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This study aimed to identify the motivations that lead a particular sub-group of the millennial generation, namely, university students, to choose mountain areas as tourism destinations both in winter and summer. Through a focus group and a questionnaire survey targeting Italian millennial students ($n = 2,292$), we first identified the main motivations that drive this choice. Second, we identified the level of importance for each motivation during both seasons. The findings revealed that millennials are guided by six main motivations in choosing mountain areas as travel destinations, each of which play different roles according to the considered season. The only exception is represented by the category of food and beverage, which is not influenced by seasonality. The results contribute to the literature on tourism and millennials, giving insight on the motivations that drive millennials' choices. Moreover, the results are relevant from a managerial point of view by providing important indications to managers and policy makers on the determinants of millennials' decisions.

Keywords: Millennials; mountain tourism; winter; summer; seasons; motivations

Introduction

In recent years, studies have started to investigate the behaviours and attitudes of millennials because of their importance to industries (Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant, 2017; Nowak, Thach, & Olsen, 2006). The relevance of millennials, defined as people born between the 1980s and 1995, is evidenced by the fact that they represent a very wide segment of the population with high purchasing powers (Nowak, Thach, & Olsen, 2006). Millennials are also characterised by their interest in social media (Akkucuk & Turan, 2016), attention to such new trends as sustainability (Bonadonna , Giachino & Truant,, 2017; Felzensztein, 2011; Ferris, 2011), and tendency to be influenced by those trends in their purchasing decisions. For these reasons, the overall interest in the millennial generation and its behaviours has been changing over the years (Foot, 2001; Hoover, 2009; Nowak et al., 2006). Meanwhile, the tourism industry has gained interest in these

young people who may represent its future (Lama, 2018; Liu, Wu, & Li, 2018; Loureiro & Guerreiro, 2018; Rita, Brochado, & Dimova, 2018).

There are several points in common between millennials and the characteristics of mountain tourism. Millennials show interest in themes such as climate change and natural resources (Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015; Olsen, Thach & Nowak, 2007) and they tend to evaluate the impact that their activities have on the environment (Hopkins, 2017; Miller, Merrilees & Coghlan, 2015; Olsen, Thach & Nowak, 2007; Schoolman, Shriberg, Schwimmer & Tysman, 2016; Tomalty & Mallach, 2016). Meanwhile, tourism in mountain areas, after a long period of economic success and deep environmental transformation (Denning, 2014), is being transformed by the consequences of climate change (Bonzanigo, Giupponi, & Balbi, 2016; Garavaglia, Diolaiuti, Smiraglia, Pasquale, & Pelfini, 2012; Morrison & Pickering, 2013; Palomo, 2017; Pröbstl-Haider, Dabrowska, & Haider, 2016; Varley & Medway, 2011), new tourists' needs and behaviours (Cavallaro et al., 2017; Dejouhanet, 2017; Moularde & Weaver, 2016), tourists' diverse perceptions of natural and environmental resources (Dornier & Mauri, 2018; Wu, Hou, & Wen, 2018), and the increasing popularity of rural areas (Bajgier-Kowalska, Tracz, & Uliszak, 2017; Chiran, Vîntu, Jităreanu, Murariu & Leonte, 2017; Kortoci & Kortoci, 2017); mountain tourism needs to be rediscovered.

Mountains remain places of relatively undisturbed nature and important natural resources. They are also places of species and genetic diversity that urban classes of the post-industrial societies have rediscovered for satisfying their need of nature-based tourism (Higham, Thompson-Carr, & Musa, 2015). On the one hand, the mountain tourism sector is increasing the number of its initiatives towards sustainability to meet the new market demand (Paunović & Jovanović, 2017). On the other hand, millennials are attracted by natural environment and sustainability (Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant,

2017; Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015). However, few studies have analysed the relationship between millennials and tourism in mountain areas (Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant, 2017). Mountain areas meet some of the requisites that are of potential interest to millennials, but it is not verified whether millennials are genuinely interested in mountain destinations. Moreover, the main motivations that stimulate them to choose mountains as travel destination need to be identified.

This research, analysing the 2,292 answers of millennials student to a questionnaire, identified the main motivations that guide millennials in choosing mountain destination both during the summer and winter seasons.

The seasonality can have an influence on the motivation that led millennials to choose mountain because of the different weather conditions and consequently the different activities that can be made. The relevance of the seasonality is underlined by previous studies as e.g. Hodeck & Hovemann (2016) that started to analyse separately winter and summer in catching peoples' motivation for sport activities.

The findings are expected to yield theoretical contributions, adding a new research stream to research on millennials, particularly relating to their attitude towards the environment and sustainability in mountain tourism. From a managerial point of view, the study is relevant because it underlines the motivations that can convince millennials to choose mountain areas as tourism destinations. Mountain municipalities need to attract people and develop new marketing strategies that can convince young people to choose them for their free time and, to do this, they need to know how and what to communicate.

Literature review

Understanding millennials to promote the tourism sector

The growing interest in millennials and tourism is evident in the research conducted by Veiga, Santos, Águas, & Santos (2017), which underlined how the ability of millennials in developing their digital skills, their being connected, and their constant openness to new experiences can disrupt the tourism sector's logic. Different experiments have been conducted to shed light on how millennials react to new communication tools and on the actual relevance that social media, the internet, and all the digital instruments have in their decision making in the tourism industry (Erdeji & Dragin, 2017; Loda, Coleman, & Backman, 2010; Şchiopu et al., 2016). Results have underlined the importance of the internet in promoting destinations (Loda et al., 2010), giving millennials the opportunity to choose and directly book their travel online as well as express their opinions after the journey by posting reviews and photos online (Erdeji & Dragin, 2017; Şchiopu et al., 2016). The relevance of the internet is related to the fact that for millennials, it is important to co-create experiences and provide feedback on the good or bad experience they had during the journey (Erdeji & Dragin, 2017). The information gathered on millennials has also been used to promote and develop some areas as tourist destinations (Fall & Lubbers, 2017; Hahm, Upchurch, & Wang, 2008). For example, studies have attempted to define strategies for promoting the United States as an international tourism destination (Fall & Lubbers, 2017). Others have evaluated if the strategy of featuring locales in films could generate the desire to visit the portrayed tourist destinations (Hahm et al., 2008).

A number of studies have also paid attention to the different facets of tourism and its direct or indirect interaction with the millennial generation (Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant, 2017; Dimache, Wondirad, & Agyeiwaah, 2017; Smith, Clement, & Pitts, 2018;

Tsai & Chen, 2017). Smith, Clement, & Pitts (2018) analysed the involvement of millennials in the tourism sector as operators as well as their career progression in the hospitality sector. Researchers have focused on the behaviours of millennials in visiting museums (Dimache et al., 2017) and in buying airline tickets, particularly the elements that influence their willingness to pay (Tsai & Chen, 2017). Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant (2017) demonstrated the high sensibility of millennials with respect to issues of sustainability and investigated their perception of winter and summer sports in mountains, highlighting the influence of both the place where they lived and their sex on their perceptions. The current work is the only study that sought to investigate the role of millennials in mountain tourism.

The information gathered on millennials' behaviours and attitudes have been investigated under several topics and at different time periods (see Table 1). Recently, some scholars have also evaluated millennials' behaviours on tourism issues and related motivations. Indeed, interest is increasing in shedding light on the role and place of millennials in different industries, including tourism (Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant, 2017). However, there is a lack of studies dedicated to mountains as tourism destination for millennials. As mountains can be defined as places of relatively undisturbed nature and important natural resources and are also places of species and genetic diversity that can attract people from cities (Higham, Thompson-Carr, & Musa, 2015), and as millennials are recognised as being interested in environment and sustainable actions (Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015; Hopkins, 2017; Miller et al., 2015; Olsen, Thach & Nowak, 2007; Schoolman et al., 2016; Tomalty & Mallach, 2016), studying the relationship between them can open new avenues in the tourism sector.

Table 1. Literature and related results on millennials'/university students' behaviours.

References	Findings
Rita, Brochado, & Dimova (2018)	American and British millennials share push travel motivations and destination activity preferences. The main motivational factors are 'to relax' and 'to escape from the ordinary', and the most attractive destination activities are 'to try local food' and 'to go sightseeing'.
Smith, Clement, & Pitts (2018)	Millennials/hospitality alumni are involved in substantial job movement in the first three years after graduation. Millennials who leave the hospitality sector could be integrated into related fields, such as health care and real estate.
Bonadonna, Giachino, & Truant (2017)	Millennials have a high degree of sensitivity towards sustainability issues. There are differences in the perception of millennials regarding the sustainability of both mountain winter and summer sports. Millennial perception is deeply influenced by the place they are used to living—mountains or cities—and their sex.
Dimache, Wondirad, & Agyeiwaah (2017)	This study highlighted the identitarian and ideological implications of visiting the Museum of History for Hong Kong born-and-raised millennials. The findings revealed the connections between individual and official narratives.
Erdeji & Dragin (2017)	Millennials are interested in adventure and travel, use the latest technology and social media, and post their experiences online, sharing them with a large number of friends. Moreover, they have the need to co-create experiences and provide feedback on their positive or negative experience.
Fall & Lubbers (2017)	This was a survey on 691 foreign and domestic college students to identify categories of terms to describe the United States. The findings offered suggestions for campaign themes that support or run contrary to perceptions currently held by the respondents.
Khan & Callanan (2017)	Millennials Muslims are influenced in travel decisions by affinity groups and finding common ground with a diverse group of friends.
Pepe & Bournique (2017)	New York State heritage sites primarily use word-of-mouth, relationship, and electronic marketing. Social media are used to communicate mostly with adults and seniors, but the major issue identified in the study is that marketing does not focus heavily on millennials.
Tsai & Chen (2017)	Ticket validity is the most important obstacle to the willingness-to-pay value by millennials, followed by availability of flight, advanced booking, and conditions for changing bookings.
Veiga et al. (2017)	Millennials can disrupt the tourism sector with their particular characteristics, such as strong digital skills,

	high degree of permanent connectivity, search for outstanding experiences, and altruistic behaviours.
Santos, Veiga, & Águas (2016)	Millennials may be a homogeneous segment. They are considered digital natives who look for authentic experiences and see themselves as travellers rather than tourists.
Şchiopu et al. (2016)	This study demonstrated millennials behaviour in the stages of journey planning, booking, and development. The results highlighted the importance given to technological resources and the extent to which young tourists are willing to share travel experiences later.
Smith, Cohen, & Pickett (2014)	The main motivation to volunteer in sport activities (i.e. Soccer without Borders) is the opportunity to travel abroad. The millennials involved indicated they had intentionally sought opportunities in a foreign country and a long-term immersion. This condition is important for the volunteers to achieve their initial goals related to gain a cultural experience, i.e. increasing global understanding and providing social gains.
Mohsin & Alsawafi (2011)	Omani students' push motivations to travel abroad are 'to be mentally refreshed', 'to learn something new or increase my knowledge', and 'to spend my time without worrying about my study'. The students' pull factors are 'safety and security at destination even when travelling alone', 'natural attractions', and 'availability of mosques (places of worship)'. Moreover, sex has a significant impact on some of the travel motivations.
Loda, Coleman, & Backman (2010)	Millennials tested a print advertisement and the official website for the Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau. Results underlined the importance of the internet to tourism marketing and destination selection.
Xu, Morgan, & Song (2009)	This study compared the travel behaviour and attitudes of undergraduate students from the United Kingdom and China. The survey revealed similarities and significant differences. On the one hand, both groups enjoy beach holidays, search for fun and relaxation after studies, wish to discover somewhere new, and prefer to eat local food. On the other hand, the Chinese students want to see the famous sights and learn about other cultures and history, whereas the British are more concerned with having fun and engaging in outdoor adventure.
Hahm, Upchurch, & Wang (2008)	This study examined the degree to which the leisure activity of 'going to a movie or film' can influence the desire to visit the portrayed tourist destination. The results showed that the desire to visit film locations as expressed in the movie significantly vary by sex and ethnicity.

Thrane (2008)	This study examined how a number of determinants affect college students' destination choices for their summer vacation trip. General vacation and trip-specific motives are critical determinants of destination choice, whereas socio-demographic characteristics are not.
Kim, Oh, & Jogaratnam (2007)	College students are influenced when products are delivered as associated with 'knowledge', 'sports', and 'adventure'. Travel marketers should primarily focus on these factors to improve the push model.

The mentioned studies (see Table 1) show that millennial students are involved in researches dedicated to analyse tourism and leisure motivations in different contexts and their attitude with technological resources. Therefore, although recent studies highlight the interest on millennials/students' motivations in tourism issues, the lack of researches on the relationship between mountain tourism and related seasonal motivations is as much evident. Indeed, no study aims at identifying millennials motivations that drive the choice towards a mountain destination and evaluating feasible differences between summer and winter seasons.

Role of motivation in choosing a tourism destination

Motivations are important to be known to influence tourists during the different phases of their decision making in choosing a destination (Mansfeld, 1992).

Several studies have analysed tourists' motivations for different topics such as nature, sports and tourism, food and beverage, tranquillity, economic aspects, and trendy locations (Hodeck & Hovemann, 2016; Kim, Lee, Uysal, Kim & Ahn, 2015; Luo & Deng, 2008; Alsawafi, 2017; Mutanga, Vengesayi, Chikuta, Muboko & Gandiwa, 2017; Phillips & Brunt, 2013). Regarding nature concerns, the analysis of tourist motivations is important to understand the predictors of good wildlife tourism experiences (Mutanga et al., 2017) or stimulate revisit intentions (Kim et al., 2015). Moreover, tourists'

environmental attitudes and nature-based motivations could be closely and positively related (Luo & Deng, 2008).

Some studies have analysed motivations in sporting event contexts such as stadium atmosphere (Alsawafi, 2017), seasons in a specific region (Hodeck & Hovemann, 2016), and winter sports market (Phillips & Brunt, 2013). Specifically, Hodeck & Hovemann (2016) reported that there is almost no significant difference between summer and winter sport tourism regarding the importance of motivational factors in a specific geographical area.

Tourism motivations can also be correlated to local food in terms of consumption (Kim & Eves, 2012), of tangible and intangible heritage for UNESCO sites (Jiménez Beltrán, López-Guzmán, & Santa-Cruz, 2016; Peira, Beltramo, Pairotti & Bonadonna, 2018), and of trails in specific areas (Grybovych, Lankford, & Lankford, 2013). Kim & Eves (2012) identified that some underlying motivational dimensions of local food consumption are labelled as cultural experiences, interpersonal relations, and sensory appeal.

Additionally, economic aspects can influence tourism motivations, including as a determinant to take a trip as a break from city life (Dunne, Buckley, & Flanagan, 2007) or sometimes as a tool to define the distance that tourists tend to choose for their destinations in times of crisis (Cafiso, Cellini, & Cuccia, 2016) and relaxation experiences; the number of annual holiday trips, previous wellbeing holidays, and other factors significantly increase the likelihood of tourists being interested in relaxing holidays (Konu & Laukkanen, 2010). Finally, trendy locations can be considered a tool to stimulate tourism motivations, for example, experiencing fashionable/trendy places as a pull factor (Konu & Laukkanen, 2010) as well as also a determinant for working individuals' and students' destinations (Chow, 2017; Pedersen & Gram, 2018).

The motivations of tourists can be influenced by socio-demographic and travel characteristics, considering destination area (Azmil & Marzuki, 2015), as well as trip characteristics and trip preferences for sport tourism spectators (Dixon, Backman, Backman & Norman, 2012). In some cases, tourists' motivation can be influenced by cultural issues; traditional events can represent a strong motive to travel; for example, Scottish music events (McMorland & Mactaggart, 2007), Chinese lantern festival (Shen, 2014), and Chinese dragon boat races (McCartney & Osti, 2007).

Focusing on mountain areas, the topic of seasonality has been analysed by a number of scholars (Morrison & Pickering, 2013; Pütz et al., 2011; Rixen et al., 2011; Serquet & Rebetez, 2011; Steiger, Abegg, & Jänicke, 2016).

Several studies have investigated the impact of climate change on winter tourism and evaluated different scenarios to help the tourism industry adapt to the new setting (Cocolas, Walters, & Ruhanen, 2016; Saarinen & Tervo, 2006). In some cases, new activities are proposed in the summer season to attract more tourists (Morrison & Pickering, 2013; Rixen et al., 2011), with consideration for both cultural differences (Landauer, Haider, & Pröbstl-Haider, 2014) and reactions to climate change (Falk, 2013). It is necessary to adapt in terms of the strategy planning of the destination (Pickering, Castley, & Burtt, 2010; Tervo-Kankare, Hall, & Saarinen, 2013). These studies revealed that it may be economically reasonable to avoid technical snowmaking and redirect investment in tourist attractions independent of snow conditions (Pütz et al., 2011). Meanwhile, for summer tourism, and more specifically, tourism in mountain areas, studies have identified the relevance of cooler weather and the possibility to choose between different sports activities as main motivations linked to the choice of destination (Steiger et al., 2016). Meanwhile, results have shown that mountain tourists could spend

more nights in mountain resort hotels if the heat waves of climate change are more regular (Serquet & Rebetez, 2011).

In analysing the research on millennials' motivations, no reference to mountains has been made. Some studies have focused on the most important motivations for travelling, independent of the location (Kim, Oh, & Jogaratnam, 2007; Mohsin & Alsawafi, 2011; Rita et al., 2018; Smith, Cohen, & Pickett, 2014; Thrane, 2008; Xu et al., 2009).

To elaborate, if millennials are associated with the words *motivation* and *tourism*, the important motivation factors for US students are knowledge, sport, and adventure (Kim et al., 2007); in contrast, Omani students identify relaxation, knowledge, and mental regeneration as the most important motivators (Mohsin & Alsawafi, 2011). Meanwhile, Norwegian students are inspired to travel by the need for escapism (Thrane, 2008), whereas UK and Chinese students consider 'relax' and 'discover something new' as important motivations to travel (Xu et al., 2009). As for American and British millennials, they identify 'to relax' and 'to escape from the ordinary' as the most important motivations for travel (Rita et al., 2018). Indeed, American millennials are motivated to participate in long-term international sport-for-development volunteerism to increase their global understanding and elicit social gains (Smith, Cohen, & Pickett, 2014).

On the basis of the literature review and the lack of research on millennials and mountain tourism, and with the awareness that millennials are interested in themes such as climate change and natural resources (Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015), and that they tend to evaluate the impact that their activities have on the environment (Hopkins, 2017; Miller et al., 2015; Olsen, Thach & Nowak, 2007; Schoolman et al., 2016; Tomalty & Mallach, 2016), the present study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- RQ 1. What are the motivations for millennials to choose a mountain destination?

- RQ 2. Are there differences between motivations for summer and winter seasons?

Methodology and sample

A questionnaire-based survey was used for analysing millennials and mountain destinations. The study focuses on the Piedmont Region in Italy because it features a long-standing mountain tradition, given that its geography is 43.3% mountainous, and it boasts many mountain destinations that attract tourists from around the world. Within this region, the University of Turin is a leading university with a solid national and international reputation. The University of Turin can be considered a relevant sample base, as it is one of the biggest universities in Italy and includes 27 departments in different research fields, from computer science to nanotechnology, from sociology to medical science, and from psychology to management science, to name a few.

The questionnaire was created at the beginning of 2017 and consisted of 34 questions, either closed-ended or based on a seven-point Likert scale. Each question included an open answer to allow respondents to specify a different response or suggest other ideas. Four sections formed the core constructs of the questionnaire: i) general data on millennial respondents; ii) sustainability perception and behaviour; iii) vacations in mountain municipalities; and iv) motivations for choosing mountain destinations. A focus group with a sample of six millennials was conducted to identify motivations behind the choice of mountain destinations during summer and winter seasons (Krueger and Casey, 2014; Barbour, 2007). Millennials involved in the focus group were three males and three females aged between 24 and 31 years old. All of them were students, and two of them

also had some working experience. Four of them declared that they go to mountain areas for holidays, whereas the other two people rarely go, and when they do, it is usually for only one day. The focus group, which lasted around two hours, was conducted to identify the main motivations for choosing mountain areas during summer or winter seasons, as the literature does not provide a clear classification for millennials.

The questionnaires were supplemented by a focus group to identify the main motivations that influence the choice of mountain areas as destinations during the summer and the winter seasons. This was an important step in the research because, as previously mentioned, the literature does not offer a clear categorisation of the determinants for millennials students to choose mountain destinations. From the focus group, millennial students associated mountain areas with different activities according to the season considered.

Starting from some of the motivations found in the literature, the focus group completed the range of possibilities to consider: i) nature and wildlife; ii) sport; iii) food and beverage; iv) relaxation and quiet; v) economic convenience; and vi) trendy location. On the one hand, some of the motivations identified were divergent. For example, excursions were considered by some millennials as sport, and by others, as nature and wildlife. After a discussion with the participants, it was decided to consider excursions as sport when their level of difficulty was high, and otherwise, as nature and wildlife. On the other hand, some initially identified motivations were gradually integrated or deleted. For example, the 'solarium' motivation, that is, to get a tan, was integrated in the 'relaxation and quiet' category; the 'shopping' motivation was considered not aligned with the mountain areas and therefore eliminated. The results of the focus group identified a list of shared motivations for choosing mountain areas by millennial students.

After the focus group, we formulated a questionnaire that was tested with 95 millennials in order to corroborate its effectiveness, refine its design, and improve its content. This step allowed us to verify the reliability of the questionnaire, identify imperfections in the structure of the questions and detect potential mistakes and structural weaknesses. During this stage, for example, the answer to 'period of stay' in the summer and winter seasons was changed to 'One day', 'Weekend', 'One week', and 'More than one week'. Subsequently, the questionnaire was created using GSuite and then sent to the available e-mail addresses of the students at the University of Turin, Italy. The chosen sample was composed of university students as a representative sub-group sample of millennials (e.g. Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010).

A recall was done, once the completion date expired, to reach as many students as possible. The received answers were analysed to rule out questionnaires with incomplete responses in important sections. After the selection, 2,292 questionnaires were validated for the purpose of the research, representing a response rate of 12%.

To analyse the responses, IBM SPSS PASW 18.0.0 was used. Descriptive statistics summarised the responses and made inferences on the survey data. The results of the analysis of numerical variables are expressed as mean +/- standard deviation. Additionally, to compare season evidence, a one-way repetitive analysis of variance was used. Post-hoc tests of item reliability were then conducted to ensure the constructs were internally consistent: contrasts within subjects, effects between subjects, and Bonferroni tests. Differences and associations were considered significant at $p < 0.05$.

Findings

The analysis of the results allowed us to determine the motivations that lead millennial students to choose mountain destinations in the winter and summer bridging the gap highlighted by literature analysis. Furthermore, from the data analysis several

practical and theoretical implications of the study emerged. More in detail, at the initial stage, an overview on the sample and their main traits is presented in order to underline the general context of the study and the attitude of millennials towards vacation in mountain destinations (e.g., booking preference and period of stay in mountain). At a later stage, a focus on the reasons that led millennials to choose mountain destinations during summer and winter seasons is presented, showing significant differences in such categories.

The sample was composed of students from various departments of the University of Turin with a mean age of 23 years (females comprised 65.4% of the total sample).

According to the sustainability aspects, we found the important role of both education and family in enhancing the awareness of the majority of millennial students, influencing their attention towards the environment. If the university made the students aware about such topics, the family was fundamental for them to understand how to act in a sustainable way, such as in proper waste disposal. In line with the literature review, the sample of millennial students paid attention to their purchasing decisions, such as identifying products and services that respect the environment. Indeed, they stated that if a company pursues a sustainable attitude, they are more willing to pay for the company's products and services.

Another important aspect we analysed through the questionnaire was the millennial students' tendency to spend their vacation in mountain municipalities. We observed a significant interest in mountain vacation destinations, as the majority of the participants (58.2%) reported visiting a mountain municipality more than three times a year (Table 2). Table 2 shows millennials' vacation choices of mountain municipalities. Tables 3 and 4 show the percentage of millennials who spend summer and winter vacations in a mountain destination.

Table 2. Vacation in mountain municipalities (times/year).

Vacation in mountain municipality (times/year)	Response count	%
Never	167	7.3
One	302	13.2
Two	289	12.6
Three	199	8.7
More than three	1,335	58.2
Total	2,292	100.0

Table 3. Summer vacation in mountain destinations.

Summer vacation in mountain destination	Response count	%
Yes	1,134	49.5
No	1,158	50.5
Total	2,292	100.0

Table 4. Winter vacation in mountain destinations.

Winter vacation in mountain destination	Response count	%
Yes	1,254	54.7
No	1,038	45.3
Total	2,292	100.0

The period of stay varied from a single day to over two weeks, as shown in Tables 5 and 6, with an opposite trend for the two considered seasons.

Table 5. Period of stay during summer.

Period of stay in summer	Response count	%
One day	452	19.7
Weekend	575	25.1
One week	568	24.8
More than one week	697	30.4
Total	2,292	100.0

Table 6. Period of stay during winter.

Period of stay in winter	Response count	%

One day	782	34.1
Weekend	873	38.1
One week	329	14.3
More than one week	308	13.4
Total	2,292	100.0

From the previous tables, it emerged that our sample of millennial students usually spent more than a weekend in the mountains during the summer season, and a day or a weekend during the winter season.

The booking tools used by millennials for summer and winter vacations were investigated to confirm their greater digital approach highlighted in literature (Table 7). The booking preferences were divided to three groups: on-line (through website such as Booking and Airbnb), traditional (e.g. telephone, newspaper ads, and travel agencies), and without reservation (e.g. use of houses owned by family or friends).

Table 7. Booking preferences.

	Summer		Winter		
Booking preferences	Mean	Standard Dev. Error	Mean	Standard Dev. Error	Sig. (2-code)
Online	2.702	.098	2.945	1.011	.000
Traditional	4.051	1.609	4.113	.899	.000
Without reservation	3.001	1.234	3.120	.994	.230

Table 7 shows the scarce use of online booking channels in favour of traditional channels, mainly represented by the use of telephones. The use of houses owned by the family to access mountain destinations was greater than that of online channels, even if it is not particularly widespread within the sample (mean 3 on a Likert scale from 1 to 7).

A difference in evaluating mountain areas as destinations according to season was identified, confirming the results from the focus group. A significant difference was observed between the average values for the judgment between the two seasons. Taking

into consideration as first variable the 'motivation' to choose mountain areas as destination, we confirmed that the choice between summer and winter was strongly guided by motivation. Furthermore, we analysed the main characteristics of mountain destinations. The motives presented in the questionnaire were the same for both winter and summer: nature and wildlife, sport, food and beverage, relaxation and quiet, economic convenience, and trendy location. Considering each of the six motivations, the authors noted the following:

- Nature and wildlife: the average score for summer (6.157) was significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than that for winter (5.910);

- Sport: the average score for winter (5.487) was significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than that for summer (4.618);

- Food and beverage: the average score for summer (4.142) was not significantly higher than that for winter (4.103);

- Relaxation and quiet: the average score for summer (6.319) was significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than that for winter (5.800);

- Economic convenience: the average score for summer (3.515) was significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than that for winter (3.013);

- Trendy location: the average score for winter (2.463) was significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than that for summer (2.110).

Table 8 shows the main results for each considered motivation.

Table 8. Motivations for visiting in the summer and winter seasons.

Measure: Motivation					
	Summer		Winter		
Motivation	Mean	Standard Dev. Error	Mean	Standard Dev. Error	Sig. (2-code)
Nature and wildlife	6.157	.060	5.910	.065	.000

Sport	4.618	.060	5.487	.065	.000
Food and beverage	4.142	.061	4.103	.067	.360
Relaxation and quiet	6.319	.060	5.800	.065	.000
Economic convenience	3.515	.062	3.013	.067	.000
Trendy location	2.110	.062	2.463	.068	.000

From the results, nature and wildlife, relaxation and quiet, food and beverage, and sport were the motivations with higher marginal means. Particularly, food and beverage was the only motivation with relatively stable results for both winter and summer. For the other three motivations, a significant difference was observed between the two seasons. Sport, as it also emerged from the focus groups, was the motivation that drove the choice towards a mountain destination during winter, but was less relevant for summer. Conversely, nature and wildlife and relaxation and quiet were two motivations that led millennials to choose mountain destinations during summer.

Finally, economic convenience was more important during summer, whereas trendy location was more relevant to choosing a mountain resort as winter destination. Figure 1 graphically shows the differences between motivations during the winter and summer seasons.

Figure 1. Motivations for choosing a mountain area as destination in winter and summer.
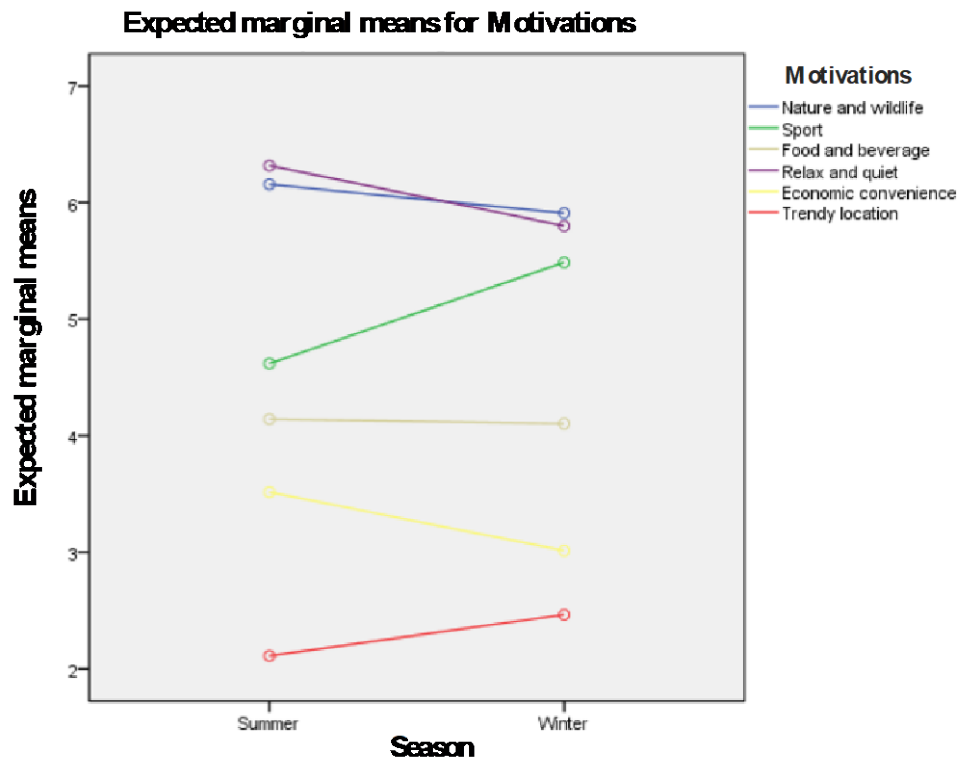
Figure 1 further highlights the important role of food and beverage during both seasons, whereas the imbalance between winter and summer is more evident for other motivations.

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the increasing relevance of studies on millennials, this research investigated the motivations that drive millennials towards choosing a mountain destination. For this purpose, a sample of Italian millennial students was selected.

As a general feature, the sample of millennial students was particularly aware of sustainability issues, in line with the main findings in the literature (Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant, 2017; Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015).

A significant interest in mountain vacations was identified, especially during winter. During summer, millennials tend to spend more time in the mountains, whereas winter holidays are characterised by a shorter stay (usually a day or a weekend). This

finding confirmed millennials' interest in the natural environment (Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant, 2017; Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015; Paunović & Jovanović, 2017).

We also investigated the main channels used by the selected sample for booking mountain locations. In contrast with the main literature on millennials and tourism (Erdeji & Dragin, 2017; Loda et al., 2010; Schiopu et al., 2016; Veiga et al., 2017), the use of digital instruments was not particularly widespread. Indeed, the millennial university students in our study did not book their travel directly online; they preferred to use traditional channels, particularly the telephone.

Regarding the first research question (*What are the motivations that lead millennials to choose a mountain destination in a specific season?*), the focus group revealed a list of motivations that fill the gap in the literature on millennials and mountain tourism. Indeed, few studies on millennials have considered compiling a complete list of motivations (Rita et al., 2018), and none have focused on mountain destinations and a distinction between winter and summer seasons.

However, some motivations reflected those identified in different tourism studies: presence of high-quality local food (Kim & Eves, 2012; Rita et al., 2018), nature-based attitudes (Luo & Deng, 2008), economic aspects (Dunne et al., 2007), relaxation opportunities (Konu & Laukkanen, 2010), and trendy locations (Chow, 2017; Azmil & Marzuki, 2015). Consequently, this study enriches the literature on tourism by providing a list of reasons that drive millennials towards the choice of a mountain destination.

For the second research question (*Are there differences between motivations in summer and winter seasons?*), millennials were shown to be attracted by mountain destinations especially for the possibility of being immersed in nature and for relaxing. This aspect was more evident in the summer season than in winter, confirming the results of Steiger et al. (2016). The sport offer was an important reason, especially during the

winter, partly contradicting the finding in Hodeck & Hovemann (2016), in which no significant differences are registered between summer and winter seasons. Our results indicated that mountain destinations were also attractive for their food and beverage offers, without any seasonal difference, confirming previous studies on millennials' motivations (Kim & Eves, 2012; Rita et al., 2018).

Conversely, millennials seemed to be not particularly influenced by the choice of 'trendy location' and 'economic convenience', in contrast with previous studies (Cafiso et al., 2016; Chow, 2017; Dunne et al., 2007; Pedersen & Gram, 2018).

Thus, the findings confirmed millennial students' interest in mountain destinations, with some important seasonal differences. The nature-based motivation and relaxation and quiet opportunities were the most relevant reasons that drove the target sample in choosing the mountains as tourist destination. The relevance attributed to such motivations confirmed the sustainability attitude of this population segment.

Implications and limitations

This study revealed several theoretical implications: firstly, it contributes to enriching the literature on mountains as tourism destination, given the scarcity of studies on such topic (Bonadonna, Giachino & Truant, 2017), highlighting interesting evidence for winter and summer vacations as regards the length of stay (one day, weekend, one week, more than a week), booking preferences, motivations, and also sustainability attitudes. The booking channels chosen by the sample of millennials contribute to increasing the literature on millennials' tourism choices, even if highlighting dissimilar results. As regards the motivations, the research contributes to validating and completing the list of motivations previously identified in literature. Lastly, the research, putting in relation the different topics analysed independently in literature, bridges the existing gap

on motivations for visiting mountain destinations during the winter and summer seasons, focusing on a group of millennials who are also university students.

This research also reveals significant practical implications, as it enables different tourism operators and local authorities to gain awareness on millennials' perceptions and behaviours. With a clear understanding of millennials' motivations regarding the choice of mountain destinations, managers as well as local actors can better market their particular destinations and offerings. Moreover, the study highlights differences between the reasons that led millennials to choose mountain in summer and winter; this represents an important variable in designing marketing and different managerial initiatives.

Indeed, the above results could help managers develop communication strategies and match visitors' motivations with adequate products and services at mountain destinations. Motivations can further be used to target and differentiate among products/services by season and according to the morphology of the territory.

Millennials have been shown to be highly interested in nature and wildlife, relaxation and quiet, trying local foods, and practicing sports, with some differences between summer and winter seasons. As such, mountain destinations need to offer nature trails, adjunct services to support relaxation, authentic local cuisine, and sporting opportunities, depending on season. Local governments, tourist operators, and local organisations can include these distinctive features in their promotional mix or in their marketing communication to create commercial offers that incorporate millennials' preferences, differentiated according to the period of the year. They should likewise take into consideration that for such destinations, the booking channels preferred are still traditional, with inevitable consequences on communication offers.

This study has some limitations that should be overcome in future studies. Its main limitation is related to the chosen sample, namely, millennial students from the University

of Turin, Italy. Future studies could enrich the sample in two ways: by including millennials from other Italian and European universities and by considering a more heterogeneous sample of millennials, including non-students. Another limitation refers to the content of the questionnaire, which does not consider the combination of the push (internal) and pull (external) factors that motivate millennials (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). According to Rita et al., (2018), future research can consider the push factors that motivate individuals, together with the pull factors, to provide a complete overview of mountain destinations. A further limitation linked to the questionnaire is that it includes only seven motivations, identified by combining evidence from literature with the results of the focus group. Future studies need to cover more items to increase the chances of discovering significant differences between participants.

Finally, owing to the sampling design employed in this study (i.e. convenience sampling), the findings may not be representative, and the results should be generalised with caution.

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