

# UVM ScholarWorks

## Comparing website presentations of "nature" across Vermont ski areas and adjacent rural communities

Item Type	thesis;article
Authors	Reckard, Margaux Anna-Elizabeth
Download date	2026-06-12 07:25:50
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14849/4820">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14849/4820</a>

COMPARING WEBSITE PRESENTATIONS OF “NATURE” ACROSS VERMONT  
SKI AREAS AND ADJACENT RURAL COMMUNITIES

A Thesis Presented

by

Margaux Reckard

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Science  
Specializing in Natural Resources

January, 2018

Defense Date: November 8, 2017  
Thesis Examination Committee:

Patricia A. Stokowski, Ph.D., Advisor  
Cheryl Morse, Ph.D., Chairperson  
Dona Brown, Ph.D.  
Cynthia J. Forehand, Dean of the Graduate College

## ABSTRACT

Ski areas attract and cater to tourists and are often powerful symbols of cultural identity and place-based meaning. Within contexts of mountain tourism development, ski areas also communicate messages to orient visitors and residents to special features and qualities of the natural environment. This research specifically focuses on how Vermont ski areas and their neighboring rural communities use language, symbolism and imagery, within the context of website communications, to shape cultural meanings of nature and place.

A sample of small, medium, and large ski areas, representing a range of development sizes, locations, and recreational offerings, were paired with their adjacent rural communities. A qualitative content analysis and a textual analysis of photographic images and written texts from ski area and town websites examined presentations of “nature” and place. Website presentations were compared across ski areas of different sizes, and between towns and ski areas. Findings show that portrayals of “nature” differ by the size of the ski area, but are similar across rural towns – though towns tended to produce a discourse about “nature” divergent from that of ski areas. In addition, both ski resort and town websites used images and texts of “Vermont” symbolically in constructing their place identity, though they did this in different ways. This study contributes a better understanding of the ways that ski areas and rural communities work both independently and collaboratively to create and sustain meaningful physical places and cultural myths. Aligning public communications electronically to present a more unified place identity to visitors and residents alike has potential planning and management implications for tourism development, especially in rural regions in Vermont and elsewhere.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is a product of many hands. I'd like to acknowledge my dedicated committee members, Dona and Cherie, whose sincere interest in my work, thought-provoking questions, and candor kept me both focused and inspired.

Outside my committee, Rachelle Gould and Marla Emery were the survival kit and flashlight, respectively, in my forays into the dark and murky mysteries of qualitative analysis software. Carolyn Goodwin Kueffner was also a light, though of a different kind – a warm and steady campfire, happily burning. Thank you, Carolyn, for your hugs, advice, and faith. And of course, my cohort of graduate student comrades provided wisdom, support, humor, and snacks that made these past few years immeasurably better – Finn Yarbrough, Ariana Cano, Hallie Schwab, Nicole Rogers, Emma Sass, Molly Heuss, among many others.

Thanks most of all is due to my advisor, Pat, for her firm guidance, attention to detail, supply of chocolate, and delightful humor when the road became bumpy. She is so deeply committed to her graduate students' success, and I feel quite grateful to be the recipient of her time, encouragement, wisdom, and steadfast support.

And, finally, I'd like to extend my gratitude to the most wonderful human on the entire planet, my partner Quentin, who tolerated me when I was being difficult with endless patience, care, and love.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: COMPARING WEBSITE PRESENTATIONS OF “NATURE” ACROSS VERMONT SKI AREAS AND ADJACENT RURAL COMMUNITIES.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Introduction.....	3
1.2. Literature.....	6
1.2.1. Destination Image.....	8
1.2.2. Tourism Destination Texts .....	9
1.2.3. Language and Place .....	10
1.2.4. From Language to Texts.....	11
1.3. Methods .....	12
1.3.1. Study Sites .....	13
1.3.1.1. Small Ski Areas.....	15
1.3.1.2. Medium Ski Areas .....	17
1.3.1.3. Large Ski Areas.....	17
1.3.2. Data Collection .....	18
1.3.3. Data Analysis.....	22
1.3.3.1. Content and Thematic Analysis .....	23
1.3.3.2. Textual Analysis .....	23
1.4. Results .....	25
1.4.1. Ski Area Website Homepages: Comparisons by Scale .....	26

1.4.1.1. Comparing Images across Scale: Ski Areas and Visual Images .....	27
1.4.1.2. Comparing Messages across Scales: Ski Area Written Texts .....	29
1.4.2. Town Websites: Comparisons across Towns .....	33
1.4.2.1. Comparing Photographic Images on Town Websites.....	34
1.4.2.2. Comparing Written Texts on Town Websites .....	36
1.4.3. The Place of “Vermont” in Ski Area and Town Websites .....	39
1.4.4. The Creation of Ski Area and Town Discourses .....	40
1.5. Discussion.....	41
1.5.1. Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research .....	47
1.6. Conclusion .....	48
1.7. References.....	51
<b>CHAPTER 2: COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>62</b>
2.1. Social Construction of Place.....	63
2.2. Tourism.....	66
2.2.1. Development of Tourism in Vermont.....	66
2.2.2. Destination Image .....	71
2.2.3. Tourism Destinations: Texts.....	72
2.3. Language and Place .....	74
2.3.1. Content Analysis.....	75
2.3.2. Textual Analysis .....	77
2.4. Conclusion .....	80
2.5. References.....	82
<b>COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>89</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1: Study Sites: Vermont Ski Areas and Towns.....	15
Table 2: Study Sites: Town Characteristics .....	16
Table 3: Number of “Screenshots” .....	27
Table 4: Pictures in Screenshots .....	28

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1: Selected Vermont Ski Areas by Scale .....	14
Figure 2: Mad River Glen Home Page, January 22, 2017 .....	20
Figure 3: Mount Snow Resort Home Page, April 6, 2017 .....	29
Figure 4: Magic Mountain Home Page, July 30, 2017 .....	32
Figure 5: Town of Dover Home Page, December 22, 2016 .....	36

**CHAPTER 1: COMPARING WEBSITE PRESENTATIONS OF “NATURE”  
ACROSS VERMONT SKI AREAS AND ADJACENT RURAL COMMUNITIES**

Margaux Reckard

Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont,  
Burlington, VT, USA. [mreckard@uvm.edu](mailto:mreckard@uvm.edu)

Patricia A. Stokowski, PhD.

Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Vermont,  
Burlington, VT, USA. [Patricia.Stokowski@uvm.edu](mailto:Patricia.Stokowski@uvm.edu)

## **Abstract**

Ski areas attract and cater to tourists and are often powerful symbols of cultural identity and place-based meaning. Within contexts of mountain tourism development, ski areas also communicate messages to orient visitors and residents to the natural environment. This research specifically focuses on how Vermont ski areas and their neighboring rural communities use language, symbolism, and imagery in website communications to shape cultural meanings of nature and place. A sample of small, medium, and large ski areas, representing a range of development sizes, locations, and recreational offerings, were paired with their adjacent rural communities. A qualitative content analysis and textual analysis of images and texts from ski area and town websites show that rural towns and ski areas portray “nature” differently. This study contributes a better understanding of how ski areas and communities work both independently and collaboratively to create and sustain meaningful physical places and cultural myths.

**Keywords:** communities; images; nature; ski resorts; texts; textual analysis; social construction of place; websites

## **1.1. Introduction**

Ski areas are not only sites of recreational opportunity, they are also natural landscapes subject to technological control. Though they are unable to function without a predictable winter climate, many ski areas are capable of artificially replicating weather events. They require large numbers of visitors to become profitable – yet many visitors are not skiers but tourists who arrive in off-seasons for other purposes. Ski areas are also notable for their interdependencies with other organizations and institutions. They contribute to the amenity settings of local and regional landscapes and communities, serving not only as recreation activity destinations but as powerful symbols of identity. In this capacity, they highlight for both local people and visitors the social, cultural and ecological qualities supporting local meanings and senses of place.

The state of Vermont offers a high concentration of ski areas, including twenty downhill and thirty Nordic ski centers spread across the Green Mountain range and its rural landscapes. Though it has the second-smallest population in the country, Vermont is located within an eight-hour drive of over 70 million people (USDA Forest Service, 2006). Thus, a considerable portion of state revenue relies on tourism income generally and on the ski industry specifically (Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing, 2013). Ski areas in Vermont are often located within or adjacent to rural or isolated communities, and they take advantage of local and regional landscapes. Thus, the settings of ski areas are linked with natural environments as well as with the local histories and cultural geographies of place. Coupled with their centrality within

Vermont's tourism system, this affords both ski areas and their neighboring rural communities a powerful voice in constructing and reinforcing the imagined and projected images of Vermont.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the marketing and public communications materials of Vermont tourism have used a constellation of physical characteristics – mountainous terrain, open fields, farmland, forest, small villages – to elevate meanings about the dynamic, alluring image of Vermont. Such meanings of place are not static, though they implicitly reinforce the cultural importance of mythic qualities of Vermont (Brown, 1995; Harrison, 2006; Hinrichs, 1998; Morse, et al., 2014; Searls, 2006) – that of picturesque rurality, quaint village life, and hardy Vermonters engaging with “nature.” The imagined “Vermont” is also actively cultivated by the state’s Tourism and Marketing department, which, among other promotional efforts, publishes the quarterly magazine *Vermont Life*. This magazine’s narratives about Vermont’s nature, society and culture, and its high-quality nature photographs, romanticize Vermont’s version of “rurality” (Hinrichs, 1998); the magazine claims to have “helped establish the state’s image as an outdoor paradise” (Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing, 2017). In recent decades, this presentation of the ‘natural’ state of Vermont has often included a socio-political ethic of environmentalism, layering the meaning of the “*Green Mountain State*.”

The ubiquity of outdoor features (forests, fields, barns) to represent “Vermont” makes “nature” a critically important and meaningful part of the state’s identity, and it is therefore reasonable to expect that Vermont businesses and organizations will, in

turn, make pronouncements about the qualities of place where they have invested. Given the high concentration of ski areas in the state, it is also reasonable to expect such pronouncements made by ski areas will center on rural “Vermont” images and presentations that make unique their location in the Green Mountains. These pronouncements are likely to take the form of public communications where rhetorical claims about Vermont are presented in support of business goals. Thus, the public communications produced by ski resorts and rural communities can be proposed to function as discourses about nature and culture reflective of local and regional landscapes. But, what symbolic meanings do these convey?

To answer this question, we focus on certain types of mass mediated messages produced by ski areas and their adjacent communities to evaluate the ways that ideas about nature and culture are organized and presented. We concentrate specifically on the electronic websites of ski resorts and their nearby communities, as these have become prominent communication sources in this digital age. To date, there has been relatively little research about the uses of websites in ski area communications, and there seem to be no published studies about how tourism websites are positioned relative to the public communications of adjacent communities.

The purpose of this study, then, is to understand how ski areas and their neighboring rural communities use language, symbolism and imagery – particularly within the context of website communications – to shape cultural meanings of nature and place. Three research questions guide the study: How is “nature” presented in ski area and community texts and images? Additionally, how else do ski area and

community website texts and images contribute to the symbolic construction of place?  
Finally, to what extent do ski area and community discourses align?

Answering these questions can contribute a better understanding of the ways that ski areas and rural communities work both independently and (potentially) collaboratively to create and sustain meaningful physical places and cultural myths. Studying ski areas in conjunction with their nearby towns may offer practical lessons as well. Ski areas are often economically and culturally tied to local communities, and both are in the business of crafting their image and place identities relative to specific audiences. Aligning public communications electronically to present a more unified place identity to visitors and residents alike has potential planning and management implications for tourism development, especially in rural regions in Vermont and elsewhere.

## **1.2. Literature**

Grounded in qualitative methods, this research focuses on how nature and place are constructed within both written and visual tourism texts. Although issues of language in the social construction of place have been discussed in the tourism literature, scholars have often taken a marketing approach to the subject. Further, the juxtaposition of efforts made by towns and nearby tourism sites has rarely been studied. This research attempts to bridge these gaps by focusing on the communication practices of both tourism sites and towns, broadening traditional inquiries into the discursive construction of place.

### **1.2.1. Destination Image**

Traditional approaches to the special qualities of tourism destinations have focused primarily on the concept of image. In the tourism literature, the concept of image tends to be used in utilitarian ways to describe the ways that destinations are marketed. That is, a given destination has an image that is comprised of its features and physical components, as well as how people feel *toward* that place (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; O’Leary & Deegan, 2005; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2006, among others).

Recently, scholars have attempted to more precisely define the unique components of qualities of place, focusing on what has been called, “destination personality” (Hosany, Ekinici, Uysal, 2006; Chen & Phou, 2013). These researchers argue that a strong positive relationship exists between destination image and destination personality, defined as the human traits assigned to place (for example, friendliness, excitement, or originality (Chen & Phou, 2013)). The theoretical reasoning is that destinations do not just have images, but that images are the basis of individual relationships with place. Often, scholars use attitude theory to support processes of relationship-building with place, citing the cognitive and affective aspects (Chen & Phou, 2013) that tourists use to evaluate, for instance, their satisfaction with a destination. Such studies demonstrate clear practical implications for destination promoters, but in elevating individual attitudes, this approach fails to consider discursive aspects of image-making across tourists and tourism systems.

### **1.2.2. Tourism Destination Texts**

Prior research work on characteristics and uses of language in tourism (Dann, 1996; Jaworski and Pritchard, 2005; Phipps, 2007; among others) provides a foundation for the study of tourism destination texts. But, the textual, semiotic and discursive qualities of ski areas' mass mediated communications have received little attention in the scholarly literature. Most studies of ski tourism focus on visitor perceptions (Bonney-Claudet & Ghantous, 2013; Needham, Wood & Rollins, 2004; Roul, Adjizian, Auger, 2016) and ski areas' climate change adaptation (Dawson & Scott, 2007 & 2013; Scott, McBoyle, Minogue, & Mills, 2006; Steiger, 2010; Steiger & Abegg, 2013). Research about the communication practices of ski areas is far more likely to address utilitarian topics related to marketing and destination management (Perdue, 2001; Spector, Chard, Mallen, & Hyatt, 2012; Williams, Gill & Chura, 2004), rather than questions about discursive aspects of place.

Further, research that does focus on the content and structure of organizational and destination websites has received only limited attention in the tourism literature (see, for instance, Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger, 2010). Quantitative studies (Brito & Pratas, 2015; Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Govers & Go, 2005, among others) have categorized website marketing strategies, but have not compared website contents across destinations or types of providers – such as tourism sites and adjacent towns.

Even outside tourism communications research, there is little published work about economic, socio-cultural, and political relationships between tourism destinations and nearby rural communities. The scholarly literature about tourism and communities

tends to be site-specific, emphasizing residents' perceptions of proposed and actual tourism developments (Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990; Wang & Chen, 2015) and community impacts of tourism development (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Gill, 2004; Simmons, 1994). Some scholars have addressed regional issues in tourism development (see, for example, Nunkoo, 2015; Stokowski, 1996; Valente, Dredge, & Lohmann, 2015), but these studies tend to focus on planning and impacts from the perspectives of residents, governments or businesses, generally ignoring the discursive aspects that drive both tourism and place production.

Some researchers have examined mass media discourses within the wide variety of tourism promotional materials. Stamou and Paraskevopoulos (2004) focused on ecotourism by examining visitor logs in Greece, discovering dual discourses – touristic and environmental. In studying promotional materials of Grenada, Nelson (2005) found that images created sharp divides between nature, place, and people. Both studies demonstrate that tourism discourses are complex, with the potential to produce conflicting meanings across audiences. It is also notable that in much of the research in tourism mass media, few studies have applied *qualitative* methods to analyze the forms, contents and styles of website texts specifically.

### **1.2.3. Language and Place**

Studying visual and written tourism texts can reveal how systems of meaning and symbolism are mapped onto place (Williams & Lew, 2015) in a cycle of production and reproduction of place meanings. The social construction of place has been well-described by Greider and Garkovich (1994), who explain that natural phenomena are

also sociocultural phenomena in that “they are constructed through social interactions” (p. 5). For decades, human geographers have explored place meanings and human experience and immersion in place, beginning with Tuan (1974) and Relph (1976) and extending to more recent investigations of the politics of place-making (Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2011) and place production through performance of rural landscapes (Morse, et al., 2014). We have chosen to focus on the social construction of place in Vermont, as the region relies on the mythic qualities of place to drive not only the cultural economy of tourism, but also to sustain a regional identity.

Language is an apt lens for studying the symbolic construction of place (Tuan, 1991) because language makes legible human experience (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). This research presented in this paper is grounded in the idea that language is a central means of social construction, and the study of texts, then, is an exercise in understanding the social practices of place-making. Thorough analysis of language through texts must complete two tasks to understand the social construction of place. First, textual analysis must “explore how texts are *made* meaningful” as well as how they “contribute to the constitution of social reality by *making* meaning” (ibid., p. 4). Second, Hannam and Knox (2005) advise “unpacking the cultural meanings” of texts as mediators of culture (p.24).

#### **1.2.4. From Language to Texts**

Scholars have used the concept of text to refer to how meaning is constructed through symbolism and form. As used in this study, the concept of “texts” will refer to mass media messages found in the written language of business or community websites. Websites are electronic settings populated by both written and visual texts. These texts

span informational, promotional, narrative, or even inspirational communications, and rely on readers' shared understandings to produce and reproduce meanings of place. Beyond the confines of website media, these texts function as articulations of cultural phenomena in how they represent place (Lehtonen, 2000). This study delves into the meanings of language that are both connotative and denotative (Barthes, 1978) to illuminate how websites communicate an obvious (literal) presentation of place, as well as how they implicitly convey meanings about the social values and systems of social and cultural understanding that shape their production. The practical and symbolic processes of text production require a three-pronged approach to textual analysis (Lehtonen, 2000) that considers texts, cultural context, and audiences.

### **1.3. Methods**

This study examines how written and visual texts, disseminated by tourism providers on ski area and town websites, aim to construct both place generally, and nature specifically. Given the social and symbolic production of texts, the historical and cultural context of Vermont tourism frames the selection of study sites and informs the textual analysis. Data are qualitative, and include written texts and photographic and graphic images visible in mass media communications. In contrast to how "image" is used in "destination image," the term "image" in this paper refers to visual texts – photographs, video snapshots, and drawings on websites.

### 1.3.1. Study Sites

Seeking variation across study sites, a total of 12 Vermont ski areas were selected. These included small, medium and large resorts, located across the state ([Figure 1](#)), and representing a range of development sizes, locations, and recreational offerings ([Table 1](#)). A ski area's size was the key comparative feature, determined by skiable acreage, number of lifts, and number of trails. An effort was also made to select ski areas geographically distributed across the state, and those with outstanding natural or cultural characteristics. While ski areas could also be categorized by numbers of skier visits (Lucas & Goeldner, 1987), this information is often private, and may not be entirely comparable because ski seasons – even at ski areas in the same state – vary in length.

Ski areas were paired with adjacent rural towns ([Table 1](#)) for multiple reasons: 1) towns communicate messages about the same geographic location as ski areas, which extends comparative potential; 2) the literature is largely lacking examination of tourism destinations in conjunction with neighboring communities; 3) ski areas in Vermont are often located on leased public land, which tie resort profits to the public good; and 4) towns often view ski areas as central to their landscapes for ecological, economic, and cultural reasons (see, for instance, the Town of Waitsfield's 2012 Town Plan, which describes how “webs of white ski trails economically bind” (p.9) towns to ski areas' success).

A total of 14 rural towns adjacent to the 12 selected ski areas were chosen for study (three ski areas are each adjacent to two towns). Towns vary according to

population, second-home-ownership, household income, and their levels of tourism development ([Table 2](#)): some enjoy strong tourism economies and high rates of visitation (Woodstock, Stowe, Killington), while others are more rural and less developed (Londonderry, Peru, Fayston). Consequently, the connection to neighboring ski areas varies greatly; some benefit immensely from ski area development, while other towns and ski areas act more independently.



**Figure 1: Selected Vermont Ski Areas by Scale**

**Table 1: Study Sites: Vermont Ski Areas and Towns**

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Ski Area</b>	<b>Towns</b>
Small	Cochran's Ski Area	Richmond
	Middlebury College Snow Bowl	Middlebury Hancock
	Northeast Slopes	E. Corinth
	Suicide Six	Woodstock
Medium	Bromley Mountain Ski Resort	Manchester Peru
	Burke Mountain Resort	Burke
	Mad River Glen Cooperative	Waitsfield Fayston
	Magic Mountain	Londonderry
Large	Killington Resort	Killington
	Pico Mountain Resort	Killington
	Mount Snow	Dover
	Stowe Mountain Resort	Stowe

#### **1.3.1.1. Small Ski Areas**

“Small” ski areas (n=4) were classified as those with fewer than 100 skiable acres and four chairlifts. Cochran’s Ski Area, in the very rural and sprawling Richmond, VT, is famous for its founding family of Olympic skiers who continue to manage the hill today, and for its outstanding contribution to Vermont’s skiing culture. It is also the nation’s only non-profit 501(c)(3) ski area, and caters primarily to local skiers. Also selected for study, Northeast Slopes (near East Corinth, VT) is a local ski hill dependent on community support and volunteerism for upkeep. Its lack of equipment rentals makes it less appealing to tourists.

Many consider Suicide Six ski area the birthplace of skiing in Vermont. It is owned by The Woodstock Inn, in the adjacent town of Woodstock. The town is known

for its self-proclaimed “New England charm” and as the site of Vermont’s only National Park. Suicide Six has evolved to cater to primarily out-of-state tourists. Finally, the sample includes the Middlebury College Snow Bowl, managed by Middlebury College and popular with college students and families. The Snow Bowl is located in the tiny town of Hancock, but is often associated with the larger, wealthier community of Middlebury.

**Table 2: Study Sites: Town Characteristics**

<b>Scale of Adjacent Ski Area</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>% Second-Home Owners</b>	<b>Median Household Income</b>
Small	Richmond	4,397	3.9%	\$44,688
	Middlebury	7,561	2.4%	\$49,414
	Hancock	323	22.6%	<i>N/A</i>
	E. Corinth	1,461	7.3%	<i>N/A</i>
	Woodstock	3,288	19.8%	\$61,339
Medium	Manchester	4,391	52.3%	\$46,667
	Peru	448	70.5%	<i>N/A</i>
	Burke	1,638	29.6%	\$34,545
	Waitsfield	2,574	35.9%	\$40,724
	Fayston	1,660	13.7%	<i>N/A</i>
	Londonderry	1,140	46.8%	<i>N/A</i>
Large	Killington	811	80.1%	\$47,500
	Dover	1,410	80.0%	<i>N/A</i>
	Stowe	4,314	39.4%	\$86,888
Vermont		624,594	14.6%	\$55,176

*Note:* Population and second-home ownership data from 2010 U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml> Median income data from Data USA, which sources data from the American Community Survey, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://datausa.io/>

### **1.3.1.2. Medium Ski Areas**

The four “medium” ski areas include resorts with skiable terrain of 100-300 acres. Burke Mountain Resort is located in the northeastern corner of Vermont in East Burke. It serves visitors interested in adventure sports as well as regional residents, and is known for its summer mountain biking opportunities. Bromley Mountain, located in the town of Peru in the Green Mountain National Forest, presents itself as a family resort, using year-round activities to draw tourists from New Jersey and Massachusetts. It is located near outlet malls and other tourism amenities in neighboring Manchester.

In contrast, central Vermont’s Mad River Glen ski area is a “skiers only” cooperative with strong loyalty from local residents. Located near a cluster of tourism-dependent rural communities (Fayston and Waitsfield, among others), Mad River Glen contributes to a strong regional ski culture. Magic Mountain ski area, near Londonderry in southwestern Vermont, also has a co-op management style. Dubbed the “anti-Vail,” Magic cultivates its reputation as an independent resort (SnowBrains 2016).

### **1.3.1.3. Large Ski Areas**

The four ski areas classified as “large” each contain over 300 skiable acres and exhibit destination resort characteristics such as four-season amenities, large hotels, and high visitation rates. Among these, Killington is the largest and most visited ski area in Vermont, and also owns nearby Pico Mountain Resort; both areas are included in the sample. Killington Resort and the town of Killington cater to large numbers of tourists, despite the town’s small year-round population of 800 residents (U.S. Census Bureau,

2010). Across town, Pico is considered the “local’s resort,” because it lacks the golf, biking, and hotel amenities that draw tourists to its sister mountain.

Despite its relatively small size (485 acres), Stowe Mountain Resort boasts the greatest number of ski runs in the state, and is a nationally-reputed four-season attraction for visitors to the central region of Vermont. The Town of Stowe is also a tourist haven. Stowe Resort was acquired by Colorado’s Vail Mountain Resort in 2017 (Vermont Business Magazine, 2017). Finally, Mount Snow, which dominates the town of Dover, offers year-round tourism with luxury hotels, a golf course, and highly regarded terrain.

### **1.3.2. Data Collection**

Data were collected from ski area and town websites in a systematic, year-long process consistent across all websites. Screenshots of each ski area and town website were recorded and catalogued once a month from August 2016 through July 2017. Screenshots were taken by capturing an image (with a standard “Clip” function of a computer) of the ski area or town’s homepage on their website as it appeared on the researcher’s web browser (see [Figure 2](#)). Because most web pages are scrollable, however, a single screenshot may not be able to capture the entirety of the homepage content. In these instances, screenshots were taken sequentially to capture sections of a scrolling web page. If a homepage contained slideshows of photographs, additional screenshots were also taken so that each successive photo was retained. This process ensured that the data reliably represent any iteration of homepage content a website visitor might encounter. For consistency and comparison, screenshot data were taken

only from each website's homepage. Other kinds of information – maps, descriptions of local amenities, resort or town histories, contact information, and so on – are usually located on web pages beyond the homepage, but these are ignored in this analysis.

This data collection method was intentionally selected to control the size of the images and texts and to preserve image resolution. Taking multiple screenshots manually to obtain all segments of an original web page allows data to be more easily printed for close inspection, allowing researchers to review the data sources separately, and improving inter-coder reliability. Further, while software (such as NCapture) is available that preserves web content off-line in PDF format, web-to-PDF conversion tools can distort the original appearance of the web page or render some text non-searchable. Additionally, taking screenshots provided for more selectivity, prevented repetition in data, excluded advertising and amenity lists (such as ticket prices) that occur when navigating away from the homepage, and ensured consistency in data collection across all ski area and town websites. Screenshots also preserve the context of the original text and images, an improvement in methodology from past studies which collected written texts and photographs in separate Word documents (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007). When performed over time, the screenshot method can reveal how websites change across seasons and years.

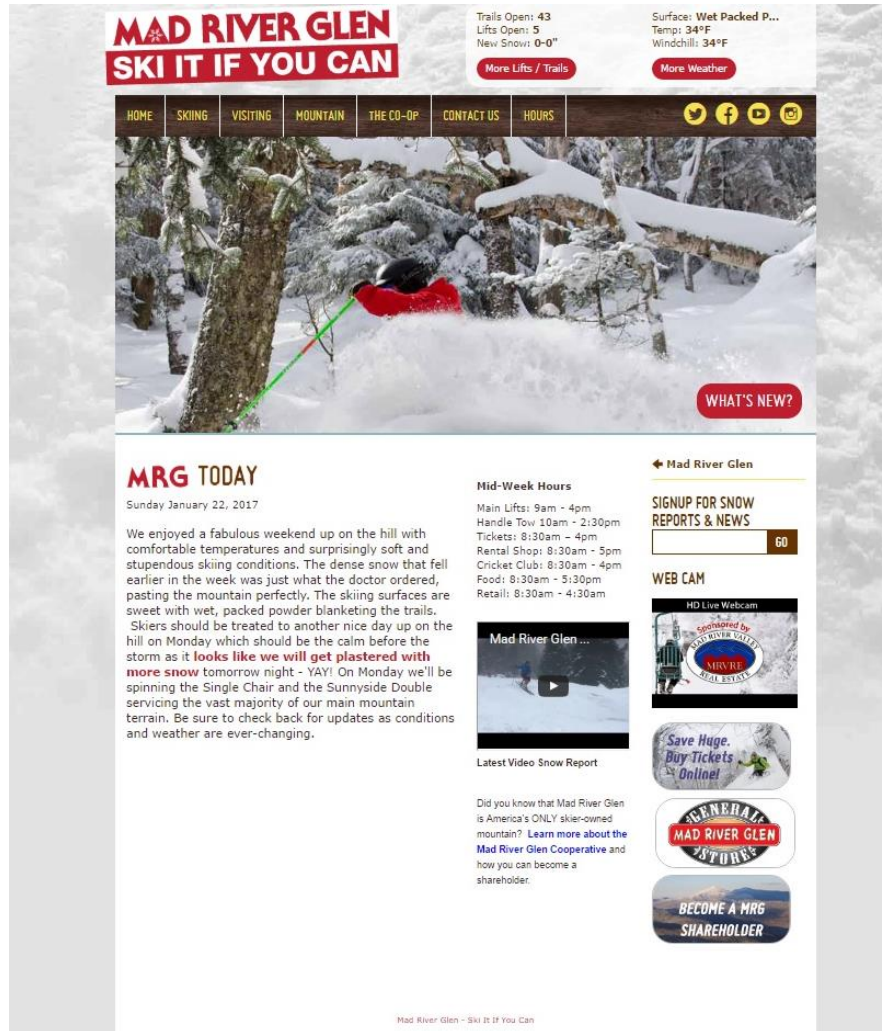


Figure 2: Mad River Glen Home Page, January 22, 2017

It should be noted that ski area and town websites vary in their content, design, and intended audience. Town websites are maintained by public entities (usually local governments) for use by residents, tourists, potential businesses or developers, and others, while ski area websites are promotionally produced by private or non-profit organizations to attract visitors. Although town websites are consequently less professional in their web development than ski areas, both communicate projected

images of place, and were examined using the same methods of content and textual analysis.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed four criteria for qualitative research studies to ensure trustworthiness in both method and findings: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Throughout the data collection process for this study, care was given to “describing the data extensively and compiling them in an orderly way” (Decrop, 2004, p. 161) to achieve transferability and the potential for replicability. Data were sorted by site and month of collection, and a standardized labeling process that catalogued screenshot data by their original website address (URL) and date of capture was used. Field notes accompanied data collection, in order to record contextual information related to ease of access, recurring content across several months, and initial impressions.

In addition, a careful data collection and analysis methodology was developed for this research to add credibility to a type of research often criticized for being too subjective. Two researchers discussed all aspects of data collection and analysis, and performed multiple coding reliability checks throughout the analysis process. These efforts resulted in shared decisions about content categories, categorization procedures, and interpretation of the data. The result was that “theoretical propositions conformed with the interview and observation data” (Decrop, 2004, p.159) to reach confirmability.

Beyond the collection of website screenshots, semi-structured qualitative phone interviews (n=14) were also conducted with as many town officials and ski area managers who were available in mid-summer to supplement website data. These served

as a check on researcher interpretations, and also helped to answer questions related to why certain kinds of mass media communication practices had been chosen by study communities and ski areas.

### **1.3.3. Data Analysis**

The overall goal of this proposed research is to understand how and to what extent discourses about nature and place are incorporated within the electronic website communications of Vermont ski areas and their adjacent communities. For purposes of this research, “nature” is defined as visible ecological elements of the natural world in the vicinity of Vermont ski areas and towns. For example, this includes: trees, night skies, snow, or mountain ridgelines. Additionally, in this research “place” refers to geographic locales and their cultural meanings. This research centers on qualitative content and textual analysis as methods for understanding ski areas’ and towns’ construction of place through mass media communications. Our indicators will be the denotations and connotations provided in written and symbolic texts, as explained below.

Data analysis initially relied on standard interpretive methods of content analysis. Although content analysis has most commonly been applied in quantitative research, this study focused on what Newbold et al. (cited in Stepchenkova, 2012, p. 445) called a more “complete picture of meaning and contextual codes, since texts may contain many other forms of emphasis besides sheer repetition” or countable patterns.

### **1.3.3.1. Content and Thematic Analysis**

Hannam and Knox (2005) describe the core of content analysis as “the basic assumption...that there is a relationship between the frequency of a specific theme and its significance or dominance” (p.24). However, rather than reduce results to a purely quantitative structure, a semiotic approach extends the analysis, in recognition that “there are usually several layers of meaning within any textual or visual analysis and that these are usually arbitrary but bound by particular cultural contexts” that “reveal the indirect and often unintentional levels of meaning” (Hannam & Knox, 2005, p.25). This is a particularly apt means to studying tourism website texts, because they are presumably carefully crafted and packaged, even if influenced by industry, local, and regional interests.

Following categorization and frequency tabulation within content analysis, a thematic analysis was applied to uncover patterns within and across community and ski area texts. Thematic analysis allows for more consideration of texts in context (Braun & Clark, 2006). More specifically, considering the original web layout context of the data, as well as the social context from which the text was produced (for instance, the scale of the ski area, or the reliance of a town on its neighboring ski area’s branding), analysts may obtain a better sense of the richness of meanings of texts.

### **1.3.3.2. Textual Analysis**

A detailed textual analysis revealed further themes and patterns in the data. The connotative and denotative messages of written and visual texts (Barthes, 1978) were dissected to understand their “objective representations of reality” (Geczi, 2016, p.26)

as well as what “is not necessarily immediately graspable” (Barthes, 1978, p. 19). This twofold analysis reveals how the ski area and town texts, which may at first glance seem to simply market recreation or development opportunities, operate within greater systems of social and cultural meaning.

First, texts were examined for what they *literally* communicated (denotations), to ascertain the overall objectives of the websites, the targeted audience, and patterns in the presentation of messages. Next, researchers separately and then together investigated the assumptions and implicit symbolic messages conveyed by the texts (connotations), beginning with analysis of individual texts (such as one- or two-paragraph self-descriptions presented on town homepages) and extending to broader discursive patterns within and across websites.

All forms of analysis of website data were facilitated by NVivo 11 qualitative analysis software. Within NVivo, each ski area or town, as the individual units of observation, was considered a “case.” Screenshots were imported into NVivo, and iteratively coded by identifiers distinct for written texts and pictures to reveal how websites portrayed nature – this constituted the first step of descriptive coding. Of particular interest were written texts about nature and place, such as descriptions of the physical landscape (“our mountain”), explicit articulation of geopolitical boundaries (such as, “we are located in the heart of the Green Mountains,” or “New England town”), and distinguishing features of the location. Codes for pictures included categories for both pictures with people (such as, “one person,” “large group,” or “children emphasized”) and pictures without people (such as, “night sky,”

“condominiums,” or “ski lift”). These procedures allowed for some quantification of results, such as the percentage of images without people. The separate coding scheme for pictures and written texts allowed analysis to be conducted at the level of an individual ski area or town, or to be comparative. Equally important, the separation of codes was necessary because written and visual texts depict places and convey meaning differently (Hunter, 2008), appeal to readers in distinct ways, and vary in their practical applications in the mass media.

The second step of coding aimed to identify the connections between categories of codes and to derive interpretive meanings (Cong, Wu, Morrison, & Wang, 2014; Stepchenkova, 2012). An iterative coding process provided the flexibility of removing inapplicable categories, adding new ones given additional observations, and re-examining previously coded data. Then, a comparative textual analysis was performed to reveal similarities and differences among and between ski areas and towns. Our findings in this paper are largely grouped by written texts and photographic images to demonstrate the distinct ways in which words and images narrate particular perspectives of reality and create specific stories of place (Lehtonen, 2000)

#### **1.4. Results**

Patterns within and across ski areas and towns’ visual and written presentation of place and nature are presented below along three points of comparison: (1) Comparison by scale of the ski area – small, medium, or large; (2) Comparison across towns; and (3) Comparisons between ski areas and towns.

Overall, data analysis revealed three general conclusions: (a) ski areas tended to portray place differently depending on the scale (size) of the ski area, but presentations of nature were most often reduced to snow; (b) town websites contain varying types and presentations of content, but all tend to communicate a similar type of “nature,” and (c) towns tended to produce a discourse about “nature” that is divergent from that produced by ski areas. In addition, data analysis suggests that most websites used “Vermont” in a symbolic fashion to construct their presented place identity, whether through direct references to the state or through classic rural Vermont imagery, though ski areas and towns did so in differing ways.

#### **1.4.1. Ski Area Website Homepages: Comparisons by Scale**

The homepages of ski area websites vary in terms of their web design and level of marketing, but all present common elements, such as trail maps, lists of available amenities, upcoming events, and ticket prices. Ski area websites feature photographs of visitors, mountains, and amenities, using these and written texts to orient the website visitor to the characteristics of the ski area. Often, website content is dynamic, changing with the seasons or weather and the calendar of events.

In general, the quantity of data presented on website homepages varied by size of ski areas and by seasonality. Across all scales, ski area websites published more new website content in winter compared to other times of the year (that is, their homepages changed more frequently during winter months). At the same time, large ski areas tended to produce more new web content consistently throughout the year. Thus, even

though data were collected monthly for each ski area, ski areas contributed proportionally more texts and images to the overall data set as their size (and correspondingly their status, revenues, and level of development) increased (Table 3). Further, there tended to be more written text on small and medium ski area websites in this sample; large ski area websites tended to feature brief, and fewer, written texts, and larger photographs.

**Table 3: Number of “Screenshots”**

Towns		366
Ski Areas		434
	Small	112
	Medium	141
	Large	181
<b>Total</b>		<b>800</b>

Differences across small, medium and large ski areas are evident in the content, form, and style of texts, as well as the images provided on their websites.

#### **1.4.1.1. Comparing Images across Scale: Ski Areas and Visual Images**

The homepages of all ski area websites present a variety of photographic images. Among small ski areas, website images tended to be oriented to families. These featured historical photos, pictures of single skiers racing, and images of children and families. These websites provide fewer landscape shots, and photographs with nature elements (trees, mountains, sky views) almost always include people in the foreground. Generally, small ski area websites feature what might be considered naïve (non-professional) photography: images that show how “regular people” see the place.

Notably, across the four small ski areas, the size, focus, quality, seasonality, and content of pictures varied considerably.

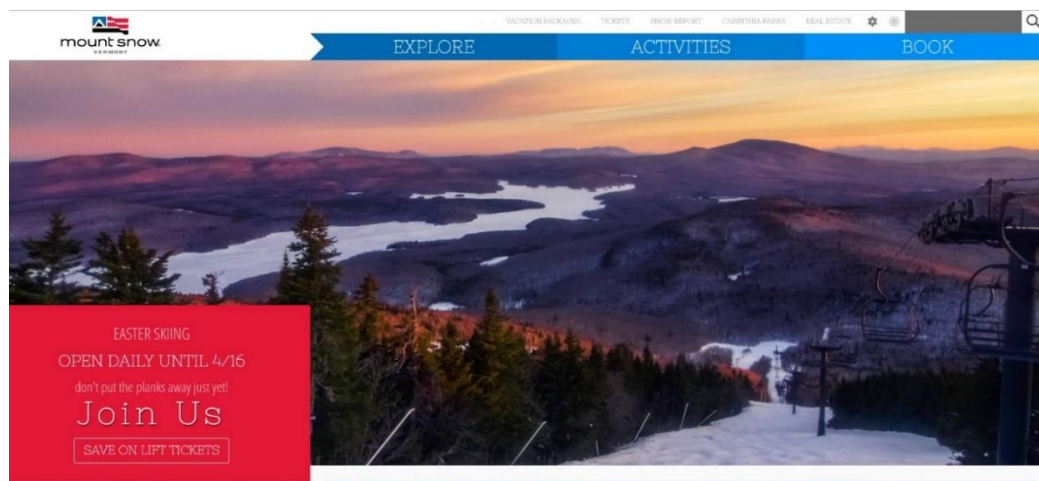
Photographic images used on the homepage websites of medium ski areas tended to retain the family-friendly emphasis of small ski areas, but also showed a variety of amenity features. These pictures featured children and families, often in small groups. The websites also published an abundance of images of ski lifts. Most of all, the homepage websites of medium ski areas featured snow in all its forms – powder, groomed, or spraying from a snowmaking cannon. These snow images tended to present a particular kind of snow: fluffy, bright white, clean, and abundant, rather than the icy, dirty, and patchy snow that often characterizes New England winters.

**Table 4: Pictures in Screenshots**

	Towns	Ski Areas	<b>Total</b>
Number of Pictures with People	82	338	<b>420</b>
Number of Pictures without People	281	121	<b>402</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>822</b>

In contrast to both small and medium ski areas, the homepages of large ski area websites tended to present images that feature both technology (such as ski lifts or snow blowers) as well as sweeping landscape shots; these are often shown together (see [Figure 3](#)). Similarly, the subjects of photographs for these sites are often amenities such as condos, snow groomers, restaurants, and golf courses. Altogether, the large ski areas tended to use images to present a managed landscape, alluding to an idea of a “nature” that is controlled.

Despite the differential presentation of “nature” at each scale of ski area, content analysis revealed one prominent similarity. Notably, ski area websites at all scales generally featured pictures with people – 75% of all pictures included people (see [Table 4](#)). Of these, over one third are pictures of one person skiing. Clothed in bulky ski suits and goggles, the human subjects of these photographs often appear featureless and genderless, and it is not possible to determine if the skier is a tourist or a local resident. Most importantly, these pictures show people *in place*; they communicate that at the ski resort, nature does not stand alone, but is a backdrop for human activity and experience.



**Figure 3: Mount Snow Resort Home Page, April 6, 2017**

#### **1.4.1.2. Comparing Messages across Scales: Ski Area Written Texts**

As with pictures, written website texts varied across small, medium, and large ski areas. The written texts of small ski area websites mostly lacked place descriptions and written texts about “nature,” and tended to minimize the physical characteristics of their mountain setting. Indeed, the few descriptions of place that were presented were chiefly skiing-centric: runs were described “as wide as an eight-lane highway” or with

“challenging terrain.” Instead of place referents, written texts on these homepages emphasized family amenities and espoused a shared “community” feeling. In these cases, though, the term “community” seemed to refer to ski area patrons and employees of the ski area itself, as well as a more abstract idea of a built community, rather than to a geographic area or to the local town.

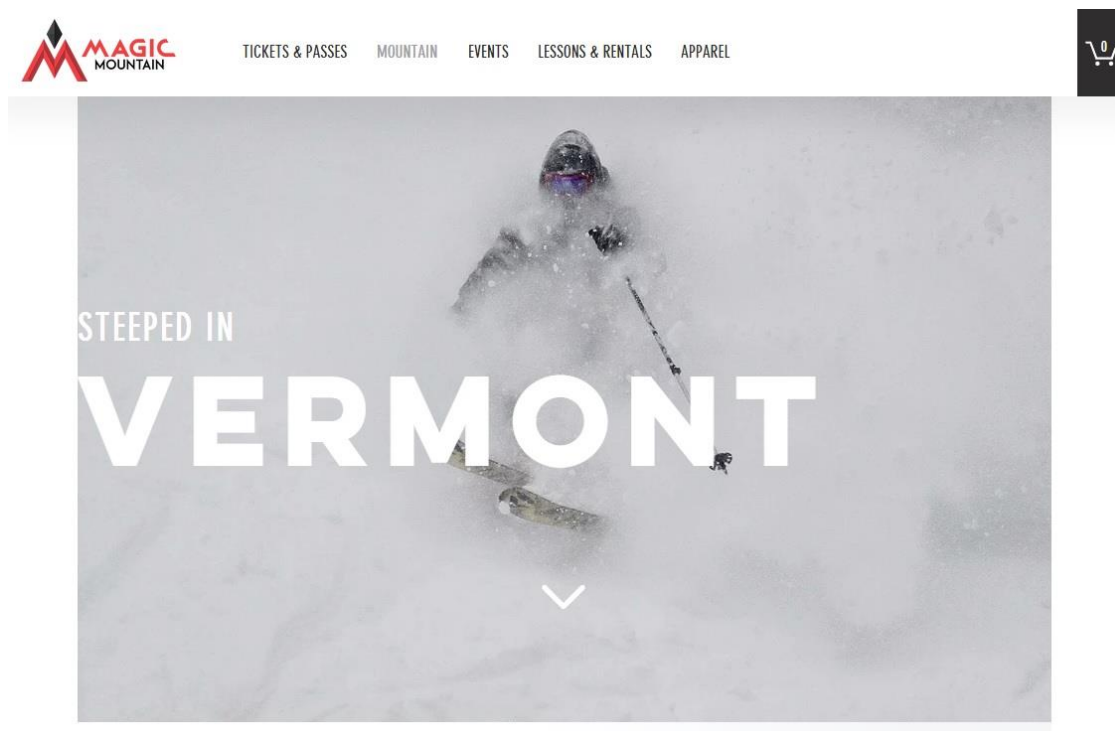
This emphasis on a shared sense of community is evident with Cochran’s frequent reminder that they’re “our favorite little ski area,” drawing the audience in through second-person statements. Middlebury Snow Bowl employs a nearly identical plea to remember “your favorite family friendly ski area,” but they don’t leave it at that. On various panels of text on their homepage they call themselves a “quirky ski area” and a “family friendly mountain.” They also promise that, “Whether you’re a first timer...or an experienced rider...our trained snow school instructors will insure you have a great time out on the snow.” The Snow Bowl’s emphasis on families, enjoyment, and creating ties between management and visitors completely dominates their web texts, leaving a sense of the place itself up to imagination. In sum, “nature” is largely absent in the written texts of small ski area websites, much as it is in their photographs.

The emphasis of small ski areas on a shared community feeling is quite different from the written texts presented on the websites of medium ski areas, which tend to highlight the recreational experiences of the visitor. For instance, Burke Mountain’s catch phrase is, “Your gateway to adventure in the Northeast,” and Mad River Glen’s challenges “Ski it if you can.” Bromley Mountain describes itself as “your family-

friendly Vermont ski resort. To kids, the mountain is huge, and they love our terrain parks. To parents, it's just the right size." Similarly, Mad River Glen's "legendary trails" are "for your skiing pleasure." In these texts, while the setting is billed as part of the visitor experience, characteristics of nature seem to be downplayed; recreation activity is the defining feature.

There are also dozens of texts about varying qualities of snow presented across the four medium ski areas' websites. Mad River Glen's 2017 season highlight was a large winter storm which "utterly transformed" the ski area "into a world-class, powder paradise," and left "freshies to be found in the nooks and crannies." Magic Mountain takes a somewhat more austere, straightforward approach to snow; after describing recent grooming efforts on the mountain, one text claims this shows "how serious we are about...more and better snow." On medium-sized ski area websites, also considering the proliferation of pictures of snow, nature is perceptibly reduced to a preoccupation with the specific yet variable characteristics of snow.

In contrast, large ski areas use their written texts principally to reinforce their established reputations as four-season recreation destinations. For large ski resorts, the concept of "community" is used to refer to local, well-known geographic places, like the towns of Stowe and Killington. Written texts presented on homepage websites allude to "nature" as being part of the resort experience, but these tend to simply underscore the implied values of snow (for example, Killington ski area has the "Most Open Terrain in the East") while avoiding any descriptions of nature or place.



**Figure 4: Magic Mountain Home Page, July 30, 2017**

However, on large ski area websites (and some medium ones), the term “Vermont” is used quite often, though in ways that seem to go beyond its geographic description. Mount Snow contends it is “Vermont’s closest big mountain resort” and has “Vermont’s most scenic [golf] course,” while Stowe boasts the “Highest Peak in Vermont.” A tone of competition is evident in these claims, as if each large ski area attempts to be the “most” representative or equivalent to “Vermont,” without indicating what exactly about them makes them *Vermont* and not anywhere else (see [Figure 4](#)).

Relying on reputation – and using Vermont to reinforce that reputation – can be seen in a text from Stowe Mountain Resort, which appeared on their website after they were purchased by Vail:

Stowe Mountain Resort is an internationally renowned four-season destination. Surrounded by majestic Mt. Mansfield – the highest peak in Vermont – and Spruce Peak, Stowe is filled with activities and adventures for every season and every guest... Stowe’s historic village combined with Vermont’s most spectacular landscape creates the quintessential New England getaway. (<https://www.stowe.com/>)

Here, the self-descriptive adjectives are all about reputation-building: “internationally renowned destination,” “highest peak in Vermont,” “historic village,” and “Vermont’s most spectacular landscape.” Stowe refers to its physical surroundings by lauding the majesty of Mount Mansfield and weaving ties to the mythic “Vermont,” legitimizing itself and communicating that it possesses a mountain and a landscape large enough and notable enough to matter.

Although large, medium, and small ski area website texts are quite distinctive, some similarities across scales do exist. Every ski area uses slang about snow in website written texts – such as “fresh corduroy” (Northeast Slopes), “pow frenzy” (Bromley) and “Dig in, powder hounds, to the faceshot buffet” (Middlebury College Snow Bowl). Other more descriptive texts about snow also abound, especially relating to skiing conditions. Further, none of the website homepages of any ski area explicitly refer to “nature” or even describe landscape features such as glades, woods, or summits. Given the ubiquity of snow texts across ski area websites, it is clear that for ski areas, nature *is* snow.

#### **1.4.2. Town Websites: Comparisons across Towns**

In comparison to ski area websites, town websites are heavily informational, and seem to be targeted to more diverse audiences (part-time and full-time residents,

businesses, tourists). Their often naïve form suggests that many lack sophisticated web development; some of those in the sample even seemed to rely on the same web platform or design template. The homepages of most of the town websites studied here featured dropdown menus listing municipal departments, quick links for residents, and important town documents, such as a Town Plan. Visually, these town websites used a limited color scheme and plain text. The layout of town websites – informational lists and menus – is such that the *visual* presentation, especially the use of pictures, draws attention first.

#### **1.4.2.1. Comparing Photographic Images on Town Websites**

For a visitor to the town websites in this sample, the most obvious presentations of place are through photographs. However, within this sample, some distinctions can be identified in the layout, focus, nature of written texts, and photographs presented across towns with large, small, or medium ski areas nearby. These differences may be based on the level of tourism development in the town, the degree of alignment with the local ski area, or even the objectives and target audiences of the web content itself.

Towns with large ski areas (Dover, Killington, and Stowe) tend to use photographs or logos to align themselves with their nearby ski areas (see [Figure 5](#)). Where Dover’s website employs Mount Snow Resort’s logo, the logos and color schemes of the towns of Killington and Stowe are nearly identical to those of their neighboring ski areas. The aesthetic layout of these websites feature a limited number of colors, and multiple, small photographs. All photographs used contain natural and

cultural landscapes, such as agricultural fields, barns, lakeside development, and ski lifts or ski trails.

In contrast, towns nearer to small ski areas (Richmond, Corinth, Middlebury, Hancock, Woodstock) have largely similar web layouts, dominated by wide header images – two towns even use an identical header photograph. These towns seem to ignore the proximity of their nearby ski area. The websites of all of these five towns heavily features autumn images, and all but one display village pictures (such as a church steeple, a town hall, or a main street).

Towns adjacent to medium ski areas (Burke, Waitsfield, Fayston, Londonderry, Peru, Manchester) represent a spectrum of tourism development levels, and these also tend to display more variability across their websites. None of these sites overtly reference their proximity to a ski area. These homepages also employ a limited color scheme, but a range of photographic skill (from naïve to stylized) can be seen. Unlike the homepages of towns with small ski areas, all seasons are represented on these six websites, spanning photographs of cherry blossoms, bright orange foliage, snowy village streets, and aerial views of deep green forest.

Regardless of the population of each rural town, their tourism development level or their proximity to a ski area, the homepages of town websites tend to exhibit a more consistent form and structure in presenting place imagery. All of the town websites tended to feature iconic rural Vermont images – quaint villages, white churches, covered bridges, and country barns. Twelve of fourteen towns prominently display these images on their homepage (it is notable that ski area websites lack such

images almost entirely). Town websites also heavily feature pictures of autumn scenes (13 of 14 websites), such as stands of blazing maple trees on back roads, tractors hauling bales of hay, and artfully arranged gourds.

### 1.4.2.2. Comparing Written Texts on Town Websites

In their written web texts, towns adjacent to large ski areas (Dover, Killington, Stowe) are information heavy, presenting lists of upcoming events, public notices, and quick links to town documents and policies. Aligned with the local large ski areas

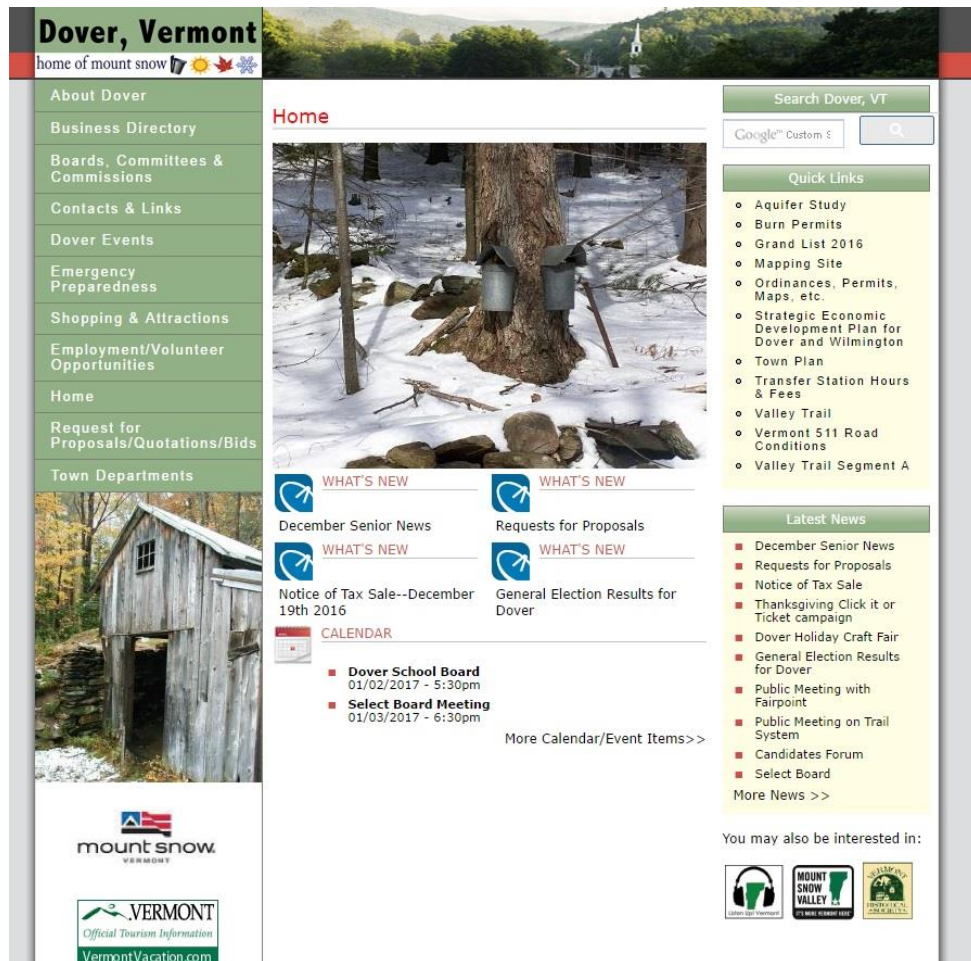


Figure 5: Town of Dover Home Page, December 22, 2016

through photographs and logos, this suggests that these town websites aim to attract business and stimulate development. In contrast, towns nearby small ski areas (Corinth, Hancock, Middlebury, Richmond, Woodstock) present more texts about the town itself and provide information geared toward local residents.

Towns nearby medium ski areas (Burke, Fayston, Londonderry, Manchester, Peru, Waitsfield) have more varied homepages than the other two groups of towns. Those towns with high levels of tourism development (Fayston, Waitsfield, and Manchester) provide considerable tourist information, alongside resources for residents and businesses, indicating the multiple objectives of the website and targeting multiple audiences. In contrast, Peru, Londonderry, and Burke – all relatively tiny rural communities – feature community news, upcoming meetings, and a more insular focus.

Across the sample, all the towns situate themselves in terms of geographic context in the written texts on their website homepages. In fact, it is the most salient way that they distinguish themselves from one another by using phrases such as “in the Green Mountains,” “in central Vermont,” or a “quintessential New England town.” These geographic indicators are the most site-specific, self-descriptive texts on town websites, even as they communicate very little about the distinguishing features of a specific towns’ *place*.

Six towns situated near small and medium ski areas (Burke, Corinth, Hancock, Manchester, Middlebury, and Waitsfield) are unlike the others in that they display prominent written texts on their homepages describing their community; some even detail town histories. Other than Hancock (whose text is primarily focused on outdoor

recreation values of its forest settings), these towns all cater to tourists. Burke's short description draws upon generalized phrases to paint its imagined ethic of rural Vermont for visitors and others:

Established in 1782, the Town of Burke has a rich history, a strong sense of community and an idyllic location, nestled in northern Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. The Town of Burke is a wonderful place to live, visit, or do business. <http://www.burkevermont.org/>

From this text, a reader can deduce very little about the particular qualities of the town; the use of imprecise positive adjectives suggests less about *who* they are than about what they imagine themselves to be. Further, references to residents, visitors, and businesses alike add to the ambiguity of the text.

Using indistinct, positive adjectives is common across the six texts, and is particularly apparent in "nature" descriptions. While Manchester and Middlebury use adjectives to describe their "picturesque" valley and "longest river in Vermont," respectively, both texts transition quickly into their locations as centers of commerce. Similarly, Waitsfield and Hancock allude to the importance of "nature" without identifying anything specific or descriptive of the town. Waitsfield's homepage uses broad, sweeping terms such as "landscape," "agriculture," and "natural and social heritage," while Hancock dubs itself "a gateway to the wilderness," situating nature just outside its boundaries, rather than central to the town itself. Corinth's self-description relies on geographic indicators such as county boundaries, but does not mention "nature" in any capacity. In sum, these six texts communicate that for towns, "nature" is a sight to be seen – but it is not necessarily substantive, or even particular to that place.

### **1.4.3. The Place of “Vermont” in Ski Area and Town Websites**

Despite their distinct representations of “nature,” town and ski area website texts are aligned in a particular presentation of “place,” most noticeably the ubiquity of “Vermont” (as a term, and as an imagined place) across all websites.

Ski areas rarely make linkages to nearby towns explicit on their websites, or even describe their geographic place through distinctive local or regional features. Instead, ski areas more often orient themselves to Vermont. For instance, Bromley Resort includes references to “Bromley, Vermont” throughout its website, discursively fashioning the resort as a town itself (one that doesn’t exist; the resort is located in the town of Peru, VT). Stowe Mountain Resort even minimizes their link to the town of Stowe by interchangeably referring to the town’s charm, “Vermont,” and “New England.” As previously discussed, references to “Vermont” pepper ski area websites, but are unaccompanied by explanation or description. “Vermont” is simply invoked as a recognizable place.

In contrast, town websites employ written and visual imagery to invoke the rural, historicized, and mythic “Vermont.” Four towns craft ties to the state by highlighting their rural past through historic narratives published on their homepages. Consistently, these histories are focused on the town’s founding in the eighteenth or nineteenth century and often neglect to describe the trajectory of how they transformed to the modern-day. In doing so, these town histories characterize the towns’ contemporary reality only in terms of their historical rurality. For example, Corinth’s homepage reads:

Like most of Vermont, our economy is no longer primarily agricultural. Some of us commute to our day jobs or work at home in front of a computer screen. Others of us are loggers, artists, writers, farmers, business people, carpenters and contractors – differing perhaps in how or when we arrived here but still valuing the rural nature of our town and over 200 years of spirited independence. (<http://corinthvt.org/>)

Corinth's history text exemplifies other towns' efforts to use rurality to add an authentic "Vermont" quality to their place.

Across town websites, the frequent autumnal pictures, iconic rural "Vermont" images, and active creation of the mythic "Vermont" through history texts seems to present an aesthetic that is about the state of Vermont (and Vermonters), not a local geographic place. Rather than pointing to town landmarks or distinctive community features, town websites use images and written texts of cultural landscapes associated with "Vermont" to communicate their place identity. Meanwhile, ski area websites invoke "Vermont" in their industry positioning. However, despite how ski area and town websites often attach themselves to the state, "Vermont" goes undefined or unexplained, a general idea standing in for more nuanced descriptions of landscape.

#### **1.4.4. The Creation of Ski Area and Town Discourses**

To better understand the choices leading to town and ski area web content, semi-structured qualitative interviews with the managers of eight ski areas and six town managers supplemented the website analysis. Informants were asked to discuss their intended messages, their choice of media, and their target audiences. They were also asked to elaborate on how ideas about "nature" were conveyed in their public communications. Interview results mirrored results of the website textual analyses. Ski

area managers emphasized that snow was categorically and symbolically the most important aspect of “nature,” and their public communications were oriented to describing its availability and quality for potential audiences. Town managers also described “nature” as central to their public communications efforts, though they tended to describe “nature” as primarily comprised of agriculture, backroads, fall foliage and rural landscapes. Town spokespersons tended to reference nearby ski areas as local attractions, but the reverse was uncommon. In the case where websites align between town and ski area, there was some indication from interviewees that this was an intentional effort.

Overall, despite the regional proximity and cultural and economic influences of ski areas on rural communities, the mass media messages on ski area and town websites generally do not align or reference one another. Five distinct discourses emerged from comparative textual analysis: three relate to the independence of large, medium, and small ski area website communications, while the fourth is the distinct discourse of towns. The fifth, unanticipated discourse was the activation of symbolic, mythic aspects of Vermont to structure nature and place texts. Overall, our results suggest that ski areas and rural communities communicate different ideas about both “nature” and place. For towns, “nature” is cultural and agricultural landscapes. In contrast, for ski areas, “nature” equates with snow.

## **1.5. Discussion**

The contrasting website presentations of “nature” provided by ski areas and towns illuminate not just how these disparate organizations present their settings, but

also reveal the broader systems of meaning that help to produce messages about “nature” and transform ski areas and rural communities into powerful symbols of identity.

Given the suite of physical characteristics that have successfully characterized Vermont tourism and comprise the romantic, cultural myths of “Vermont,” it was expected that ski areas would aestheticize their mountain landscapes and weave ties to Vermont rurality. Instead, ski area communications construct “nature” simply as snow. This presentation of “nature” on ski area websites has several important functions. The ubiquity of written and visual texts about snow signals that snow legitimizes the status of ski areas as recreation destinations. It is snow that makes them *a place*, and subsumes all other place characteristics in the presentation of place identity. But as with all leisure, skiing and riding are short-lived activities, limited by both the length of a ski slope and by the transience of winter snowfall. Therefore, ski area communications are inherently limited by the fleeting nature of their content: recreational experiences, like snow, are ephemeral leisure experiences. Even as ski areas define themselves in terms of snow, and elevate the high quality of their slopes and grooming technology, they do not (or cannot) present a lasting or robust, complex idea of “place” in the visitor imagination.

Second, the use of generalized photos of snow also renders the location of these ski areas, as seen on their websites, as nondescript, unidentifiable, and indistinguishable from other ski areas. These textual practices communicate that physical, or even symbolic, place is second to a particular, guaranteed recreation experience. In doing so,

they rely on imagined landscapes and imagined experiences. In reality, ski areas in Vermont often have poor quality, icy snow, and guaranteed snowfall is impossible with an increasingly unpredictable winter climate. Therefore, the function of visual and written texts about high quality, white, fluffy snow is clearly used to represent imagined ideas and experiences, even if this might not be truthful.

Written texts containing slang associated with snow also pepper the ski area websites, but the use of such slang is arguably limiting and exclusionary because it prescribes meaning that is related specifically to the recreation experience (as achieved by specific groups of participants). Slang emphasizes a particular way of *knowing* about snow, and the frequency of texts with slang about snow on small, medium and large ski area websites also communicates a particular understanding of place. Texts with slang about snow cement the recreational function of “nature by transforming a natural resource into a consumable, fashionable, yet featureless product – “nature” becomes a literal recreational surface. In kind, when ski area websites use pictures to present technology *with* nature, they communicate that nature doesn’t stand alone; it is controlled and managed for the sake of the recreation experience (for the audience) and for the sake of reputation (for the ski area).

But perhaps most importantly, abundant texts about snow diminish “nature” to a single characteristic. Because ski area websites present a united front on what constitutes “nature,” they produce a particular understanding for audience consumption. It is possible that the reality of climate change and unpredictable weather, and the necessity of technological fixes (grooming and snowmaking) to counter the effects,

heightens the significance of a prescribed meaning of “nature.” Texts about snow signal a “nature” that is controlled, manipulated, and even replicable. Across all scales, ski areas communicate that both the physical and constructed place have been commercialized and controlled – that nature is not prioritized and therefore not necessary to the ski area’s place identity. This may indicate that ski areas, having identified their precarious position in a now variable climate, seek to separate “nature” from place.

At the same time, ski area websites continue to heavily rely on “Vermont” as a stand-alone descriptor, one that is non-specific to a particular ski area. Perhaps the most demonstrative example is Magic Mountain’s home page, which for several months in 2017 declared in bold white letters across a nearly all-white picture of a skier emerging from a cloud of snow, “Steeped in Vermont” (see [Figure 4](#)). Not only does the picture literally convey someone immersed in snow, and therefore, in “nature,” but the “Steeped in Vermont” descriptor communicates that the skier is also somehow immersed in “*Vermont*” without any indication to how. Here, the stand-alone “Vermont” attempts to encapsulate so much that it in actuality communicates very little about the specific place. Magic Mountain, among many of the other ski areas, relies on a very imprecise, shallow idea about, and fantasized meaning of, “Vermont.”

The mythic qualities of the “Vermont” label are clearly expected to convey import and meaning with the audience, but such broad geographic descriptors as “New England” and “Vermont” perform a second discursive function. For website audiences of both visitors and residents, state and regional identifiers are recognizable and

familiar, and their use in communications renders place legible and consumable. Reducing place to the single known (marketable) identifier of Vermont seems especially typical of large ski areas. This suggests the pervasiveness of “Vermont” as a cultural myth, one that adds relevance, importance, or distinctiveness, as if all readers/viewers will have the same understanding of “Vermont.” However, because *all* ski areas invoke the term “Vermont” and avoid substantive place descriptions, they consequently become indistinct from one another. Additionally, the emphasis on snow that diminishes “nature” to a single, commodified component reduces how ski areas represent the complexity of place, with the consequence that places become interchangeable across the region.

In kind, towns’ presentation of “nature” as cultural rural landscapes is in fact a presentation of “Vermont,” and its consistent overuse similarly renders the towns interchangeable and unrecognizable from one another. For instance, towns with medium ski areas, whose websites contain a wide variety of pictures that span seasons and emphasize cultural landscapes, appear to be working much harder to create a visual understanding of their community. In fact, the type of place presented may not be reflective of reality at all. For example, the use of primarily autumn-in-Vermont images, and the imprecise positive adjectives used by towns in their self-descriptions, communicate so little that a town’s place identity is unclear. Do they have a place that is *theirs*, or are they just another identical, rural Vermont town? The resulting representations of the towns are nondescript and indistinct. Vermont towns exploit “Vermont” imagery in both words and images – a *practice* of rurality (Hinrichs, 1998;

Morse, et al., 2014), rather than reality. That they also ignore their nearby ski areas seems to suggest that their primary emphasis is on the past, not the present.

We can speculate that the towns all have self-directed reasons for aligning themselves with “Vermont,” such as town size or possibly the level of tourism development. However, town websites do show a reliance on “Vermont” as a fixed and stable image. Consistent symbolism, invoked by images of barns, maple sugaring, and town halls, is that of the “Vermont” myth. Town website texts and images, drowned in the place-based cultural tropes of “Vermont,” consequently – and perhaps ironically – make themselves indistinct as anything beyond ‘another rural Vermont town.’

Ski area and town websites communicate disparate ideas of “nature,” even of overlapping geographic locations. What this means is that the place identity of “Vermont,” invoked in name only by the ski areas, and carefully constructed through imagery by the towns, is embattled. Pulled in four different directions by different-sized ski areas and also the towns, the presentation of the state’s place identity occupies a paradox. “Vermont” is, at once, assumed to be understood homogenously by audiences, and yet is applied liberally and imprecisely.

Although ski areas and towns link themselves to “Vermont” in unique ways, all point to what “Vermont” should be. “Vermont” is an imagined place, though ski resorts and towns imagine it differently. In doing so, they lean heavily on the state’s imagery and reputation. For these tourist places, image is everything – especially image about place.

### **1.5.1. Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research**

This study has provided an initial examination of ski area and town websites, but several issues remain. Several notable Vermont ski areas have been excluded from this study: Jay Peak and Smuggler's Notch Resort are popular throughout the Northeast but lack adjacent communities. However, these resorts do represent a unique type of tourism, in which four-season destinations have almost developed into towns in their own right; their public communications deserve future study. Additionally, a discourse study of tourism destinations throughout the Northeast would reveal more complexities about place-making processes and uses of cultural myths in place-making.

Other opportunities lie in comparative studies of the discursive processes of place construction in Vermont with other rural ski areas and communities in Colorado, British Columbia, or Europe. In particular, given the heavy emphasis of snow by ski area websites, other ski area texts (in Vermont or elsewhere) spanning the past several decades could be studied to determine whether this emphasis has intensified over time. That is, is there a relationship between the pressures of climate change and the necessity for ski areas to maintain a reputation for possessing 'quality' snow? A longitudinal study of ski area texts might also reveal whether ski area presentations of place have changed over time in light of a warmer and less predictable climate.

One of the limitations of this research is the length of the website data collection period, and the volume of website material reviewed. One avenue to lengthen collection of website data for comparative purposes is to use internet archive services such as the "Internet Archive Wayback Machine." These services sporadically save web pages over

time to preserve their original content and design, enabling further tourism research to include expired web pages into comparative analysis.

Another limitation is that this study only considered the homepages of ski area and town websites, though other web pages might also contain information, descriptions, history narratives, and additional images that could contribute to the presentation of place. Choosing a smaller sample of tourism destinations and rural communities, but looking more broadly at all web media materials they present, is an avenue for future research.

A final limitation is the style, form, and content of the town and ski area websites, which together comprise varying levels of sophistication in presentation and content. Although researchers took care to use consistent data collection and data analysis methods across websites, the variety of original website *contexts* for data limits the replicability of this study with the same ski area and community cases (that is, website material is impermanent). Further, ski area and town websites are produced by private and public entities respectively. Despite ski areas' and towns' cultural, economic, and political ties, which motivated our two-pronged study, their public communications are perhaps not always intended for the same audiences and are therefore not entirely comparable.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

This study used qualitative methods of content and thematic textual analysis to compare constructions of “nature” and place across both tourism and town sites. Ski area and town websites in Vermont revealed stark differences in presentations of

“nature” and place, constituting four distinct discourses about place. Nevertheless, all study sites did align themselves with a fifth discourse drawn from myths of “Vermont” that seemed an attempt to craft place identity. Highly manipulated, this fifth discourse ascends to an overarching commentary that erases aspects of distinctive place identity from either group – ski areas or towns. Because both employ varied imagery and symbolism to convey “Vermont,” very real cultural, economic, and political implications at the local and state level result. Understanding how both private and public organizations present place in the same geographic region reveals how multiple systems of meaning are produced and reproduced.

As ski areas begin to adapt their messaging and development strategies to address potential climate change impacts, their shifting place identities may cause tension with residents, visitors, and even politicians. Understanding how ski areas adapt their textual presentations of place in light of a changing climate could provide new insight about how a state with a cultural identity embedded in tourism can create a “new” image of place. Textual analysis reveals implicit, symbolic meanings in the public communication of places that might otherwise go unnoticed. For a place-based industry, this study’s textual analysis can be used strategically to improve joint efforts with rural communities to promote tourism in Vermont. Website communications may represent an imagined, crafted, marketed reality, but they are consumed by real people, who translate those messages – unconsciously or not – into their understanding of a place. For an industry that is so visible and valuable for Vermont and the Northeast, this is a precarious balance to strike. If the type of “Vermont” that ski areas are presenting

in mass media texts is incongruous with that of the towns, then there is a missed opportunity for cultural and economic vision and alignment. Further, if both town and ski area imaginings about Vermont are out-of-step with reality, Vermont itself may also suffer.

## 1.7. References

- Adams, D. (2016) "New England ski industry feeling under the weather." *Boston Globe*.
- Barthes, R. (1978) *Image, music, text*. (S. Heath, ed. and trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bonnefoy-Claudet, L., & Ghantous, N. (2013) Emotions' impact on tourists' satisfaction with ski resorts: The mediating role of perceived value. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30:624-637.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brito, P. Q., & Pratas, J. (2015). Tourism brochures: Linking message strategies, tactics and brand destination attributes. *Tourism Management*, 48, 123-138.
- Bromley Mountain. (2017). *Bromley Mountain Ski Resort*. Retrieved from <https://www.bromley.com/>
- Brown, D. (1995). *Inventing New England regional tourism in the nineteenth century*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Chen, C. F., & Phou, S. (2013). A closer look at destination: Image, personality, relationship and loyalty. *Tourism Management*, 36, 269-278.
- Choi, S., Lehto, X. Y., & Morrison, A. M. (2007). Destination image representation on the web: Content analysis of Macau travel related websites. *Tourism Management*, 28(1), 118-129.

- Cochran's Ski Area. (2017). *Cochran's Ski Area*. Retrieved from <http://www.cochranskiarea.com/>
- Cong, L., Wu, B., Morrison, A. M., Shu, H., & Wang, M. (2014). Analysis of wildlife tourism experiences with endangered species: An exploratory study of encounters with giant pandas in Chengdu, China. *Tourism Management, 40*, 300-310.
- Corinth, Vermont Official Website – Municipal Info 05039-05040. (2017). *Town of Corinth, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://corinthvt.org/>
- Dann, G.M.S. (1996). *The language of tourism: A sociolinguistic perspective*. Wallingford: CAB International.
- Dawson, J. & Scott, D. (2007) Climate change vulnerability of the Vermont ski tourism industry (USA). *Annals of Leisure Research, 550-572*.
- Dawson, J., & Scott, D. (2013) Managing for climate change in the alpine ski sector. *Tourism Management, 35*, 244-254.
- Decrop, A. (2004) Trustworthiness. In Phillimore, J. & Goodson, L. (Eds.), *Qualitative Research in Tourism: Ontologies, Epistemologies and Methodologies* (pp. 156-169). Routledge: New York.
- Dover, Vermont. (2017). *Dover, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.doververmont.com/>
- Fayston VT | Official Municipal Website. (2017). *Town of Fayston, Vermont*. Retrieved from <https://www.faystonvt.com/>

- Geczi, E. (2016). *Placing natural resource decisions in social and historical contexts: Sociological inquiries into agency communications, management rationalities, and community change*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ScholarWorks Graduate College Dissertations and Theses. (Paper 551)
- Gill, A. (2004). Communities and growth management. In Lew, A.A., Hall, C.M., & A.M. Williams (Eds.), *A Companion to Tourism* (pp. 569-583). Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Govers, R., & Go, F. M. (2004). Projected destination image online: Website content analysis of pictures and text. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 7(2), 73-89.
- Greider, T. & Garkovich, L. (1994). Landscapes: The social construction of nature and the environment. *Rural Sociology*, 59(1), 1-24.
- Hallett, R.W., & Kaplan-Weinger, J. (2010). *Official tourism websites: A discourse analysis perspective*. Channel View Publications: Bristol.
- Hancock, Vermont. (2016). *Town of Hancock, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://hancockvt.us/>
- Hannam, K., & Knox, D. (2005). Discourse analysis in tourism research a critical perspective. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 30(2), 23-30.
- Harrison, B. (2006). *The view from Vermont: Tourism and the making of an American rural landscape*. Burlington: University of Vermont Press.
- Hinrichs, C. C. (1998). Sideline and lifeline: The cultural economy of maple syrup production. *Rural Sociology*, 63(4), 507-532.

- Home » Burke Mountain Resort. (2017). *Burke Mountain*. Retrieved from <http://skiburke.com/>
- Hosany, S., Ekinici, Y., & Uysal, M. (2006). Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(5), 638-642.
- Hunter, W.C. (2008). A typology of photographic representations for tourism: Depictions of groomed spaces. *Tourism Management* 29, 354-365.
- Jamal, T. B., & Getz, D. (1995). Collaboration theory and community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), 186-204.
- Jaworski, A., & Pritchard, A. (Eds.). (2005). *Discourse, communication, and tourism* (Vol. 5). Channel View Publications.
- Jones, K. (2015). *Benchmark Study of the Impact of Visitor Spending on the Vermont Economy: 2013: Tourism is Vital to Vermont*. Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing.
- Killington – Welcome to the Beast. (2017). *Killington Resort*. Retrieved from <http://www.killington.com/site/index.html>
- Lehtonen, M. (2000). *The cultural analysis of texts*. London: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). London: Sage.
- Lucas, C.A., & Goeldner, C.R. (1987). Ski area marketing: A survey of NSAA United States ski area marketing departments 1985-86 season (Graduate Research). Business Research Division, Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Colorado, Boulder.

- Mad River Glen, VT: Ski It If You Can. (2017). *Mad River Glen Cooperative*. Retrieved from <http://www.madriverglen.com/>
- Magic Mountain Ski Area | Home. (2017). *Magic Mountain*. Retrieved from <https://www.magicmtn.com/>
- Middlebury Snow Bowl. (2017). *Middlebury Snow Bowl VT Family Friendly Ski Area*. Retrieved from <https://www.middleburysnowbowl.com/>
- Morse, C. E., Strong, A.M., Mendez, V.E., Lovell, S.T., Troy, A.R., & Morris, W.B. (2014). Performing a New England landscape: Viewing, engaging, and belonging. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 36, 226-236.
- Mount Snow® :: Vermont's Closest Big Mountain Ski & Snowboard Resort. (2017). *Mount Snow, Vermont*. Retrieved from <https://www.mountsnow.com/>
- Needham, M.D., Wood, C.J.B., & Rollins, R.B. (2004). Understanding summer visitors and their experiences at the Whistler Mountain ski area, Canada. *Mountain Research and Development*, 24(3), 234-242.
- Nelson, V. (2005) Representation and images of people, place and nature in Grenada's tourism. *Geografiska Annaler Series B* 87(2), 131-143.
- Northeast Slopes Est1936. (2017). *Northeast Slopes Ski Area*. Retrieved from <http://www.northeast slopes.org/>
- Nunkoo, R. (2015). Tourism development and trust in local government. *Tourism Management*, 46, 623-634.

- O'Leary, S., & Deegan, J. (2005). Ireland's image as a tourism destination in France: Attribute importance and performance. *Journal of travel research*, 43(3), 247-256.
- Official Website of the Town of Stowe, Vermont. (2017). *Town of Stowe, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.townofstowevt.org/>
- Perdue, R. (2001) Internet site evaluations: Influence of behavioral experience, existing images, and selected website characteristics. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 11(2), 21-38.
- Perdue, R. R., Long, P. T., & Allen, L. (1990). Resident support for tourism development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17(4), 586-599.
- Peru, VT – Our Community. (2017). *Peru, VT*. Retrieved from <http://www.peruvt.org/>
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction* (Vol. 50). Sage Publications.
- Phipps, A. (2006). *Learning the arts of linguistic survival: Languaging, tourism, life* (Vol. 10). Multilingual Matters.
- Pico Mountain. (2017). *Pico Mountain Resort*. Retrieved from <http://www.picomountain.com/site/index.html>
- Pierce, J., Martin, D. G., & Murphy, J. T. (2011). Relational place-making: The networked politics of place. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36(1), 54-70.
- Relph, E. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. London: Pion Limited.

- Richmond, VT – Our Town. (2017). *Town of Richmond, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.richmondvt.gov/>
- Roult, R., Adjizian, J. M., & Auger, D. (2016). Sense of place in tourism and leisure: The case of touring skiers in Quebec. *Almatourism-Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development*, 7(13), 79-94.
- Scott, D., McBoyle, G., Minogue, A., & Mills, B. (2006) Climate Change and the Sustainability of Ski-based Tourism in Eastern North America: A Reassessment. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 14(4), 376-398.
- Searls, P.M. (2006). *Two Vermonts: Geography and identity, 1865-1910*. Durham: University of New Hampshire Press.
- Simmons, D. G. (1994). Community participation in tourism planning. *Tourism Management*, 15(2), 98-108.
- SnowBrains (2016, August 16). Magic Mountain Ski Area, VT Bought By The Anti-Vail. Retrieved from <http://snowbrains.com/magic-mountain-ski-area-vt-bought-by-the-anti-vail/>
- Spector, S., Chard, C., Mallen, C., & Hyatt, C. (2012). Socially constructed environmental issues and sport: A content analysis of ski resort environmental communications. *Sport Management Review*, 15(4), 416-433.
- Stamou, A. G., & Paraskevopoulos, S. (2004). Images of nature by tourism and environmentalist discourses in visitors books: A critical discourse analysis of ecotourism. *Discourse & Society*, 15(1), 105-129.

- Steiger, R. (2010). The impact of climate change on ski season length and snowmaking requirements in Tyrol, Austria. *Climate Research*, 43(3), 251-262.
- Steiger, R. & B. Abegg. 2013. The sensitivity of Austrian ski areas to climate change. *Tourism Planning and Development*, 20(4), 480-493.
- Stepchenkova, S. (2012). Content analysis. In Dwyer, L., Gill, A. & N. Seetaram (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Tourism: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (pp. 443-458). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- Stepchenkova, S., & Morrison, A. M. (2006). The destination image of Russia: From the online induced perspective. *Tourism Management*, 27(5), 943-956.
- Stepchenkova, S., Kirilenko, A. P., & Morrison, A. M. (2009). Facilitating content analysis in tourism research. *Journal of Travel Research*, 47(4), 454-469.
- Stokowski, P. A. (1996). *Riches and regrets: Betting on gambling in two Colorado mountain towns*. University Press of Colorado.
- Stowe Mountain Resort Vermont Ski and Summer Adventures Resort. (2017). *Stowe Mountain Resort*. Retrieved from <https://www.stowe.com/>
- Town of Burke, Vermont. (2017). *Town of Burke, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.burkevermont.org/>
- Town of Killington, Vermont. (2017). *Town of Killington, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.killingtontown.com/>
- Town of Londonderry, VT. (2017). *Town of Londonderry, VT*. Retrieved from <http://www.londonderryvt.org/>

- Town of Manchester, Vermont | So Close. So Vermont. (2017). *Town of Manchester, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://manchester-vt.gov/>
- Town of Manchester, Vermont | So Close. So Vermont. (2017). *Town of Manchester, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://manchester-vt.gov/>
- Town of Waitsfield. (2012). *Waitsfield Town Plan; Adopted October 22, 2012*. Waitsfield, VT.
- Town of Waitsfield, Vermont | Official Website of the Town of Waitsfield. (2017). *Waitsfield, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.waitsfieldvt.us/>
- Town of Woodstock, VT. (2017). *Town of Woodstock, Vermont*. Retrieved from <https://townofwoodstock.org/>
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1974). *Topophilia: A study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1991) Language and the making of place: A narrative-descriptive approach. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81(4), 684-696.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010*. Retrieved from [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?sr\\_c=CF](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?sr_c=CF)
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2014) *American Community Survey: 2014*. Retrieved from <https://datausa.io/>
- USDA Forest Service. (2006). *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Land and Resource Management Plan Green Mountain National Forest* (USDA FS

Publication No. NWU 20060107). Milwaukee, WI: United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service.

Valente, F., Dredge, D., & Lohmann, G. (2015). Leadership and governance in regional tourism. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 4(2), 127-136.

Vermont Business Magazine. (2017, June 7) Vail Resorts closes on acquisition of Stowe Mountain Resort. Retrieved from <http://www.vermontbiz.com/news/june/vail-resorts-closes-acquisition-stowe-mountain-resort> Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing. (2017). How we promote Vermont. Retrieved from <http://accd.vermont.gov/tourism/how-we-promote>

Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing. (2017). How we promote Vermont. Retrieved from <http://accd.vermont.gov/tourism/how-we-promote>

Wang, S., & Chen, J. S. (2015). The influence of place identity on perceived tourism impacts. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 52, 16-28.

Welcome to Town of Middlebury, VT. (2017). *Town of Middlebury, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.townofmiddlebury.org/>

Williams, P., Gill, A., & Chura, N. (2004). Branding mountain destinations: The battle for "placefulness." *Tourism Review of AIEST - International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism*, 59(1), 6-15.

Williams, S., & Lew, A. A. (2015). *Tourism geography: critical understandings of place, space and experience*. New York: Routledge.

Woodstock Inn Ski Area | Suicide Six Vermont. (2017). *Woodstock Inn & Resort*.

Retrieved from <https://www.woodstockinn.com/ski-area>

## **CHAPTER 2: COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW**

Grounded in qualitative methods, this thesis focuses on how nature and place are constructed through the mass media communications of ski areas and rural communities in the state of Vermont. Therefore, various modes of inquiry inform this work, ranging from the specificity of tourism development in Vermont to broader issues in tourism scholarship, as well as particular methods of textual analysis extending to language as a mediator of broad systems of meaning.

However, this thesis also arose from an opportunity to extend the methodologies of these areas of scholarship: given the power of language to construct cultural understandings of place, and given the centrality of place to the marketing of ski areas and towns in Vermont, why not examine the website messaging that likely informs public perceptions of place in a digital age? Although issues of language in the social construction of place have been discussed in the tourism literature, scholars have often taken a marketing approach to the subject. Further, the juxtaposition of efforts made by towns and nearby tourism sites has rarely been studied. This thesis attempts to bridge these gaps by focusing on the communication practices of both tourism sites and towns, broadening traditional inquiries into the discursive construction of place.

The comprehensive literature review in this chapter offers context for the theoretical foundation and methodological process of the previous chapter's qualitative study. This literature review is presented in three broad sections: the theoretical positioning of the social construction of place (2); tourism – both the broad scholarly

tourism literature and a more specific evaluation of Vermont tourism (2); and methods of analysis (3).

## 2.1. Social Construction of Place

For decades, human geographers have explored place meanings and human experience and immersion in place, beginning with Tuan (1974) and Relph (1976) and extending to more recent investigations of the politics of place-making (Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2011) and place production through performance of rural landscapes (Morse, et al., 2014). This thesis applies the concept of the social construction of place to Vermont, as the state relies on the mythic qualities of place to drive not only the cultural economy of tourism, but also to sustain a regional identity.

The theoretical foundation for this thesis borrows from the humanistic geography canon, especially Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977), and the idea that place “[expresses] an attitude to the world that [emphasizes] subjectivity and experience” (Cresswell, 2015, p. 35). In this way, place can be seen as coloring all social relations, and as the basis for how humans make meaning of everyday experiences – place is a “universal and transhistorical part of the human condition,” or a “way of being-in-the-world” (ibid.). *Place* has been theorized in relation to *space*, as Cresswell identifies: “Space is a more abstract concept than place....Spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space between them. Yi-Fu Tuan has likened space to movement and place to pauses – stops along the way” (p. 15). Place can be considered as “space invested with meaning in the context of power” (p. 19), making it universal across human experience;

its dissection, then, “has been one of the central tasks of human geography” as a discipline, Cresswell writes (p. 19).

Tuan and Relph viewed place more holistically both geospatially and theoretically than prior human geographers: ““At one extreme a favorite armchair is a place, the other extreme the whole earth” (Tuan, 1977, 149)”” (Cresswell, p. 36). Further, Relph considered location as “not a necessary or sufficient condition of place” (p. 37), signaling a significant departure from an earlier iteration of geography.

Tuan and Relph’s conceptualization of place informs the field of social constructionism. The social construction of place and nature has been well-described by Lefebvre (1992) and Greider and Garkovich (1994), who explain that natural phenomena are also sociocultural phenomena in that “they are constructed through social interactions” (p. 5). Under the concept of social construction, artificial boundaries, contrived discourse, and symbolic meanings related to natural spaces transform their physicality into a social product. Further, the social processes that produce the space render it dynamic, rather than static (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 26), and entangled in constant interactions – the “space is produced through social practices” and is “lived and understood through symbols, language, and images” (p. 38-39). In other words, social interaction with physical environment designates systems of meaning and symbolism to geographic spaces, and these in turn create place identities.

Lefebvre contends that “social space cannot be adequately accounted for either by nature (climate, site) or by its previous history,” but instead by considering the space’s representations, symbolic values, and the ideologies under which it operates (p.

77). Precisely because space is “an ambiguous continuity” (p. 87), cultural values assigned to spaces position them on a constantly evolving social trajectory. Thus, understanding spaces as socially produced allows us to see them in layered, complex, and changing ways.

But, as Cresswell argues, there “is another profound way of thinking about place that sees it as something much deeper than a social construct, as something irreducible and essential to being human” (p. 47) – as evidenced in the work of Malpas, Sack, and Casey. This phenomenological turn in place studies employs the approach of being “in-place” (p. 56), broadening how place features in human experience. Malpas, Sack, and Casey, among others, “do not deny that specific places are the products of society and culture. They insist, however, that place, in a general sense, adds up to a lot more than that....society itself is inconceivable without place” (Cresswell, p. 49). Emphasized in this approach is the multidimensionality of place. Place is multi-scalar in that it can be experienced (and produced) at the local, regional, armchair, national, neighborhood, and global level (Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2011, p. 57).

These ideas convene at the intersection of place, meaning, and power (Cresswell, 2015), suggesting that complex forces of social interaction – class, race, gender – are positioned within space and place (and vice versa) at every scale. Therefore, place meanings depend on the positionality of a person’s gaze – an individual’s racial, classed, ethnic, gendered identity determines their understanding and relationship to place.

Greider and Garkovich focus on the symbolic meanings and definitions that transform a physical landscape into a social one. In doing so, they also incorporate issues of power into processes of place construction. They rely heavily on the social theory of postmodernists such as Soja (1989), who sees that “space or the physical environment is not a given; it is socially constructed to both “...reflect and configure being in the world” (Soja 1989:25)” (Greider & Garkovich, 1994, p. 5). The authors express concern that “deterministic theories tend to ignore socially-constructed symbols and meanings that create nature and the environment and the processes through which these symbols and meanings are negotiated, renegotiated, and imposed on other groups through the use of power” (p. 5). As such, they advocate for “a renewed focus on how human actors creatively use culture as a resource to construct symbols and meaning that define nature...and on how power is used to impose these social constructions on other groups” (p. 5). In examining the cultural production of meanings of place in Vermont, this thesis considers the power inherent in the social construction of place, as well as in the power differential present in coupled rural communities and tourism destinations. Specifically, this research asks who has control over the symbolism of nature and landscape?

## **2.2. Tourism**

### **2.2.1. Development of Tourism in Vermont**

Both the methodology and interpretation of results in this thesis have been informed by the history of tourism in Vermont; the myths, imagery, and symbolism invoked by tourism promoters since the nineteenth century; and the more recent development of ski

tourism in the state. The history of tourism in Vermont provides the context in which the public communications of ski areas and their adjacent rural communities are produced.

At the center of Vermont's cultural, historical, and tourist identity is the concept of rurality. Historicized, intentionally marketed, and often idealized, the pastoral aesthetic of the Green Mountain State has enormous cultural and selling power. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the marketing and public communications materials of Vermont tourism have used a constellation of physical characteristics – mountainous terrain, open fields, villages – to elevate meanings about the dynamic, alluring image of Vermont. Such meanings of place are not static, though they implicitly reinforce the cultural importance of mythic qualities of Vermont (Brown, 1995; Harrison, 2006; Hinrichs, 1998; Morse, et al., 2014; Searls, 2006) – picturesque rurality, quaint village life, and hardy Vermonters engaging with “nature.” The imagined “Vermont” is also actively cultivated by the state's Tourism and Marketing department, which, among other promotional efforts, publishes the quarterly magazine *Vermont Life*. This magazine's narratives about Vermont's nature, society, and culture, and its high-quality “nature” photographs, romanticize Vermont's version of “rurality” (Hinrichs, 1998); the magazine claims to have “helped establish the state's image as an outdoor paradise” (Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing, 2017).

Historians and cultural geographers have traced the development of the careful, discursive creation of the Vermont image to several turning points. These include the industrialization of the late nineteenth century that spurred the reactive tourism

promotion of sentimentalized, ‘traditional’ rurality in Vermont as an antidote to urbanization (Brown, 1995; Searls, 2006; Harrison, 2006); the post-war transformation of the state into a “leisure gateway” to serve a rising middle class (Harrison, 2006); and the development of ski areas from the 1930s onward (Brown, 1995). However, skiing’s rise in Vermont reveals a conflict between rurality and tourism, an important qualification to consider when evaluating the implications of this thesis’ study of both ski resorts and rural towns at once.

Ski areas’ arrival on the tourism scene in Vermont signaled a departure from the state’s uniform, rural identity that had fueled tourism for decades. Scandinavian immigrants to the Northeast and Midwest brought the sport to the States; it was popularized in New England by Dartmouth College students and took off in the 1930s (Brown, 1995). Skiing in Vermont began humbly, on back roads and pastures, “fitting relatively unobtrusively into the state’s preexisting rural structure” (Harrison, 2006, p. 165). But capitalizing entrepreneurs in the 1930s recognized “the need for skiing instructors, skiing equipment, and winter accommodations” (Brown, p. 211), and they “began assembling a recreational landscape that consolidated skiing geographically,” which eventually coalesced into many of the larger resorts across the state that remain today (Harrison, 2006, p. 165).

The postwar economic boom also fueled the sport’s rise, as “middle-class Americans embraced skiing both as a recreational outlet and as a forum for economic self-expression” (ibid.). At a time when the promotion of Vermont was preoccupied with rurality as an antidote to modernity, ski vacationing was simultaneously upholding

the opposite by being incredibly *modern*. Ski technologies like chairlifts, groomers, and eventually, snowmaking, “allowed resort owners to transform landscape and identity in Vermont” (ibid., p. 167). This construction and manipulation of landscape – an opening to intentionally craft a literal and ideological image for capitalist ends – was also identified in this thesis as a central tenet of contemporary ski areas’ discursive construction of place.

It is important to note that Vermont’s twentieth century tourist landscape was colored primarily by a sentimentality for rural, almost old-world charm, but that by the middle of the century, ski technology had dramatically altered that aesthetic. The culture of rural tourism had dramatically changed; white ski runs became a quintessential backdrop to rolling pasture and happy cows, an image that perseveres today. Harrison (2006) argues that “Ski technology set in motion a transformation of many rural communities along new and decidedly modern lines” (p. 178). It had invariably affected local Vermont communities in ways that previous forms of tourism had not – the physical landscape was radically altered, there were concentrated masses of tourists necessitating intense technological advancement, and negative environmental impacts for local, rural communities.

In fact, new technological developments for skiing helped transform the rigid rural, traditionalized Vermont identity into a more modern one, though one that continues to retain a historicized nostalgia. Thanks to the ski industry,

New social norms, new architectural styles, and new technological encounters with recreation all helped to redefine landscape and identity in Vermont according to the

evolving dictates of a modern leisure economy (Harrison, 2006, p. 185).

With the advent of this new culture, “rural Vermont did not stop being “rural” because of skiing” (ibid., p. 185); instead it underwent changes that highlighted the stark difference between old rurality and modernity. It was a blend between “traditional heritage and modern ski development” (ibid.) that continues in the promotion of ski areas in Vermont today.

For example, mass-marketed images of the state “promised visitors simultaneous access to the nation’s best and most technologically advanced skiing as well as all of the trappings of Vermont’s traditionalized rural charm” (Harrison, p. 186), promises that persist today on large ski area websites (see Chapter 1). As Brown (1996) notes, when a visitor to Vermont is “in search of the quaint, these nostalgic feelings are so pervasive” for residents, annual visitors, and newcomers alike “that they no longer seem to conflict with faith in “progress”” (p. 216) that so wracked the consciousness of early twentieth-century Vermonters. The promotion of Vermont as maintaining a lingering “alliance” between farm life and pastoral tourism continues currently:

Even today, when Vermont’s farms are competing for land time-share condominiums for skiers and vastly increased summer-housing market, many of those who hope to preserve farming attempt to associate it with the pastoral tourist’s landscape for which Vermont is famous (Brown, 1996, p. 214).

Despite contemporary Vermont’s primarily service economy and increasingly fragmented landscapes, the rural identity that was crafted as a tourism destination image persists throughout the state among populations other than tourists. The lingering

power of the “Vermont” brand that helps cultivate the state as a tourism destination provides the context for which the ski area and community texts studied in this thesis are produced.

### **2.2.2. Destination Image**

In the greater tourism literature, traditional approaches to the special qualities of tourism destinations have focused primarily on the concept of image. Tourism scholars tend to use the concept of image in terms of utility, to describe the ways that destinations are marketed. That is, a given destination has an image that is comprised of its features and physical components, as well as how people feel *toward* that place (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; O’Leary & Deegan, 2005; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2005, among others).

More recently, scholars have attempted to more precisely define the unique components of qualities of place, focusing on what has been called, “destination personality” (Hosany, Ekinici, Uysal, 2006; Chen & Phou, 2013). These researchers argue that a strong positive relationship exists between destination image and destination personality, defined as the human traits assigned to place (for example, friendliness, excitement, or originality (Chen & Phou, 2013)). The theoretical reasoning is that destinations do not just have images, but that images are the basis of individual relationships with place. Often, scholars use attitude theory to support processes of relationship-building with place, citing the cognitive and affective aspects (Chen & Phou, 2013) that tourists use to evaluate, for instance, their satisfaction with a destination. Such studies demonstrate clear practical implications for destination

promoters, but in elevating individual attitudes, this approach fails to consider discursive aspects of image-making across tourists and tourism systems. Therefore, while this thesis on Vermont tourism places does not evaluate them for their destination personality, further research of ski area and town communications could examine the ways messages cultivate destination personality through “community” or “family-friendly” feelings, which are components of place identified in the previous chapter’s results.

### **2.2.3. Tourism Destinations: Texts**

Other works in the tourism literature, focusing on characteristics and uses of language in tourism (Dann, 1996; Jaworski and Pritchard, 2005; Phipps, 2007; among others), provide a foundation for the study of tourism destination texts specifically. But, the textual, semiotic and discursive qualities of ski areas’ mass mediated communications have received little attention in the scholarly literature. Most studies of ski tourism focus on visitor perceptions (Bonney-Claudet & Ghantous, 2013; Needham, Wood & Rollins, 2004; Roul, Adjizian, Auger, 2016) and ski areas’ climate change adaptation (Dawson & Scott, 2007 & 2013; Scott, McBoyle, Minogue, & Mills, 2006; Steiger, 2010; Steiger & Abegg, 2013). Research about the communication practices of ski areas is far more likely to address utilitarian topics related to marketing and destination management (Spector, Chard, Mallen, & Hyatt, 2012; Williams, Gill & Chura, 2004), rather than questions about discursive aspects of place.

Further, the content and structure of organizational and destination websites has received only limited attention in the tourism literature (see, for instance, Hallett and

Kaplan-Weinger, 2010). Quantitative studies (Brito & Pratas, 2015; Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Govers & Go, 2005, among others) have categorized website marketing strategies, but have not compared website contents across destinations or types of providers – such as tourism sites and adjacent towns.

Even outside tourism communications research, there is little published work about economic, socio-cultural, and political relationships between tourism destinations and nearby rural communities. The scholarly literature about tourism and communities tends to be site-specific, emphasizing residents' perceptions of proposed and actual tourism developments (Byrd, Bosley, & Dronberger, 2009; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990; Scheyvens, 1999; Wang & Chen, 2015) and community impacts of tourism development (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Gill, 2004; Simmons, 1994). Some scholars have addressed regional issues in tourism development (see, for example, Nunkoo, 2015; Stokowski, 1996; Valente, Dredge, & Lohmann, 2015), but these studies tend to focus on planning and impacts from the perspectives of residents, governments or businesses, generally ignoring the discursive aspects that drive both tourism and place production.

Some researchers have examined mass media discourses within the wide variety of tourism promotional materials. Stamou and Paraskevopoulos (2004) focused on ecotourism by examining visitor logs in Greece, discovering dual discourses – touristic and environmental. In studying promotional materials of Grenada, Nelson (2005) found that images created sharp divides between nature, place, and people. Both studies demonstrate that tourism discourses are complex, with the potential to produce conflicting meanings across audiences. It is also notable that in much of the research in

tourism mass media, few studies have applied *qualitative* methods to analyze the forms, contents and styles of website texts specifically. Although some authors have devoted time to cataloguing the content of websites, both written and visual (Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; O’Leary & Deegan, 2005; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2006; Stepchenkova, Kirilenko, & Morrison, 2009), these content analyses are highly quantitative, using software such as CATPAC rather than observing the texts for their semiotic or discursive functions. Consequently, a new method of capturing and comparing website data was developed for this thesis, in order to examine potentially overlapping or conflicting constructions of place in tourism settings.

### **2.3. Language and Place**

Before discussing methods of analysis for website texts, it is necessary to justify why this thesis uses language as a mode of inquiry in examining the construction of place at tourism sites and in rural communities. Language is an apt lens for studying the symbolic construction of place (Tuan, 1991) because language makes legible human experience (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Studying visual and written tourism texts can reveal how systems of meaning and symbolism are mapped onto place (Williams & Lew, 2015) in a cycle of production and reproduction of place meanings. Consequently, analysis of language through texts must complete two tasks to arrive at an understanding of the social construction of place. First, textual analysis must “explore how texts are *made* meaningful” as well as how they “contribute to the constitution of social reality by *making* meaning” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 4). Second, Hannam and Knox (2005) advise “unpacking the cultural meanings” of texts as mediators of culture.

This research is grounded in the idea that language is a central means of social construction, and the study of linguistic texts, then, is an exercise in understanding the social practices of place-making.

In this thesis, the types of texts that comprise the data are mass media messages found in the written language of business or community websites. In practical terms, websites are electronic settings populated by both written and visual texts. These texts span informational, promotional, narrative, or even inspirational communications, and rely on readers' shared understandings to communicate messages about place. But these texts also have a higher function as articulations of cultural phenomena in how they represent place (Lehtonen, 2000). Semiotics scholars and others have used this concept of text to refer to how meaning is constructed through symbolism and form. In kind, this study delves into the meanings of language that are both connotative and denotative (Barthes, 1978) to illuminate how websites communicate an obvious presentation of place, as well as how they implicitly demonstrate the social values and systems of meanings that shape their production. The practical and symbolic processes of text production require a three-pronged approach to textual analysis (Lehtonen, 2000) that considers texts, cultural context, and audiences simultaneously. This literature review will discuss the two types of analysis used in the thesis – content analysis and textual analysis.

### **2.3.1. Content Analysis**

Although content analysis has most commonly been applied in quantitative research, this thesis attempted to use a more holistic approach, what Newbold et al. (as

cited in Stepchenkova, 2012, p. 445) called a more “complete picture of meaning and contextual codes, since texts may contain many other forms of emphasis besides sheer repetition” or countable patterns usually central to content analysis. Hannam and Knox (2005) describe the core of content analysis as “the basic assumption...that there is a relationship between the frequency of a specific theme and its significance or dominance” (p.24). However, rather than reduce results to a purely quantitative structure, a semiotic approach can inform the analysis, in recognition that “there are usually several layers of meaning within any textual or visual analysis and that these are usually arbitrary but bound by particular cultural contexts” that “reveal the indirect and often unintentional levels of meaning” (Hannam & Knox, 2005, p.25). This is a particularly apt means to studying tourism website texts, because they are presumably carefully crafted and packaged, but may rely on industry, local, and regional influence.

Conventional content analysis in the tourism literature often examines promotional materials or sorts characteristics of tourism places to determine visitors’ or residents’ senses of place. One use of content analysis in studying the construction of sense of place is Jepson and Sharpley’s study (2015) on how visitors to England’s Lake District incorporate spirituality into their conceptions of a rural sense of place. The authors categorized their interviews with tourists by isolating tangible attributes of the countryside that contributed to interviewees’ sense of place. Kianicka, et al. (2006) used a similar methodology to sort the content of locals’ and tourists’ interviews along place creation lines. They found that “the same local landscape characteristics contribute” (p. 61) to both tourists’ and locals’ sense of place. Another methodological

parallel can be found in Nelson's study of Granada's promotional materials. Nelson (2005) uses content analysis to categorize image-based promotional media, finding through a coding process the most salient categories of content that constructed a sense of place – place, people, and nature.

Despite the success of these authors, content analysis can be challenging in that landing at an accurate representation of large bodies of text is not guaranteed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The method improves in accuracy and reliability through secondary coding, in which a peer reviews the coding scheme as a “check” on consistency and attention to detail. However, increased reliability might only be possible with a data set of modest size – the level of detail required in textual analysis makes comprehensive evaluation of large sets of data an elusive and lofty goal. It is for this reason that analysis of ski area and town web texts in this thesis was limited to a sample of 26 sites, and only investigated website homepages.

### **2.3.2. Textual Analysis**

This thesis used a textual analysis to reveal patterns across community and ski area texts beyond the categorization and measures of frequency within content analysis. This form of linguistic analysis is grounded in semiotics, a field of study that emphasizes the social character of texts – the heavy lifting that texts perform in social acts and to convey social meaning. Semiotics developed with Ferdinand de Saussure as a way to deconstruct language as a system of arbitrary signs, or a system of meaning that is both synchronic (existing right now), and diachronic (changing over time) (Culler, 1986). Although this thesis does not use critical discourse analysis (“CDA”) as

a method, how Norman Fairclough (whose *Language and Power* (1989) is often hailed as CDA's foundation) conceptualized textual analysis represents a critical turn from Saussure's semiotics that informs this study.

Rather than focusing on the micro-parts of Saussure's structured system of analysis, Fairclough calls for always situating textual analysis within social theory, and emphasizes that "any analysis of texts which aims to be significant in social scientific terms has to connect with theoretical questions about discourse (e.g. the socially 'constructive' effects of discourse)" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 3). Fairclough's method is a three-dimensional approach to discourse: language "in use" (as a text), language as "discourse practice," and as "social practice" (Feighery, 2006, p. 4). Using Fairclough's method necessitates viewing discourse as both "socially constituted and socially constitutive" (Teo, 2000, p. 11); in other words, language contributes toward the production of social processes, but it also actively *reproduces* those processes, too.

In order to understand how ski area and community texts produce and reproduce social processes, and the social construction of "nature" in particular, the methods of Barthes (1978) and Lehtonen (2000) structure this textual analysis. Examining both individual texts and patterns across texts adds richness in meaning. Thematic analysis allows for more consideration of texts in context (Braun & Clark, 2006) – both the practical and literal context (for instance, web layout) and the social context from which texts are produced (such as level of tourism development). At a more micro level, textual analysis focuses primarily on dissecting the connotative and denotative messages of written and visual texts (Barthes, 1978) to understand their "objective

representations of reality” (Geczi, 2016, p.26) as well as what “is not necessarily immediately graspable” (Barthes, 1978, p. 19). This twofold analysis reveals how the ski area and town texts, which may at first glance seem to simply market recreation or development opportunities, operate within greater systems of meaning.

The methods of this thesis also separated analysis for written texts and images, because written and visual texts depict places and convey meaning differently (Hunter, 2008), appeal to readers in distinct ways, and vary in their practical applications in mass media messaging. Further, written texts and images narrate a particular perspective of reality and carry the story of place in distinct ways (Lehtonen, 2000).

The outcomes of textual analyses performed in tourism settings have revealed economic, social, and political consequences of tourism communications. As previously discussed, languages convey “positions, allegiances and patterns of dominance and disempowerment” that serve us as gateways to “notions of identity, difference, otherness and community” (Jaworksi & Pritchard, 2005, p.3) held by the communicator. In rural tourism settings, the implications of language used in place promotion can consequently lead to a power imbalance. Carter, Dyer, and Sharma (2007) examined the Sunshine Coast region of Australia, a primarily rural area which has undergone tremendous cultural landscape transformation through tourism – not unlike Vermont – but has suffered conflict among rural communities and tourism promotion as a result. They warn that misalignment between multiple linguistic presentations of place is especially dangerous in rural places, where language can “[smother] local meanings” of place, as it did in this rural Australian community. They

suggest incorporating “alternative place-meanings and identities in development and marketing” so as not to overlook or silence “the way places are created and experienced by many people” or to risk “inappropriate meanings being assigned to place in order to attract the investment dollar” (p. 764). Carter, Dyer, and Sharma’s study puts into context the very real implications that discursive constructions of place can unleash on rural areas with high levels of tourism.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

The literature on the social construction of place, tourism communications, analytic strategies for language, and the history of Vermont tourism informs this thesis. The literature reveals several themes, as well as understudied areas, that motivate the structure of this research approach:

- The social construction of place imbues space with meaning, transforming physicality into a social product, yet ski areas have not been examined for their qualities of place, despite their place dependency
- Tourism communications are complex and layered, but tourism researchers have devoted little study to website messaging or to comparisons between tourism destinations and adjacent communities
- The strategy of considering text, audience, and context in textual analysis can reveal complexity of meaning and productive systems of power, yet tourism studies have focused on individuals, rather than on tourism systems

Consequently, this thesis used qualitative methods of content and thematic analyses to compare the discursive strategies of both tourism sites and community sites in their

construction of place. Understanding how both private and public organizations present place in the same geographic region reveals how multiple systems of meaning are produced and reproduced.

## 2.5. References

- Barthes, R. (1978) *Image, Music, Text*. (S. Heath, ed. and trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bonnefoy-Claudet, L., & Ghantous, N. (2013) Emotions' Impact on Tourists' Satisfaction with Ski Resorts: The Mediating Role of Perceived Value. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30:624-637.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brito, P. Q., & Pratas, J. (2015). Tourism brochures: Linking message strategies, tactics and brand destination attributes. *Tourism Management*, 48, 123-138.
- Brown, D. (1995). *Inventing New England regional tourism in the nineteenth century*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Byrd, E. T., Bosley, H. E., & Dronberger, M. G. (2009). Comparisons of stakeholder perceptions of tourism impacts in rural eastern North Carolina. *Tourism Management*, 30(5), 693-703.
- Carter, J., Dyer, P., & Sharma, B. (2007). Dis-placed voices: sense of place and place-identity on the Sunshine Coast. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 8(5), 755-773.
- Chen, C. F., & Phou, S. (2013). A closer look at destination: Image, personality, relationship and loyalty. *Tourism Management*, 36, 269-278.
- Choi, S., Lehto, X. Y., & Morrison, A. M. (2007). Destination image representation on the web: Content analysis of Macau travel related websites. *Tourism Management*, 28(1), 118-129.

- Cresswell, T. (2015). *Place: an introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Wiley Blackwell.
- Culler, J. (1986) *Ferdinand de Saussure* (Revised ed.) Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Dann, G.M.S. (1996) *The Language of Tourism: A Sociolinguistic Perspective*.  
Wallingford: CAB International.
- Dawson, J. & Scott, D. (2007) Climate Change Vulnerability of the Vermont Ski  
Tourism Industry (USA). *Annals of Leisure Research*, 550-572.
- Dawson, J., & Scott, D. (2013) Managing for climate change in the alpine ski sector.  
*Tourism Management*, 35, 244-254.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1980). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and  
schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*.  
London: Routledge.
- Feighery, W. (2006). Reading tourism texts in context: A critical discourse  
analysis. *Tourism analysis*, 11(1), 1-11.
- Geczi, E. (2016). *Placing natural resource decisions in social and historical contexts:  
Sociological inquiries into agency communications, management rationalities,  
and community change*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ScholarWorks  
Graduate College Dissertations and Theses. (Paper 551)
- Gill, A. (2004). Communities and Growth Management. In Lew, A.A., Hall, C.M., &  
A.M. Williams (Eds.), *A Companion to Tourism* (pp. 569-583). Malden:  
Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

- Govers, R., & Go, F. M. (2004). Projected destination image online: Website content analysis of pictures and text. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 7(2), 73-89.
- Greider, T. & Garkovich, L. (1994). Landscapes: The Social Construction of Nature and the Environment. *Rural Sociology*, 59(1), 1-24.
- Hallett, R.W., & Kaplan-Weinger, J. (2010). *Official Tourism Websites: A Discourse Analysis Perspective*. Channel View Publications: Bristol.
- Hannam, K., & Knox, D. (2005). Discourse analysis in tourism research a critical perspective. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 30(2), 23-30.
- Harrison, B. (2006). *The view from Vermont: Tourism and the making of an American rural landscape*. Burlington: University of Vermont Press.
- Hinrichs, C. C. (1998). Sideline and lifeline: the cultural economy of maple syrup production. *Rural Sociology*, 63(4), 507-532.
- Hosany, S., Ekinici, Y., & Uysal, M. (2006). Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(5), 638-642.
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.
- Hunter, W.C. (2008). A typology of photographic representations for tourism: depictions of groomed spaces. *Tourism Management* 29, 354-365.
- Jamal, T. B., & Getz, D. (1995). Collaboration theory and community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), 186-204.

- Jaworski, A., & Pritchard, A. (Eds.). (2005). *Discourse, communication, and tourism* (Vol. 5). Channel View Publications.
- Jepson, D., & Sharpley, R. (2015). More than sense of place? Exploring the emotional dimension of rural tourism experiences. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(8-9), 1157-1178.
- Kianicka, S., Buchecker, M., Hunziker, M., & Müller-Böker, U. (2006) Locals' and tourists' sense of place. *Mountain Research and Development*, 26(10): 55-63.
- Lefebvre, H. (1992). *The production of space*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lehtonen, M. (2000). *The cultural analysis of texts*. Sage.
- Morse, C. E., Strong, A.M., Mendez, V.E., Lovell, S.T., Troy, A.R., & Morris, W.B. (2014). Performing a New England landscape: Viewing, engaging, and belonging. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 36, 226-236.
- Needham, M.D., Wood, C.J.B., & Rollins, R.B. (2004). Understanding Summer Visitors and Their Experiences at the Whistler Mountain Ski Area, Canada. *Mountain Research and Development*, 24(3), 234-242.
- Nelson, V. (2005) Representation and images of people, place and nature in Grenada's tourism. *Geografiska Annaler Series B* 87(2), 131-143.
- Nunkoo, R. (2015). Tourism development and trust in local government. *Tourism Management*, 46, 623-634.
- O'Leary, S., & Deegan, J. (2005). Ireland's image as a tourism destination in France: Attribute importance and performance. *Journal of Travel Research*, 43(3), 247-256.

- Perdue, R. R., Long, P. T., & Allen, L. (1990). Resident support for tourism development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17(4), 586-599.
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction* (Vol. 50). Sage Publications.
- Phipps, A. (2006). *Learning the arts of linguistic survival: Languaging, tourism, life* (Vol. 10). Multilingual Matters.
- Pierce, J., Martin, D. G., & Murphy, J. T. (2011). Relational place-making: the networked politics of place. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36(1), 54-70.
- Relph, E. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. London: Pion Limited.
- Roult, R., Adjizian, J. M., & Auger, D. (2016). Sense of Place in Tourism and Leisure: the Case of Touring Skiers in Quebec. *Almatourism-Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development*, 7(13), 79-94.
- Scheyvens, R. (1999). Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities. *Tourism Management*, 20(2), 245-249.
- Scott, D., McBoyle, G., Minogue, A., & Mills, B. (2006) Climate Change and the Sustainability of Ski-based Tourism in Eastern North America: A Reassessment. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 14(4):376-398.
- Searls, P.M. (2006). *Two Vermonts: Geography and identity, 1865-1910*. Durham: University of New Hampshire Press.
- Simmons, D. G. (1994). Community participation in tourism planning. *Tourism Management*, 15(2), 98-108.

- Spector, S., Chard, C., Mallen, C., & Hyatt, C. (2012) Socially constructed environmental issues and sport: A content analysis of Ski Resort Environmental Communications. *Sport Management Review*, 15:416-433.
- Stamou, A. G., & Paraskevopoulos, S. (2004). Images of nature by tourism and environmentalist discourses in visitors books: a critical discourse analysis of ecotourism. *Discourse & Society*, 15(1), 105-129.
- Steiger, R. (2010). The impact of climate change on ski season length and snowmaking requirements in Tyrol, Austria. *Climate Research*, 43(3), 251-262.
- Steiger, R. & B. Abegg. 2013. The Sensitivity of Austrian Ski Areas to Climate Change. *Tourism Planning and Development* 20(4): 480-493.
- Stepchenkova, S. (2012). Content Analysis. In Dwyer, L., Gill, A. & N. Seetaram (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Tourism: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (pp. 443-458). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- Stepchenkova, S., & Morrison, A. M. (2006). The destination image of Russia: From the online induced perspective. *Tourism Management*, 27(5), 943-956.
- Stepchenkova, S., Kirilenko, A. P., & Morrison, A. M. (2009). Facilitating content analysis in tourism research. *Journal of Travel Research*, 47(4), 454-469.
- Stokowski, P. A. (1996). *Riches and regrets: Betting on gambling in two Colorado mountain towns*. University Press of Colorado.
- Stokowski, P. (2002). Languages of place and discourses of power: Constructing new senses of place. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34(4), 368-382.

- Teo, P. (2000). Racism in the news: A critical discourse analysis of news reporting in two Australian newspapers. *Discourse & Society, 11*(1), 7-49.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1974). *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1991) Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 81*(4), 684-696.
- Valente, F., Dredge, D., & Lohmann, G. (2015). Leadership and governance in regional tourism. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, 4*(2), 127-136.
- Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing. (2017). How we promote Vermont. Retrieved from <http://accd.vermont.gov/tourism/how-we-promote>
- Wang, S., & Chen, J. S. (2015). The influence of place identity on perceived tourism impacts. *Annals of Tourism Research, 52*, 16-28.
- Williams, P., Gill, A., & Chura, N. (2004) Branding Mountain Destinations: The Battle for "Placefulness." *Tourism Review of AIEST - International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism, 59*(1), 6-15.
- Williams, S., & Lew, A. A. (2015). *Tourism geography: critical understandings of place, space and experience*. New York: Routledge.

## COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, D. (2016) "New England ski industry feeling under the weather." *Boston Globe*.
- Barthes, R. (1978) *Image, music, text*. (S. Heath, ed. and trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bonnefoy-Claudet, L., & Ghantous, N. (2013) Emotions' impact on tourists' satisfaction with ski resorts: The mediating role of perceived value. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30:624-637.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brito, P. Q., & Pratas, J. (2015). Tourism brochures: Linking message strategies, tactics and brand destination attributes. *Tourism Management*, 48, 123-138.
- Bromley Mountain. (2017). *Bromley Mountain Ski Resort*. Retrieved from <https://www.bromley.com/>
- Brown, D. (1995). *Inventing New England regional tourism in the nineteenth century*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Byrd, E. T., Bosley, H. E., & Dronberger, M. G. (2009). Comparisons of stakeholder perceptions of tourism impacts in rural eastern North Carolina. *Tourism Management*, 30(5), 693-703.
- Carter, J., Dyer, P., & Sharma, B. (2007). Dis-placed voices: sense of place and place-identity on the Sunshine Coast. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 8(5), 755-773.
- Chen, C. F., & Phou, S. (2013). A closer look at destination: Image, personality, relationship and loyalty. *Tourism Management*, 36, 269-278.
- Choi, S., Lehto, X. Y., & Morrison, A. M. (2007). Destination image representation on the web: Content analysis of Macau travel related websites. *Tourism Management*, 28(1), 118-129.
- Cochran's Ski Area. (2017). *Cochran's Ski Area*. Retrieved from <http://www.cochranskiarea.com/>
- Cong, L., Wu, B., Morrison, A. M., Shu, H., & Wang, M. (2014). Analysis of wildlife tourism experiences with endangered species: An exploratory study of encounters with giant pandas in Chengdu, China. *Tourism Management*, 40, 300-310.
- Corinth, Vermont Official Website – Municipal Info 05039-05040. (2017). *Town of Corinth, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://corinthvt.org/>
- Cresswell, T. (2015). *Place: an introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Wiley Blackwell.
- Culler, J. (1986) *Ferdinand de Saussure* (Revised ed.) Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Dann, G.M.S. (1996). *The language of tourism: A sociolinguistic perspective*. Wallingford: CAB International.
- Dawson, J. & Scott, D. (2007) Climate change vulnerability of the Vermont ski tourism industry (USA). *Annals of Leisure Research*, 550-572.

- Dawson, J., & Scott, D. (2013) Managing for climate change in the alpine ski sector. *Tourism Management*, 35, 244-254.
- Decrop, A. (2004) Trustworthiness. In Phillimore, J. & Goodson, L. (Eds.), *Qualitative Research in Tourism: Ontologies, Epistemologies and Methodologies* (pp. 156-169). Routledge: New York.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1980). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dover, Vermont. (2017). *Dover, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.doververmont.com/>
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.
- Fayston VT | Official Municipal Website. (2017). *Town of Fayston, Vermont*. Retrieved from <https://www.faystonvt.com/>
- Feighery, W. (2006). Reading tourism texts in context: A critical discourse analysis. *Tourism analysis*, 11(1), 1-11.
- Geczi, E. (2016). *Placing natural resource decisions in social and historical contexts: Sociological inquiries into agency communications, management rationalities, and community change*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ScholarWorks Graduate College Dissertations and Theses. (Paper 551)
- Gill, A. (2004). Communities and growth management. In Lew, A.A., Hall, C.M., & A.M. Williams (Eds.), *A Companion to Tourism* (pp. 569-583). Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Govers, R., & Go, F. M. (2004). Projected destination image online: Website content analysis of pictures and text. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 7(2), 73-89.
- Greider, T. & Garkovich, L. (1994). Landscapes: The social construction of nature and the environment. *Rural Sociology*, 59(1), 1-24.
- Hallett, R.W., & Kaplan-Weinger, J. (2010). *Official tourism websites: A discourse analysis perspective*. Channel View Publications: Bristol.
- Hancock, Vermont. (2016). *Town of Hancock, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://hancockvt.us/>
- Hannam, K., & Knox, D. (2005). Discourse analysis in tourism research a critical perspective. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 30(2), 23-30.
- Harrison, B. (2006). *The view from Vermont: Tourism and the making of an American rural landscape*. Burlington: University of Vermont Press.
- Hinrichs, C. C. (1998). Sideline and lifeline: The cultural economy of maple syrup production. *Rural Sociology*, 63(4), 507-532.
- Home » Burke Mountain Resort. (2017). *Burke Mountain*. Retrieved from <http://skiburke.com/>
- Hosany, S., Ekinici, Y., & Uysal, M. (2006). Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(5), 638-642.
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.

- Hunter, W.C. (2008). A typology of photographic representations for tourism: Depictions of groomed spaces. *Tourism Management* 29, 354-365.
- Jamal, T. B., & Getz, D. (1995). Collaboration theory and community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), 186-204.
- Jaworski, A., & Pritchard, A. (Eds.). (2005). *Discourse, communication, and tourism* (Vol. 5). Channel View Publications.
- Jepson, D., & Sharpley, R. (2015). More than sense of place? Exploring the emotional dimension of rural tourism experiences. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(8-9), 1157-1178.
- Jones, K. (2015). *Benchmark Study of the Impact of Visitor Spending on the Vermont Economy: 2013: Tourism is Vital to Vermont*. Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing.
- Kianicka, S., Buchecker, M., Hunziker, M., & Müller-Böker, U. (2006) Locals' and tourists' sense of place. *Mountain Research and Development*, 26(10): 55-63.
- Killington – Welcome to the Beast. (2017). *Killington Resort*. Retrieved from <http://www.killington.com/site/index.html>
- Lefebvre, H. (1992). *The production of space*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lehtonen, M. (2000). *The cultural analysis of texts*. London: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). London: Sage.
- Lucas, C.A., & Goeldner, C.R. (1987). Ski area marketing: A survey of NSAA United States ski area marketing departments 1985-86 season (Graduate Research). Business Research Division, Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Colorado, Boulder.
- Mad River Glen, VT: Ski It If You Can. (2017). *Mad River Glen Cooperative*. Retrieved from <http://www.madriverglen.com/>
- Magic Mountain Ski Area | Home. (2017). *Magic Mountain*. Retrieved from <https://www.magicmtn.com/>
- Middlebury Snow Bowl. (2017). *Middlebury Snow Bowl VT Family Friendly Ski Area*. Retrieved from <https://www.middleburysnowbowl.com/>
- Morse, C. E., Strong, A.M., Mendez, V.E., Lovell, S.T., Troy, A.R., & Morris, W.B. (2014). Performing a New England landscape: Viewing, engaging, and belonging. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 36, 226-236.
- Mount Snow® :: Vermont's Closest Big Mountain Ski & Snowboard Resort. (2017). *Mount Snow, Vermont*. Retrieved from <https://www.mountsnow.com/>
- Needham, M.D., Wood, C.J.B., & Rollins, R.B. (2004). Understanding summer visitors and their experiences at the Whistler Mountain ski area, Canada. *Mountain Research and Development*, 24(3), 234-242.
- Nelson, V. (2005) Representation and images of people, place and nature in Grenada's tourism. *Geografiska Annaler Series B* 87(2), 131-143.
- Northeast Slopes Est1936. (2017). *Northeast Slopes Ski Area*. Retrieved from <http://www.northeastlopes.org/>
- Nunkoo, R. (2015). Tourism development and trust in local government. *Tourism Management*, 46, 623-634.

- O'Leary, S., & Deegan, J. (2005). Ireland's image as a tourism destination in France: Attribute importance and performance. *Journal of travel research*, 43(3), 247-256.
- Official Website of the Town of Stowe, Vermont. (2017). *Town of Stowe, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.townofstowevt.org/>
- Perdue, R. (2001) Internet site evaluations: Influence of behavioral experience, existing images, and selected website characteristics. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 11(2), 21-38.
- Perdue, R. R., Long, P. T., & Allen, L. (1990). Resident support for tourism development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17(4), 586-599.
- Peru, VT – Our Community. (2017). *Peru, VT*. Retrieved from <http://www.peruvt.org/>
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction* (Vol. 50). Sage Publications.
- Phipps, A. (2006). *Learning the arts of linguistic survival: Languaging, tourism, life* (Vol. 10). Multilingual Matters.
- Pico Mountain. (2017). *Pico Mountain Resort*. Retrieved from <http://www.picomountain.com/site/index.html>
- Pierce, J., Martin, D. G., & Murphy, J. T. (2011). Relational place-making: The networked politics of place. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36(1), 54-70.
- Relph, E. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. London: Pion Limited.
- Richmond, VT – Our Town. (2017). *Town of Richmond, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.richmondvt.gov/>
- Roult, R., Adjizian, J. M., & Auger, D. (2016). Sense of place in tourism and leisure: The case of touring skiers in Quebec. *Almatourism-Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development*, 7(13), 79-94.
- Scheyvens, R. (1999). Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities. *Tourism Management*, 20(2), 245-249.
- Scott, D., McBoyle, G., Minogue, A., & Mills, B. (2006) Climate Change and the Sustainability of Ski-based Tourism in Eastern North America: A Reassessment. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 14(4), 376-398.
- Searls, P.M. (2006). *Two Vermonts: Geography and identity, 1865-1910*. Durham: University of New Hampshire Press.
- Simmons, D. G. (1994). Community participation in tourism planning. *Tourism Management*, 15(2), 98-108.
- SnowBrains (2016, August 16). Magic Mountain Ski Area, VT Bought By The Anti-Vail. Retrieved from <http://snowbrains.com/magic-mountain-ski-area-vt-bought-by-the-anti-vail/>
- Spector, S., Chard, C., Mallen, C., & Hyatt, C. (2012). Socially constructed environmental issues and sport: A content analysis of ski resort environmental communications. *Sport Management Review*, 15(4), 416-433.
- Stamou, A. G., & Paraskevopoulos, S. (2004). Images of nature by tourism and environmentalist discourses in visitors books: A critical discourse analysis of ecotourism. *Discourse & Society*, 15(1), 105-129.

- Steiger, R. (2010). The impact of climate change on ski season length and snowmaking requirements in Tyrol, Austria. *Climate Research*, 43(3), 251-262.
- Steiger, R. & B. Abegg. 2013. The sensitivity of Austrian ski areas to climate change. *Tourism Planning and Development*, 20(4), 480-493.
- Stepchenkova, S. (2012). Content analysis. In Dwyer, L., Gill, A. & N. Seetaram (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Tourism: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (pp. 443-458). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- Stepchenkova, S., & Morrison, A. M. (2006). The destination image of Russia: From the online induced perspective. *Tourism Management*, 27(5), 943-956.
- Stepchenkova, S., Kirilenko, A. P., & Morrison, A. M. (2009). Facilitating content analysis in tourism research. *Journal of Travel Research*, 47(4), 454-469.
- Stokowski, P. A. (1996). *Riches and regrets: Betting on gambling in two Colorado mountain towns*. University Press of Colorado.
- Stokowski, P. (2002). Languages of place and discourses of power: Constructing new senses of place. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34(4), 368-382.
- Stowe Mountain Resort Vermont Ski and Summer Adventures Resort. (2017). *Stowe Mountain Resort*. Retrieved from <https://www.stowe.com/>
- Teo, P. (2000). Racism in the news: A critical discourse analysis of news reporting in two Australian newspapers. *Discourse & Society*, 11(1), 7-49.
- Town of Burke, Vermont. (2017). *Town of Burke, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.burkevermont.org/>
- Town of Killington, Vermont. (2017). *Town of Killington, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.killingtontown.com/>
- Town of Londonderry, VT. (2017). *Town of Londonderry, VT*. Retrieved from <http://www.londonderryvt.org/>
- Town of Manchester, Vermont | So Close. So Vermont. (2017). *Town of Manchester, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://manchester-vt.gov/>
- Town of Manchester, Vermont | So Close. So Vermont. (2017). *Town of Manchester, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://manchester-vt.gov/>
- Town of Waitsfield. (2012). *Waitsfield Town Plan; Adopted October 22, 2012*. Waitsfield, VT.
- Town of Waitsfield, Vermont | Official Website of the Town of Waitsfield. (2017). *Waitsfield, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.waitsfieldvt.us/>
- Town of Woodstock, VT. (2017). *Town of Woodstock, Vermont*. Retrieved from <https://townofwoodstock.org/>
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1974). *Topophilia: A study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1991) Language and the making of place: A narrative-descriptive approach. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81(4), 684-696.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010*. Retrieved from

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

- U.S. Census Bureau. (2014) *American Community Survey: 2014*. Retrieved from <https://datausa.io/>
- USDA Forest Service. (2006). *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Land and Resource Management Plan Green Mountain National Forest* (USDA FS Publication No. NWU 20060107). Milwaukee, WI: United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service.
- Valente, F., Dredge, D., & Lohmann, G. (2015). Leadership and governance in regional tourism. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 4(2), 127-136.
- Vermont Business Magazine. (2017, June 7) Vail Resorts closes on acquisition of Stowe Mountain Resort. Retrieved from <http://www.vermontbiz.com/news/june/vail-resorts-closes-acquisition-stowe-mountain-resort>
- Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing. (2017). How we promote Vermont. Retrieved from <http://accd.vermont.gov/tourism/how-we-promote>
- Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing. (2017). How we promote Vermont. Retrieved from <http://accd.vermont.gov/tourism/how-we-promote>
- Wang, S., & Chen, J. S. (2015). The influence of place identity on perceived tourism impacts. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 52, 16-28.
- Welcome to Town of Middlebury, VT. (2017). *Town of Middlebury, Vermont*. Retrieved from <http://www.townofmiddlebury.org/>
- Williams, P., Gill, A., & Chura, N. (2004). Branding mountain destinations: The battle for "placefulness." *Tourism Review of AIEST - International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism*, 59(1), 6-15.
- Williams, S., & Lew, A. A. (2015). *Tourism geography: critical understandings of place, space and experience*. New York: Routledge.
- Woodstock Inn Ski Area | Suicide Six Vermont. (2017). *Woodstock Inn & Resort*. Retrieved from <https://www.woodstockinn.com/ski-area>