



Educating a New Woman through Tourism

A Lesson from Interwar Railway Advertising

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The textual and visual narratives of Chamonix that were created by the P.L.M. railway company in interwar decades redefined the identity of this city. Instead of portrayed as an isolated and hard-to-reach place in the Alps, Chamonix was represented as one of interwar loci of modernity where the new discourses on gender, sports, a female body, and leisure were elaborated= Chamonix's discourse of modernity was not without a touch of nostalgia, because Chamonix's new identity incorporated many references to the Belle Époque. Chamonix was narrated as a space where travelers could immerse themselves in the new experience of modernity. The presentation analyzes a role of French railway company Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée, P.L.M., in redefining a public discourse on women as independent and physically strong. The P.L.M. made remarkable efforts to promote ski industry and railway travel to the Alps in the 1920s. In 1924, Chamonix became famous as the site of the Winter Olympic Games. The P.L.M. built several luxurious hotels in Chamonix and actively advertised the pleasures of winter sports for French women. The efforts of the P.L.M. to promote winter sports in the Alps involved articulation a new vision of gender roles, redefined the identity of the region, and contributed to the rise of mass tourism. The region was redefined as the space of modernity. The railway posters advertising travel to Chamonix

created the model, a visual matrix of what the French ought to be; the posters functioned not just as the invitation to travel, but also an invitation to dream about new social roles, new identities that one could acquire by undertaking a voyage, practicing a new type of sports, and breaking from the daily routine. On such railway posters, nowhere could one find a discourse of domesticity or any hints at women's passive role in society. Railway posters of the 1920s and 1930s portray smiling single women who climb up to the top of mountains and appear to embody the feminist discourses of single women. The representations of French women on such posters became a remarkable effort to redefine the identity of a modern women outside of the discourse on motherhood.