk in a way that corresponds to the different modes of awareness. Against the backdrop of these fundamental requirements, I will outline some ways that I currently consider adequate to apply integral ideas and practices to the field of (extreme) outdoor sports.

The *Upper-Right* quadrant considers the aspects of body and movement, which play an important role in outdoor sports. Concerning this realm, I think of an application of body-related integral practices like the 3-Body-Workout, Focus Intensity Training (Wilber, Patten, A. Leonard, and Morelli 133-145, 152-156) or the ITP Kata (G. Leonard and Murphy 73-115). While certain

practices focus more on making a general meaningful contact with the physical and energetic bodies, the fit intensive training could be modified from a strength training towards a program that could be used more specifically in sports with relatively short but intense periods of focused physical movement (e.g. BASE jumping, BMX riding or skateboarding, rock bouldering, cliff diving or freeskiing). Furthermore, I consider brainwave and biofield technology an effective tool, if paired with practices of visualization, meditation and others.

The *Upper-Left quadrant* includes any noteworthy aspects of the athlete's individual experience and creativity. Here it is obvious to make contact with interested athletes and to translate elements of the AQAL model into their concepts and language, and vice versa. As far as I can see, the athletes themselves seek for interpretations of their sport practices. Whereas mainstream approaches to understand extreme sports are simple and quite reductionist (e.g. "I practice extreme sports because I need the adrenaline"), there is a lack of a more complete and deeper meaning. As Bette points out, extreme athletes became more reflexive in the meantime (10). But, in most cases, they adopt superficial interpretations and expectations that are provided by their sporting culture by the mass media and by certain scientific disciplines, in particular psychology. With the AQAL map, the athletes can better access and understand their personal sporting practice in the context of their biography, their typologies, their lines and levels of development and their shadows, especially if the model is taught by a gnostic intermediary. As a scanning device for reality the AQAL map is also a very suitable guide for a broad-based risk-management in extreme sports, as it includes exterior factors as well as interior factors of intuition and morality. And besides that, as Esbjörn-Hargens reveals, AQAL can be much more than a map (18-19). Another benefit of an Upper-Left approach on extreme sports relates to trained states of consciousness through, for example, regular meditation. Wilber (*Integral Spirituality* 73-74) points out, that trained states tend to unfold in a sequential fashion. This is very interesting for athletes, as they frequently oscillate (or switch) the spectrum between gross states and non-dual states, for instance, between focused awareness on a movement task and non-dual flow states. If this sequence is trained, athletes can experience more and deeper flow states.

In the *Lower-Left quadrant*, books, articles or websites can convey integral ideas. If prepared in a way that meets the semantics and values of outdoor sports cultures, integral aspects and practical applications can be distributed to a large number of people to enrich their experience of sporting practice and life. In conjunction with this media-related approach, cooperation with leading extreme athletes would catalyze the mind-changing effects to a much greater extent. As mentioned above, popular professionals play a special role in outdoor sports communities. If they reach a postconventional mode and talk about it, others will follow.

In the *Lower-Right quadrant*, extreme athletes find themselves in a space between sport, economics and the media. To move in this space for a prolonged period of time, it is useful to know the rules of the game. This implies to accept the fact, that the basic resources concerning these systems are limited: Physical capabilities are limited. Funds of money are limited. Media attention or perceptive capacity of media events is limited. As I point out in my thesis, athletes often feel pressured by this shortage of resources: pressure to perform better; pressure to take higher risks; pressure to satisfy their sponsors; pressure to catch the attention of the media; competitive pressure between the athletes (291). This is the conventional mode to fit in the field of extreme sports. In a postconventional mode, athletes not only move in this field, but act on it. One way to do this is using additional resources that are not limited, but that grow if they are skillfully used. Such resources are creativity or sincerity in the Upper-Left quadrant, mutual understanding and value-based communities in the Lower-Left quadrant. There are several ways

to tap these sources: As extreme and outdoor athletes are rarely organized in comparison to traditional sports associations, building up a global network could pave the way to connect on a postconventional level. Networks following the model of integrallife.com facilitate exchange and cooperation, not only within an athletes' community, but beyond. A critical mass of professional and grass-roots athletes entering the second-tier modes of awareness would have an enormous positive influence on the systems of sport, science, economy, education and on ecological issues.

The approaches that I have just presented are some general applications of Integral Theory and Practice on (extreme) outdoor sports. For optimal effectiveness, they must be specified for the particular types and levels of sports practices, individuals, communities and networks. At the moment, I do not know what resonance might be expected of an Integral view and quest for applications on extreme sports. Nonetheless, I look forward to discussing this topic and its related aspects within the integral community and beyond.

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