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Mountain regions: a French speciality

The Festival of Mountain Trades, which took place in Chambéry from 15 to 18 November, was one more time the opportunity to showcase French expertise in mountainous environments both in France and for export.

Poma, Egis and the Compagnie des Alpes are major businesses associated with the expertise and dynamism of the French “mountain” industry. With all the players in the sector, these businesses enable France to figure among the top three countries in terms of annual numbers of ski days (50 million in the



winter of 2011). In total, with their many projects to develop and run ski resorts, France achieves a turnover of €7 to 8 million, according to Cluster Montagne. A significant scale which, in the view of the professionals, has not been sufficiently emphasised by the public authorities.

Cluster Montagne

Cluster Montagne was set up in April 2012 to export French expertise in this area. The aim of the organisation is to unify the whole economic sector related to mountains in order to promote its development, notably at international level.

The new body acts as an interface between French companies, both large industrial groups and small and medium-sized enterprises, and their potential clients in France and abroad. Cluster Montagne offers the skills of French players in the fields of developing ski areas, leisure activities and also the training of professionals.

“Our mission is to pursue the dual objective of improving France’s appeal as a destination and of positioning France’s companies at international level,” points out Benoit Robert, director of the cluster. “We work pretty much all over the world. We are, for example, very active in the markets of countries affected by the economic crisis. We also offer managers of ski resorts technological innovations that might revive their development.” But industrialists are also looking towards emerging countries such as Chile, Poland and Russia.



The town of Sochi in Russia is now a place that cannot be overlooked. In 2014 it is due to host the Winter Olympic Games on the ski runs of four ski resorts in the area, representing a market worth nearly \$24 billion. French industrialists have a big presence. The Compagnie des Alpes (CDA), for instance, is supervising the construction and running of the Olympic resort of Rosa Khutor, which will host the Alpine skiing, snowboarding and freestyle events. Two employees of the CDA have even been seconded to the region to manage the project, which will not finish at the end of the Olympics. In fact, the CDA has landed a 25-year contract to maintain the resort. The Poma company, world leader in cable transport, is installing ski lifts at the various sites. SMEs are also present on the ground: Engineerisk, for instance, is in charge of research into the avalanche risk at the Olympic resorts; and Lumiplan is developing dynamic signage systems in the Olympic valley as well as smart-phone apps.

In China, Cluster Montagne has over 20 ongoing projects, including the “Shanghai by China” resort, whose

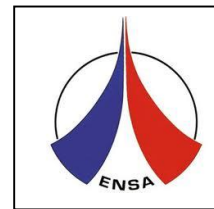


hotel facilities should reach 10,000 beds. The resort has been built in just two and a half years, when the construction of such a structure can easily take 20 years, depending on the resources and economic conditions of the country.

The directors of Poma are also turning their attention to South America. The group is known in particular for the construction of the New York aerial tramway as well as the one in Rio. The French company has also built the southernmost cable transport installations in the world, sited near the Chilean town of Punta Arenas, not very far from Tierra del Fuego.

Ifremmont and Ensa for professionals

France also has a universally recognised centre for professional training for ski instructors: the Ecole Nationale du Ski et de l'Alpinisme (Ensa). The centre of expertise of this leading establishment, set up in 2008, is taking charge, in particular, of disseminating the school's know-how and promoting professions and training in the mountain sector.



Working on behalf of local people, amateurs and professionals, Ifremmont is a centre of excellence in mountain medicine, set up in 2005 from a project supported by France and the European Union. With the UNITAR (United Nations Institute for Training and Research) label, the Ifremmont Mountain School training centre is aimed at all specialists in mountain regions who are likely to be faced with an isolated environment lacking in health facilities.

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Website:

<http://www.cluster-montagne.com/>

<http://www.ensa-chamonix.net/>

<http://www.ifremmont.com/>