
FORUM

Globalisation of Alpinism in the Twentieth Century: Publicity, Politics, and Organisational Endeavours

Jon Mathieu

ABSTRACTS

Die Globalisierung des Alpinismus begann im späten 19. Jahrhundert und setzte sich während des ganzen 20. Jahrhunderts fort, wenn auch in komplexer, kontextabhängiger Weise, mit Rückschlägen und unterschiedlichen Geschwindigkeiten auf verschiedenen Ebenen. Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht diesen Prozess mit einer Kontrastmethode. Zwei Aspekte der Globalisierung des Alpinismus werden einander gegenübergestellt: ein zentraler Schauplatz, bestehend aus denkwürdigen Bergbesteigungen, die viel öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit auf sich zogen, und eine wenig beachtete internationale Organisation abseits der großen Bühne. Zu den Beispielen gehören die Besteigungen der Eigernordwand, des Pik Lenin, Pik Stalin und Mount Everest. Die organisatorischen Bemühungen werden durch die *International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation* veranschaulicht. Ich vertrete die These, dass die Unterschiedlichkeit der beiden Globalisierungsstränge vor allem an ihrem Verhältnis zu Politik und Macht lag.

After its emergence in the late nineteenth century, the globalisation of alpinism continued throughout the twentieth century, albeit in a complex, context-dependent manner, with setbacks and different speeds at different levels. This article aims to investigate this process by way of contrastive exemplification. Two aspects of the globalisation of alpinism will be contrasted: a centre stage, constituted by memorable ascents, the object of intense public attention and interest; and a little-noticed offstage area in international organisation. The examples include the climbing of the Eiger North Face, Lenin Peak, Stalin Peak, and Mount Everest. The organisational endeavours are illustrated by the *International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation*. I

will argue that it is mainly their relation to politics and power that makes these two strands of globalisation so different.

1. Introduction

In 1907 the *Alpine Club* in London celebrated its fiftieth birthday and, to mark the occasion, presented a survey of the mountaineering associations that had been created since its foundation and more or less following its example. The survey testified to the success of organised alpinism in many parts of the world. From New Zealand to Africa and the United States of America, mountain enthusiasts had gathered to promote their new sports culture. The distribution, of course, was far from balanced. For China the survey registered one single association founded in 1899 by German speaking emigrés (*Tsingtau Bergverein*), whereas nearly 150 associations were listed for Europe, many of them created in recent years.¹ The beginning of the new century experienced also an increase in long-distance mountaineering. In 1922 the British made the first serious attempt to “conquer” Mount Everest, identified as the highest peak of the world in the mid-nineteenth century. The attempt had become possible because Tibetan authorities, deciding about the northern access, were under political pressure and had to put aside their religious concerns against climbing. The expedition was under the leadership of a general and comprised a military escort, a film maker, and a great number of local porters, cooks, and other assistants, with around 300 pack animals, apart from the group of mountaineers. The attempt ended in tragic failure, yet the movie *Climbing Mount Everest* could be shown back home as an exciting record.²

After its emergence in the late nineteenth century, the globalisation of alpinism continued throughout the twentieth century, albeit in a complex, context-dependent manner, with setbacks and different speeds at different levels. The following article aims to investigate this process by way of contrastive exemplification. Two aspects of globalisation of alpinism will be contrasted: a centre stage, the object of intense public attention and interest; and a little-noticed offstage area in international organisation. I will argue that it is mainly the relation to politics and power that makes these two strands of globalisation so different. Climbing difficult mountains generated a great deal of publicity, particularly for the first ascents, and was closely linked to political feelings and authorities, whereas the organisation of international alpinism with its emphasis on general rules and safety measures had much less potential for attention and political use. Both processes were driven by rapid, revolutionary innovations in the areas of communication and transport, but these innovations played out in different ways. While the politicised centre-stage was moving fast and pushed globalisation, the offstage area lagged behind and followed the

1 A. J. Mackintosh, *Mountaineering Clubs*, in: *Alpine Journal* 23 (1907), pp. 542–570. – All quotes are given here in English (own translation).

2 P. H. Hansen, *The Dancing Lamas of Everest: Cinema, Orientalism, and Anglo-Tibetan Relations in the 1920s*, in: *The American Historical Review* 101 (1996) 3, pp. 712–747.

general trend. A few years ago, the political scientist Pepper D. Culpepper launched a fruitful empirical and theoretical debate about the difference between “noisy” and “quiet” business power, the first active in the domain of medialised politics, the second in the domain of lobby work behind the scenes.³ It is a similar duality that will be explored here in a very different field and setting.

The first section of the article looks at memorable moments in global alpinism and how they reached a larger audience and how they related to politics. The examples adduced are the Eiger North Face in Switzerland, the Pamir summits in the Soviet Union, and Mount Everest on the border of Nepal and China. Afterwards we shall turn to the very different history of the most representative association in this field, the *International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation*, which was founded in 1932 but only developed a global outreach much later. For both parts I can partially draw on a recently established research tradition which puts the history of alpinism in political and cultural contexts and no longer focuses on the technicalities of first ascents or on the self-description of club achievements.⁴ The conclusion of the article returns to the general argument of “noisy” and “quiet” strands of globalisation and their particular figuration of power. Globalisation is seen here as the historical process of expansion, multiplication and acceleration of worldwide interactions. Spatially remote factors gain in importance in relation to regional and local factors, not only on a functional level, for example through commodity-chains, but also in the minds and reflections of the people involved.⁵

2. Publicising and Politicising the “Historic” Moments

“Four Men on Unscaled Alps Wall, Waiting for Dawn to Reach Peak”, *The New York Times* informed its readers on 24 July 1938, on page 23. In a few lines the article made it clear that the “Eigerwand” was a terrifying wall, and that the four young men were in a dramatic situation, “huddled tonight in stormclouds at an altitude of 12,700 feet”. The next day the short news were moved to the front page, the tension heightened: “CLOUDS HIDE FATE OF 4 ON ALPS CLIFF”. The all-clear was given one day later, again on the front page: “CLIMBERS CONQUER DREAD EIGER PEAK”. Now the men were also assigned nationalities and family names: two Austrians, Harrer and Kasparek, and two Germans, Vörg and Heckmair, had reached the peak.⁶ In London, *The Times* reported on the Eiger adventure with three articles too, announcing the conclu-

3 P. D. Culpepper, *Quiet Politics and Business Power. Corporate Control in Europe and Japan*, Cambridge 2011.

4 Two examples: A. Pastore, *Alpinismo e storia d'Italia. Dall'unità alla resistenza*, Bologna 2003; P. H. Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man. Mountaineering after the Enlightenment*, Cambridge 2013.

5 Standard publications are J. Osterhammel/N. P. Petersson, *Globalization. A Short History*, Princeton 2009, and L. Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era*, New York 2014; for mountain regions see J. Mathieu, *The Third Dimension. A Comparative History of Mountains in the Modern Era*, Cambridge 2011, and idem, *The Globalisation of Mountain Perception: How much of a Western Imposition?* in: *Summerhill. Indian Institute of Advanced Study Review* 20 (2014) 1, pp. 8–17.

6 *The New York Times*, 24 July 1938, p. 23; 25 July, p. 1; 26 July, p. 1.

sion even a day earlier than the New York paper. The British tone was reserved: “Their feat was certainly a daring one, but it does not open a new road to ordinary climbers.”⁷ In fact, the first ascent of the Eiger North Face was part of a series of dramatic events starting in 1932 and resulting, prior to success, in nine deadly accidents. There was a heated, polarised discussion about the justification of this “sensational” and “suicidal” alpinism, overlaid by the tension in international politics soon leading to war. German climbers in particular were inspired by the nationalist sporting culture propagated by the Nazi-regime. During the climb in 1938, the *Führer* appears to have demanded reports on an hourly basis, and after the event he claimed the “victory” for the Third Reich.⁸ By this time, the media sector in industrialised countries consisted of a differentiated socio-technical system: newspapers and journalists of many kinds, national and international press agencies, wired and wireless telegraphy, telephone, radio transmission, print distribution, fixed and movable visual technologies.⁹ The media system had its own dynamics and routines, but in single cases contingency played a considerable role. The information about the Eiger event reached *The New York Times* through a “wireless” message by Clarence K. Streit, a foreign correspondent of the paper assigned to the League of Nations in Geneva. It can be assumed that he was not on site in the Bernese Oberland, but other non-Swiss media – like the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* and Hitler’s daily, the *Völkischer Beobachter* – sent special reporters.¹⁰ Again a heated dispute over the role of publicity and visualisation arose. The illustrated media produced a considerable number of detailed, emotional reports. Journalists got the impression that the Eiger event had found “the greatest attention and recognition in the entire world”, and this opinion is passed on by modern historiography, often quite generous with superlatives.¹¹ However, if we take the global measure seriously, we should ask: How many of the people living in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, making up around 70 percent of the world population,¹² possibly knew about the event? In other words: media coverage of the Eiger exploit was important – by Western standards.¹³

The Eiger North Face is a vertical arena so that climbers are visible from its foot where a busy hotel industry had developed since the nineteenth century and a mountain train

7 C. Quast, *Die Wand der Wände. Ein Vergleich der Presseberichterstattung zur Eiger-Nordwand-Durchsteigung 1938*, Universität Dortmund (Grin online) 2002, p. 36.

8 The most comprehensive book is by D. Anker (ed.), *Eiger. Die vertikale Arena*, Zürich 2008, for the Nazi context pp. 220–225; on this point also R. Amstädter, *Der Alpinismus. Kultur, Organisation, Politik*, Wien 1996, pp. 466–468. An earlier edition of Anker’s book is available in English: *Eiger. The Vertical Arena*, Seattle 2000.

9 A survey in A. Briggs/P. Burke, *A Social History of the Media. From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Cambridge 2009.

10 R. Rettner, *Eiger. Triumphe und Tragödien 1932–1938*, Zürich 2008, p. 242; Quast, *Wand der Wände*, p. 32.

11 Quast, *Wand der Wände*, p. 31 (Frankfurter Zeitung: “in der ganzen Welt grösste Beachtung und Anerkennung gefunden”); Anker, otherwise prudent, claims that no mountain of the planet has produced a stronger public echo than the Eiger (Anker, *Eiger*, p. 10).

12 Estimate based on M. L. Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population*, Chichester 2012, p. 25 and the source there indicated.

13 The best-known report on the Eiger climb is by H. Harrer, *The White Spider. The Story of the North Face of the Eiger*. Translated from the German, London 1959; but the book was late in coming and its success in many languages might have been influenced by the fame of the author, gained previously with his Tibetan adventures.

brought in people from many countries. Very different was the setting in the Pamir (Tajikistan), adjacent to the Karakoram and the Himalayas, and more than 3,000 kilometres away from Moscow, the centre of the newly formed Soviet socialist empire. In the 1920s, the Pamir region was sparsely populated and largely unknown to Russian elites, traditional or revolutionary. Historian Eva Maurer has shown how mountaineering expeditions entered this remote territory and opened it up for the state. Within a short period, a political pantheon unfolded on the mountain region with “Pik Stalin” as the highest peak (nearly 7,500 metres above sea level), “Pik Lenin” as the next one, and a number of summits named after a variable set of Soviet party leaders. The large-scale expeditions were organised by the Academy of Sciences, which was put under intense pressure to produce useful knowledge for socialism. Mountaineering had a tradition from the Alps and the Caucasus and was now mainly organised in a section of the *Association for Proletarian Tourism and Excursions* (Obščestvo proletarskogo turizma i ékskursij). The association struggled for a correct line in view of the new men to be born by the Revolution. “Bourgeois” alpinism was considered rotten and decadent. “We do not go into the mountains against the backdrop of snow and a blue sky to play up as heroes, peak-eaters, supermen, record-seekers, as those who want to separate themselves from all things earthly”, declared a leader. Collectivism should supplant separatism and individualism in every domain.¹⁴

In this first period, national borders were still relatively open. The 1928 expedition was a German-Soviet cooperation and should produce, among other things, reliable maps of the Pamir. Its success depended to a large degree on media coverage. Many of the participants published reports and illustrated travelogues not only in specialised journals but also in big dailies like *Izvestija*, *Pravda* or *Večernaja Moskva*. The film production engaged an entire team, working with the latest Western technology. It resulted in a 45-minute staged documentary that let the audience to believe that Pik Lenin, then still the highest peak known, had been reached by socialist mountaineers (in fact, also for weather reasons, it was climbed by Germans, after their Russian colleagues had already left).¹⁵ The 1933 expedition had a decisively Soviet character, and went a few hundred metres higher up to Pik Stalin, where an automatic radio and weather station was placed. The news of the climb was directly transmitted to *Izvestija*. In a later book, a publicity specialist for the expedition explained to the Tajik porters why the station was essential. “I say that workers in Moscow and Leningrad and people like them, farmers in all the corners of the Soviet Union, can follow the expedition in the newspapers, that I send telegrams to the most important, biggest paper, that I would write a book about the expedition, and in that book each of them would appear”.¹⁶ The expedition reached the highest point of the huge empire, yet not the top of the Soviet social hierarchy. At the October Revolu-

14 E. Maurer, *Wege zum Pik Stalin. Sowjetische Alpinisten, 1928–1953*, Zürich 2010, pp. 77–143, quote p. 91; the quoted leader, Vasilij Semenovskij, had been in Swiss exile in the pre-war period, when Lenin was in Switzerland too, and had worked as a certified mountain guide (ibid., p. 94).

15 Ibid., pp. 120–122.

16 Ibid., pp. 126–129, quote p. 138.

tion Parade in 1933 three posters, each 120 metres long, announced the “Victory in the Arctic, in the Desert, in the Stratosphere”. The climbers were victorious too, but not included among these first rank heroes and actors of modernity.¹⁷

One last example: the first successful ascent of Mount Everest by the New Zealander Edmund Hillary and the Nepalese-Indian Tenzing Norgay in 1953. That was also the year of Stalin’s death, which brought uncertainty to his peak, later to be renamed “Pik Kommunizma” (Communism Peak). Soon activities around Everest would contribute to a certain opening of the Soviet Union, but the ascent was announced only by a short note in *Izvestija*.¹⁸ In many parts of the world, and particularly in the countries of the climbers and in the centre of the newly formed British Commonwealth, the event was big news. The official film, *The Conquest of Everest*, began with the summit photograph and then switched to London on 2 June, when the news of the ascent coincided with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The streets were packed with crowds waving British flags, and the narrator of the film solemnly proclaimed: “And to add to the cheers, the newspapers reported an extra of extras. Britain had one new victory: Men had climbed Mount Everest”.¹⁹ On the international level, however, this statement was far from uncontested, as various nations laid claim to the first ascent as their own. Peter H. Hansen has reconstructed the turbulent “first descent of Everest” in detail. Controversies arose, for example, about priority: Who of the two climbers had been first on the summit? On the Indian subcontinent most people voted for Sherpa Tenzing. When the expedition triumphantly returned to Kathmandu, a “Tenzing Ballad” was sung in the streets, and posters showed a vigorous Tenzing pulling an exhausted Hillary to the top.²⁰ Besides the various self-affirmations, observers saw the event also as a unifying symbol of international cooperation and the spirit of humanity. After all, the flag of the United Nations had been planted on Everest (beside the British, Nepalese, and Indian flags). The Secretary-General expressly stated that this has given “our U.N. flag new glory”.²¹

Since the interwar “historic” climbing moments the media landscape had changed. By 1953, earlier technologies had become more powerful, reaching wider audiences, and new technologies began to conquer the public realm. Television was overcoming its experimental phase and the broadcast interruption during wartime, and events like the ascent of Everest contributed to the further spread of the technology. Many people were eager to watch the heroes with their own eyes. During their visit to Britain, after their success, the climbers were interviewed by the press, by radio, and by the BBC Television

17 Ibid., pp. 130–131; the first climber of the Pik Stalin was Evgenij Abalakov; probably for hierarchical reasons he had to wait long for the recognition of his feat in the Soviet audience (ibid., pp. 131–132).

18 E. Maurer, Cold War, “Thaw” and “Everlasting Friendship”: Soviet Mountaineers and Mount Everest, 1953–1960, in: *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26 (2009) 4, pp. 484–500, here p. 487.

19 P. H. Hansen, Confetti of Empire: The Conquest of Everest in Nepal, India, Britain and New Zealand, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (2000), pp. 307–332, here p. 307.

20 Ibid., pp. 308–312.

21 Ibid., p. 331.

Service.²² Tenzing attracted much attention, but he found himself in a particular “sub-altern” position. It was decided that he was to receive the George Medal by the Queen, the highest civilian award for bravery. His colleague Hillary on the other hand – native of a British settler colony, member of the Commonwealth, white but not quite British – got the high honour of knighthood.²³ The delicate “post-production” of the Everest ascent continued in New Zealand. For many fellow citizens, Hillary became the icon of a new identity. Indeed, later he would replace the Queen on New Zealand’s five dollar bill. Once again Tenzing did not fit easily into the programme. The official government gift reflected both his “indigenous” status and the exceptional publicity of the climb: It was a collection of press articles and telegrams about the ascent bound in a volume with pictures of the New Zealand Alps and a gold embossed cover with a Maori sign of rank.²⁴ In the second half of the twentieth century, Everest continued to occupy the minds of a great many around the planet. It functioned as a global focus of attention and increasingly stirred the imagination about possible personal performance and success. In the last decade of the century, the chroniclers in Kathmandu estimated around three hundred climbing attempts, ninety summit victories and five or six deaths on Everest each year.²⁵ News of the growing Everest community was frequently in the media, acting as an unmistakable driver of globalisation in mountaineering. Taken together, the twentieth century showed the intimate relationship between the daring feats on the planet’s steep walls and high summits, the public attention, the media coverage and the political use by the most diverse actors. A very different configuration can be found in another strand of globalisation. It is at this “quiet” networking for alpinism that we look in the next section.

3. International Networking and Organisation

Since the late nineteenth century, most of the prominent mountaineering associations developed an international outlook. The attempt of the Alpine Club in London to register all the associations around the planet in 1907, mentioned at the beginning of this article, is one example of that trend. The relationships between the associations were marked both by their shared passion for mountaineering and by group rivalry, the latter being driven also by increasing nationalism before World War I.²⁶ The German and Aus-

22 Ibid., p. 323; for British television at that time: Briggs/Burke, *Social History*, pp. 213–214; A. Abramson, *The History of Television, 1942 to 2000*, Jefferson 2003, p. 57.

23 Hansen, Confetti, pp. 313–314.

24 Ibid., p. 328; for the “indigenous side” of Everest mountaineering, see also S. B. Ortner, *Life and Death on Mt. Everest. Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering*, Princeton 1999.

25 R. Salisbury/E. Hawley, *The Himalaya by the Numbers. A Statistical Analysis of Mountaineering in the Nepal Himalaya*, Seattle 2012; S. K. Nepal/Yang (Sunny) Mu, *Mountaineering, Commodification and Risk Perceptions in Nepal’s Mt Everest Region*, in: J. Higham/G. Musa/A. Thompson-Carr (eds.), *Mountaineering Tourism*, London 2015, pp. 250–264.

26 Rivalry was particularly strong where national ambitions regarded overlapping territories, see S. Morosini, *Il meraviglioso patrimonio. I rifugi alpini in Alto Adige/Südtirol come questione nazionale (1914–1972)*, Trento 2016, pp. 21–50.

trian Alpine Club (*Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein*, DuÖAV) was by far the largest of the clubs. In the same year 1907 it numbered no fewer than 78,500 members, whereas the British Club, for example, remained below 700 members.²⁷ The British did not lack self-confidence in this period of high imperialism, but the Germans, based on this huge quantitative difference, considered themselves in a leading position. The head of the alpine library expressed the hope that his association, inspired by recent successes in intercontinental mountaineering, could create a comprehensive organisation: “A World-Mountain-Association (*Weltgebirgsverein*) under the hegemony of the DuÖAV, that would be the ultimate and most splendid goal of all the mountain-friendly endeavours, that would be the shining fulfilment of their boldest and most beautiful dreams.”²⁸ It was indeed a bold and unrealistic dream, but occasional conferences of international mountaineering had been held since the 1870s on the initiative (not under the hegemony) of various clubs. The massive global war suspended international contacts for some time. Such contacts revived quite rapidly during the post-war decade, when the League of Nations was created in Geneva. At two conferences in Eastern Europe in 1930 and 1931, the wish to establish a permanent agency for international cooperation and exchange in mountaineering was clearly pronounced. It was to be founded a year later at a meeting in Chamonix. The president of the French Alpine Club set high goals for this endeavour. The shared sentiment of the mountaineers should act as a counterweight to the political and economic controversies dividing the peoples, he wrote in the invitation and asked the participants to engage in the task of rapprochement.²⁹

On 27 August 1932, in the Hotel Majestic of Chamonix, the decision was taken “unanimously and with great enthusiasm” to create an organisation, a bit later to be called *Union Internationale des Associations d’Alpinisme* UIAA, in English rendered as *International Union of Mountaineering Associations*. (The name changed, currently it is called *International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation*). The tasks should be encompassing: the study and solution of all general mountaineering problems, particularly the encouragement of the young, the development and standardisation of trail markers, the posting of avalanche warnings, the protection of mountain shelters from vandalism, the establishment of a system for rating climbing difficulties, and so on. Delegates from eighteen countries were present in the assembly, two of them not from Europe (United States and New Zealand). However, seven of these countries did not join the UIAA immediately, and the

27 W. A. B. Coolidge, *The Alps in Nature and History*, London 1908, p. 244; see also A. Gidl, *Alpenverein. Die Städter entdecken die Alpen*, Wien 2007, a broad presentation of the DuÖAV from the 1860s to 1918.

28 A. Dreyer, *Der Alpinismus und der Deutsch-Österreichische Alpenverein. Seine Entwicklung – Seine Bedeutung – Seine Zukunft*, Berlin 1909, p. 160; in 1909 a suggestion for an overarching mountaineering club came also from the French, see *Dictionnaire des Alpes*, ed. by Sylvain Jouty, Grenoble 2006, p. 726.

29 P. Bossus, *Les cinquante premières années de l’Union Internationale des Associations d’Alpinisme / The First Fifty Years of the International Union of Mountaineering Associations*, Geneva 1982, p. 70; the English translation on pp. 67–106 is not always accurate, but can be checked against the French original on pp. 7–47; there is also a Spanish version of this booklet produced by the *Federación Española de Montañismo*; a personal view on these fifty years, with quite a few historic photographs, is provided by G. Tonella, *50 anni di alpinismo senza frontiere. La storia dell’UIAA*, Milano 1983; there seems to be also a German version of this text which I was unable to trace.

two countries from overseas soon left the Union on the grounds of being too remote. The members of the first Executive Committee were all European and included three presidents of major Alpine Clubs. The general political tension was on the rise (five months later Hitler would be appointed Chancellor of Germany), and the important nations distrusted each other. Thus no president was elected for the UIAA. Instead the assembly assigned the role to the Swiss, representing a small and neutral state, and the Swiss Alpine Club appointed the president of its Geneva section: Egmond d’Arcis.³⁰

Though he would hold the chair of the UIAA as an “eternal” president, not very much is known about Egmond d’Arcis (1887–1971). He came from a noble or ennobled family with the title of Count, and worked as a journalist and correspondent, often for British newspapers, mainly *The Times*. He had written a booklet about Great Britain during World War I, and later published sporadic articles on mountain topics also in Swiss journals and magazines. He joined the Geneva section of the Alpine Club in 1905. An obituary described him as valuable alpinist and lover and protector of mountains. In a speech he once expressed the view that the ideals of alpinism were akin to the culture of medieval chivalry.³¹ In the beginning, Egmond d’Arcis was elected president of the UIAA until 1936. At the general assembly of 1935 in Barcelona, however, at the proposal of the French delegate and “by common agreement”, he was re-elected for a new term of three years. This decision sufficed to establish a tradition and would be repeated several times. In fact, d’Arcis did not retire from office until 1964, at the age of 77, after a presidency of 32 years.³²

During the general assembly of Barcelona, the young Spanish Republic was already in a war-like state, leading soon to open civil war. The *Journal de Genève* in its article about the UIAA meeting was not really worried. Only army soldiers, weapons at hand, here and there reminded the visitors that the country was under siege. But the delegates had been warmly received by their Spanish colleagues, and there was enough to talk about. The Permanent Bureau in Geneva had prepared no fewer than a dozen reports on various problems: reimbursement of costs for mountain rescue, plans for a comprehensive book on alpinism covering every country, reciprocity for access to mountain huts and shelters between different clubs, and so forth.³³ The Bureau consisted of Egmond d’Arcis and a few unsalaried collaborators in Geneva, who often meet in the president’s private apartment. For a lengthy period, indeed, the UIAA was a kind of family business. The projects were many and ambitious, but the means were restricted. The budget, set at 6,000 francs in 1933, was supposed to be paid by the member clubs in proportion to their own membership. The total sum actually collected, however, was just a third of that

30 Bossus, *Fifty Years*, pp. 71–72; in Chamonix, d’Arcis had been the one who accepted the role assigned to the Swiss, on condition that the decision was approved by the Swiss Club, see *Journal de Genève*, 3 August 1932.

31 See Bossus, *Fifty Years*, pp. 72, 81, 83 and Tonella, *50 anni*, pp. 7–32; a short obituary in *Journal de Genève*, 8 December 1971; the Swiss library system currently gives 42 hits for d’Arcis as an author.

32 *Journal de Genève* 15 July 1935 and 8 December 1971; Bossus, *Fifty Years*, p. 85; the duration of the presidency was discussed and criticised in the 1950s, see Tonella, *50 anni*, pp. 29–30.

33 *Journal de Genève*, 15 July 1935.

amount, and the treasurers were constantly forced to find creative solutions in order to keep the Union halfway working. In the pre-war years the budget varied between 2,500 and 3,500 francs, and after World War II it went up only hesitantly.³⁴

Yet the later part of the twentieth century was the period when the global aspirations of the Union became more and more realistic, as revealed by its activities and its membership. From 1932 to 1939 there was one general assembly each year, combined with a meeting of the Executive Committee. The choice always fell on sites in Europe, twice in the Swiss Alps, twice in France, and four times in other countries. During the war the UIAA practically fell apart. No formal international reunion took place from 1940 to 1946. A new mountaineering federation was established in Nazi-Germany at the peak of its power which urged Egmond d'Arcis – in vain – to hand over his archives.³⁵ When the UIAA activities resumed in 1947, the pre-war kind of exclusive choices were continued. But from 1953 onwards the Executive Committee met more often, and a quarter of century later the time was ripe for general assemblies to be held on the margin of or outside Europe: during the 1970s in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, in Mexico, and in the USA, 1983 for the first time in the Himalayas, in Kathmandu, Nepal.³⁶ A similar development was evident with membership. At the foundation, eleven countries were formally represented in the UIAA, and by 1950 the figure had risen to twenty-four. In the following decades an increasing number of clubs joined the Union. The associations from the USA and from New Zealand that had left the Union in the early years because of the great distance, were back in 1966 and 1970. By now, air travel had changed physical remoteness. A sharp increase came eventually in the 1990s, when twenty-two new member countries could be registered.³⁷

The UIAA was both a complement and a rival to other mountaineering associations. Built on the explicit wish of important leaders of the alpinist movement, it also had to determine and carve out a field of activities for itself, and to watch over potential rivals on the international stage (for example by preventing the national clubs from setting up sections outside of their territory).³⁸ Back in 1933, Angelo Manaresi, the president of the Italian Alpine Club, and active fascist politician under Mussolini, wanted the UIAA to bring together “the aristocracy of mountaineering”, that is “all those who do not view mountaineering as an agreeable and munificent sport alone, but who are able to find in it an unsullied ideal of loyalty and kindness which enriches life and makes men better”.³⁹ Soon the UIAA was approached by the Swiss to intervene at the international

34 Bossus, *Fifty Years*, pp. 73, 77, 79, 85, 87.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 49–52 and the list of UIAA members on 3 March 2006 on the UIAA website (accessed 15 April 2006); currently the UIAA counts 89 member organisations from 66 countries on six continents, see <https://www.theuiaa.org/members/member-federations/> (accessed 7 July 2020).

38 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 74; the 1933 UIAA assembly was held in the Italian Alps and hosted by Maranesi; afterwards he informed Mussolini that he had been able to give the statute a fascist turn and that the meeting closed with an ovation to fascist Italy (Pastore, *Alpinismo*, pp. 179–180); documents in the UIAA archive, located in Berne at the head-

level against the “unhealthy” way of mountaineering emerging in the 1930s, with the sensational climbs on the Eiger North Face and with the temptations posed by the medals for alpinism awarded since 1924 at the Winter Olympic Games.⁴⁰ Even after the idealistic presidency of Egmond d’Arcis, the UIAA remained prudent with regard to avant-garde alpinism. When Walter Bonatti opened up a new winter route on the Matterhorn in 1965, the Bureau sent him a note of congratulation “without exalting solo climbing”. At that time, it became clearer than before that climber stars could also be useful for the UIAA. In 1972 Reinhold Messner gave a speech at its fortieth anniversary on Lake Geneva, stressing the significance of alpinism against “the spiritual degeneration” in a world of material prosperity.⁴¹

Just a few years earlier, the president had stated that the UIAA would continue to grow “not as a result of excessive publicity”, but first of all based on the virtues of its work.⁴² In fact, in the first fifty years of its existence, the Union did not receive much attention from the general public, not even in Switzerland. The first two publications about its history, background and goals, were produced for the fiftieth anniversary. One of these brochures was written by an old friend of Egmond d’Arcis, and looked back at the “family period” of the UIAA in a personal way. The other one had an official character. It was authored by the president Pierre Bossus for the general assembly held in the Himalayas in 1983. The cover stressed the move into a global future with the subtitle “From Chamonix... to Kathmandu” and two respective images. Up to now, the two booklets have remained practically the only sources of information for this long-term exercise in globalisation.⁴³

4. Conclusions

With his seminal publication of 2011, the political scientist Pepper D. Culpepper has triggered an important debate about the difference between “noisy” and “quiet” business power in the contemporary Western world. Quiet business strategies, he observes, revolve around direct contacts and lobbying opportunities with politicians and regulatory agencies. Such strategies of low salience are often more profitable for companies and economic representatives than going public with media campaigns and open discussions in large audiences. Since re-election is the usual goal in democratic office holding, politicians are usually not inclined to meet business wishes easily when they are controversial

quarter of the Swiss Alpine Club SAC, give details about the previous elaboration of the statutes, and leave a somewhat different, sober impression; see folder “Assemblée générale 1932–1935” and “Anciens statuts”.

40 Rettner, Eiger, p. 131.

41 Bossus, *Fifty Years*, pp. 86, 90.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

43 Apart from the two booklets quoted in note 29, I have only been able to trace short notes on the UIAA in various publications: *Dictionnaire des Alpes*, p. 726; D. Anker, *Bergsteigen international*, in *150 Years Stories*, ed. by Mammut Sports Group AG, Zürich 2011, pp. 162–163; the interesting new book by I. Scaglia (*The Emotions of Internationalism. Feeling International Cooperation in the Alps in the Interwar Period*, Oxford 2019) deals with special aspects in the first phase of the UIAA.

in the public medialisised space.⁴⁴ In recent years this political science debate has evolved, and new evidence, new factors and some exceptions from the suggested model have been brought forward. For instance, a distinction has been drawn between politicians in search of technical policy advice and those seeking to polish their image. They would react differently to business offers or pressures.⁴⁵

As the debate on public visibility levels is still under way and has developed no historical, long-run perspective so far, it seems sensible for the present purpose to use only elements thereof as a background to our discussion of paths of globalisation. The aspects of mountaineering history presented in this article differ quite considerably with regard to publicity and political implications. Let us summarise our findings in four points:

(1) Since its inception, record-seeking alpinism has attracted a great deal of public attention. Many people were curious about the latest achievements on steep walls and high summits. Intense attention drew extensive media coverage which, in its turn, increased the audience. The publicity cluster so created became an attractive field for politics and power deployment. In the early twentieth century the direction was often nationalistic. During the three-day climb of the Eiger North Face in 1938, the German *Führer* demanded reports on a regular basis, and after the event claimed the “victory” of the four German and Austrian climbers for the Third Reich. After their feat they were invited to a reception and photo shoot with him. Fifteen years later, when the first successful climbers returned from Mount Everest, the long series of “post production” events on three continents provided an accurate reflection of the political order and aspirations. The winds of change were blowing through the colonial world. Sherpa Tenzing, the native climber, in particular did not fit into the metropolitan hierarchy which reserved the highest honours for the British. Yet on the Indian subcontinent most ascribed the exploit to him and not to his colleague from New Zealand.

(2) In the decades around 1900 most prominent mountaineering clubs cherished international ambitions. The relationships between them were marked both by their shared passion for climbing and by their national rivalry. An international federation created, or dominated, by one club alone would have produced “noisy” politics and would not have been sustainable. Thus, when the wish for international cooperation grew in the interwar period, that task was assigned to the Swiss, a small state and weak player where international technical activities could be kept low key. The presidency of the *Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme* UIAA fell to the Swiss Alpine Club's section in Geneva, then seat of the League of Nations and of many international organisations. Some of the organisations were shaped by elites close to diplomatic and aristocratic circles.⁴⁶ The long-term president of the UIAA, Egmond d'Arcis, came from an aristocratic background as well, and thought of alpinism as a continuation of chivalrous ideals. In

44 Culpepper, Quiet Politics.

45 E. Keller, Noisy Business Politics: Lobbying Strategies and Business Influence After the Financial Crisis, in: *Journal of European Public Policy* 25 (2018) 3, pp. 287–306.

46 M. Herren, *Internationale Organisationen seit 1865. Eine Globalgeschichte der internationalen Ordnung*, Darmstadt 2009, p. 11; for the large number of international organisations located in Switzerland and particularly in

the first three decades of its existence, the Union was more or less his family enterprise and, in the war period, almost fell apart.

(3) The legitimacy of risk taking in mountaineering is an important field of discourse where views typically diverge. Driven by commercial interest, a considerable part of the media was pulled to the risk side in order to sell sensational thrills. Yet the public voices judging the latest adventures “suicidal” could become loud and prevail in certain moments. This kind of critique was also assimilated, at least officially, by the first generation of Soviet climbers. “Bourgeois” alpinism was denounced by them as an egoistic activity of individual “peak-eaters, supermen, record-seekers”. From another angle, but with similar results, the UIAA voted against the “unhealthy” way of mountaineering emerging in the 1930s and remained prudent with regard to avant-garde alpinism. After all, one of its main tasks was promoting safety in mountaineering. The Union should grow through honest work and not through “excessive” publicity. Nevertheless, developing more visibility was considered appropriate from the 1960s onward. Thus, a climber-celebrity like Reinhold Messner could be invited for a particular event. As he liked to describe life risking adventures in idealistic terms, this did not directly hurt the official view.

(4) The different link to publicity and politics created a different access to resources and resulted in a particular relationship to communication and transport technology, the single most important driver of globalisation. There are many indications that “noisy” mountaineering pushed technology. The Soviet expeditions to the summits of Central Asia in 1928 and 1933 were provided with the latest film and radio equipment. By the time of the climb of Mount Everest, television was expanding and it is quite certain that a part of the audience was encouraged by the spectacular event, a welcome addition to the Queen’s coronation, to turn to the new devices. In Britain alone, the returning heroes could be watched on over two million television sets.⁴⁷ The “quiet” side of international organisation, on the other hand, was not distinguished by technology but rather followed mainstream trends. The UIAA began to organise general assemblies far from Switzerland, in America and in Asia, only in the 1970s, after air travel had become affordable for the middle classes. A similar pattern emerged with the introduction of the internet. Although the UIAA conceived of itself as a global agency, its first website was not launched until after the turn of the millenium.⁴⁸

Geneva, see M. Herren-Oesch/S. Zala, *Netzwerk Außenpolitik. Internationale Organisationen und Kongresse als Instrumente der schweizerischen Außenpolitik 1914–1950*, Zürich 2002, p. 27.

47 Briggs and Burke, *Social History*, p. 213.

48 In 2001 (reconstructed with the website-version accessed on 15 April 2006).