

WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO SAVE? A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL EMBEDDEDNESS PERSPECTIVE ON 'SAYING NO' IN EXTREME CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: It is taken for granted that first responders (e.g., firefighters, police, and hospital staff) jobs include physical risk. They are assumed to do whatever is needed to save people's lives and fulfill their mission. However, recently highlighted but poorly understood, they must say no to situations with unknown risks and potential death. Those studies suggest that socio-ecological embeddedness and context are key in the sensemaking process that shapes the decision to say 'yes' or 'no' to a rescue operation. Yet, we know little about how such a practice is enacted and the implications for being representatives of a profession. Building on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with mountain rescue operators, we selected nine narratives where rescuers had to stop or put the operation on hold. Our main contribution lies in showing how 'hypothesizing' – imagining a worst-case scenario of the future – proves critical in maintaining legit yet controversial practices. We also contribute to the literature on place, showing that the meaning of place change with the situation by disentangling its multiple layers.

KEYWORDS: mountain rescue, 'saying no', custodianship, sociological embeddedness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Some argue that it is more important to learn to say "no" than "yes" in organizations. Saying "no" implies the assessment that one alternative is more valuable than another. Saying "yes", in contrast, means that one alternative is potentially as important as the next and that both should be pursued simultaneously. This has significant strategic implications for which alternatives are pursued (Bishop, 1999). For instance, lives could potentially have been saved if someone had dared to say 'no' in Tunnel Creek (Branch, 2012). With this as a backdrop, it is surprising how little research there is on the practice of saying "no".

While failing to address the topic directly, previous research in management and organization studies suggests that failure to say no originate in poor organizational design and tight coupling (Perrow, 1984), lack of mindfulness, interrelations among actors and poor sensemaking (Cornelissen et al., 2014; Weick and Roberts, 1993). Such a perspective obscures how places, with attached symbolic meanings and societal expectations, raise pressures and reveal conflicting logics professional experience in the workplaces (Wright et al., 2024). Drawing upon custodianship literature – preserving, maintaining and reactualizing traditions and practices (Dacin and Dacin, 2008) – where the meaning of place is central, we consider how places shape and are shaped by daily practices (Dacin et al., 2024; Wright et al., 2023).

In particular we pay attention to how the socio-ecological embeddedness - the process by which actors, with and on behalf of others, become rooted in the land through noticing, bracketing, and selecting from cues - is critical to understanding what is going on here and now (Løland et al., 2023; Løland and Hällgren, 2023; Wright et al., 2023). This allows us to, in short, explore what makes professionals say no, and what the implications are thereof.

There are a few settings where saying no (and yes) is more critical than in extreme contexts – where people get hurt or killed (Hällgren et al., 2018). Therefore, we turn to an ethnography of an elite mountain rescue unit in France to explore our research question. These professionals' job is to assess and navigate the geographical places of the mountains to help and save people in need. On the one hand, they need to consider the survival of the victim. On the other hand, they need to consider their own and their colleagues' welfare. This article aims to theorize how this balance is achieved.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 *Custodianship in extreme contexts*

First responders (e.g. firefighters, police and hospital staff) are entrusted by society to perform search and rescue practices to provide care to those who need it. By choosing this type of profession, they endorse the responsibility, both professionally and morally, to protect and safeguard those institutional values of care with their inherent societal expectations by embodying them in their daily practices (Lawrence and Dover, 2015; Wright et al., 2021). Consequently, they can be

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viewed as custodians as they are “*vested actors (individual or collective) who seek to maintain institutionalized practices*” (Dacin et al., 2019, p. 357) to preserve them and their ascribed values and meaning over time (Lok and de Rond, 2013; Wiedner et al., 2024). Considering the nature of their profession, first responders have a risky job. They, or the ones they protect, are continuously exposed to potential extreme events that can hurt or kill them (Hällgren et al., 2018). The implicit assumption is that first responders are the carriers and the performing audience (Dacin et al., 2019) of a long heroic tradition of putting their lives on the line until death because it is the cornerstone of their profession, but are they?

Recent studies of custodianship show that when directly exposed to unusual lethal risk, custodians may ‘say no’, either refusing to handle specific cases or withdrawing from their work during the Ebola pandemic (Wright et al., 2021). They may also stop their current course of action and do something else, like stopping intubation and going directly to the hospital, taking the risk the victim would die on the way (Fernandez et al., 2023). Within these organizations, such ‘saying no’ instances proved controversial, triggering intense negative emotions and tensions among colleagues. In these contexts, saying ‘yes’ cannot be taken for granted. Unusual risks create challenges the custodial work, which creates an opportunity for discussing, questioning, and renewing the role of custodians (Montgomery and Dacin, 2021).

These examples emphasize how custodianship consists of selecting practices (Saying ‘yes’ and saying ‘no’) that is enacted while preserving and adapting its core element (Dacin and Dacin, 2008; Wiedner et al., 2024). Selecting is a form of temporal work (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013) that connects present lived experiences with histories and traditions of the past that custodians reproduce and reactualize, hence anchoring them for the future (Dacin et al., 2019; Eyerman and Jamison, 1998). They do so by ‘marshalling’ and ‘tapping’ tangible and intangible resources to ‘orchestrate’ experiences in search for ‘authenticity’ - resonance between past and present (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013).

In summary, custodianship is a situated practice of selection where time and place matter. However, we know little about how the context shapes the custodianship process of selecting, especially when selecting a controversial practice. Hence, we turn to the literature about place.

2.2 Place of risk work practices

Research on custodianship in extreme contexts suggests that saving or rescuing someone is influenced by the places where those risky practices are performed. Places are defined as a geographical ‘*unique spot in the universe*’ characterized by their ‘*physicality*’ (built or natural) and ‘*invested in meaning and value*’ (Gieryn, 2000, p. 464-465), for example, the Everest or the Mont-Blanc. However, they are not necessarily stable ‘containers’ of organizational phenomena such as custodial work, but rather they are active components of those phenomena for they dynamically shape practices and actions that recursively shape them, and they invested with multiple layers of meanings, values and organizing forms (Lawrence and Dover, 2015).

To first responders, places are of special importance. As part of the job description, they should go where “the action is” (Goffman, 1969) which may put them in harm’s way. Wright et al. (2023) suggest that in such instances, places and activities are mutually constitutive of one another. While endorsing a specific meaning they simultaneously shape and constrain practices, but they also offer opportunities to reimagine them (Lawrence and Dover, 2015; Staggs et al., 2022). In this sense, places are locations whose material features are deeply interwoven with subjective experiences, emotions, and identities that are created and recreated through daily activities.

Places are intimately connected with risk – the potential of an extreme event to happen (Hällgren et al., 2018) – that first responders must make sense of through “risk work” (Hardy et al., 2020). Through this purposive and situated effort to make sense of environmental, social, and material risks in daily activities, they engage in socio-ecological embeddedness. Ecological embeddedness encompasses both visible and invisible features in the natural environment that one needs to consider. For example, Løland et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of continuous updating in ski guiding - “*the process of revising provisional sensemaking to incorporate new cues*” (Christianson, 2019, p. 45) – to perform right and avoid major mishaps or accidents. Noticing a change in wind direction and communicating it efficiently with teammates. Sensing the snow, looking at the clouds, sensing how clients behave, and asking their opinions are essential practices to understand what is going on and possibly reconsider the ski tour.

Finally, places in extreme contexts also prompt temporal work (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). Danner-Schröder (2020) shows how people background the traumatic earthquake of East Ja-

pan in 2011 to focus on the nostalgic past to foreground an imagined desirable and better future. Similarly, Løland and Hällgren (2023) emphasize the importance of past and current socio-ecological embeddedness while planning ski tours. They show how mountain guides capitalize on their own past experience and embeddedness (distant and recent) combined with those of their peers to enact accurate sensemaking and updating processes. By this temporal work, they project a plausible safe future that enable them planning a ski tour that would meet their clients' expectations.

In this paper, we aim to understand how socio-ecological embeddedness, through rooting first-responders in the here and now, shapes the practice of saying no.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Research context*

To understand how, when and why custodians say no, we employed an ethnographic study of an elite mountain rescue unit in Chamonix, France. It is known as being at the feet of the Mont-Blanc, the highest summit culminating over 4000 metres in altitude in Western Europe.

The mountain chain embodies different layers of meanings to different people living and experiencing the place (Dacin et al., 2024). Since the first ascent in 1786, the mountain attracts thousands of mountaineers every year. Over time, the mountain became almost sacred and is nowadays referred to as 'The Mecca of mountaineering'. As such it embodies a long tradition of solidarity between mountain people who respect each other, those who ascend or walk it, and also those who live there. As they physically, materially and symbolically engage themselves with it, the Mont-Blanc is almost personified and as many famous places it is seen as a place of freedom, solidarity, self-achievement, but also risk as it may claim lives if it wants (Amy, 2020).

To mountain rescuers, the Mont-Blanc is both the prestigious and almost sacred place of mountaineering and their workplace. For most of them, the location is the reason why they chose this specific unit of mountain rescue. Indeed, the population is multiplied by ten during the summer season with a lot of more or less experienced mountaineers from all over the world. Consequently, it is a workplace where over a thousand accidents happen every year, at any time to any number of people. In this sense, mountain rescuers are seen as 'the guardian angels' of the mountains (Grandmaison, 2019) and the carriers and performers of the traditions of solidarity attached to the place and of the profession (Agresti, 2018).

Institutionally, the rescue process unfolds in two stages: (1) the 'regulation', when information about the accident and its location are collected, and the decision of go or no go is taken; and (2) actual rescue, when the team (2 rescuers, 1 doctor, 1 helicopter pilot, and 1 flight-engineer) flies to victim and provides care. In some cases, which relates to the intrinsic interest of this context (Stake, 1995), rescuers may say no. The practice is grounded in the value of solidarity embedded in both traditions of mountaineering and search and rescue (Agresti, 2018). However, it translates differently as it means 'don't die' for mountaineers and 'don't let people die' in search and rescue, making it a controversial and hard-to-perform practice.

It can happen at two different yet critical moments in the rescue process. First, saying no may occur during the regulation. This usually happens when the claim is made at night without people being seriously injured, or when the weather conditions are really bad and put the rescue team at too much risk. This decision to 'temporize' the rescue operation consists in saying no to immediate intervention and planning to perform it later when conditions allow it. Second, the rescue team may be forced to say no by putting their operations on hold, meaning that they leave the people where they are and they will come back later. In those cases, rescuers report that this is mainly because of weather conditions that put the rescuers at risk. This paper focuses on those unusual, counter-intuitive and controversial practice, aiming at understanding how, why and when first responders say no.

3.2 *Data collection*

The first author collected ethnographic data through a fourteen-day semi-participant observation over three weeks at the mountain rescue unit in France. She stayed six days, on average twelve hours/day, in the office, observing the *planton* and their supervisor regulating the claims. Occasionally, she assisted rescuers in handling claims when people were speaking in English. She also spent eight days, on average twelve hours/day, in the DZ. For safety reasons and technical constraints, she did not board the helicopter when it left for operations. In total, she observed 52 claims, 47 of which triggered a rescue operation that required the rescue team to go on-site and provide care for the victim. Three claims were handled by providing advice to rest, which solved the problem. One claim for a person who strayed from the hiking path was responded to by giving guidance on the phone. Finally, one claim was said no to. Those observations were transcribed as field and methodological notes at the end of each day and during the days when no

observation took place (Groleau, 2003; Van Maanen, 2011).

In addition to the participant observation, she conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with rescuers, aeronautic personnel, and emergency physicians. Interviews were 80 minutes on average. The interviews focused on the daily activities and how the rescue team manages the risks inherent to the activity with particular attention to the most difficult decisions they had to make. Those interviews triggered the participants' memory and some of them shared their experience and narrated rescue operations that left marks because they had to say no in one way or another. Those interviews were transcribed and synthesized in a document showcasing the salient topics and ideas (Miles and Huberman, 2003). Finally, we triangulated our sources of information by reading books written by former or current mountain rescue team members who would share their memory and experiences.

3.3 *Data analysis*

Our data analysis focuses on nine narratives where rescuers had to say no, and the operation that the first author observed. Our process encompassed three stages.

First, we isolated the narratives and compiled them in a Word document, labelling them 'story 1' to 'story 9', and we translated them in English. We coded these data inductively with an 'in vivo' strategy, i.e., by selecting keywords from the participants' own language in their accounts (Saldaña, 2016). Through this first cycle of coding, we became more and more familiar with the narratives and their subtleties. We returned to the material to enrich the analysis. We 'zoomed in' (Nicolini, 2009) and focused on the motives for deciding to postpone or to put a rescue on hold.

In a second stage, we juxtaposed our codes to look for similarities and differences (Gioia et al., 2013). With the willingness to capture the lived experience of the rescue team members, we drew upon Løland and Hällgren's (2023) notion of socio-ecological embeddedness to and move to more abstract second-order codes. At the end of this second stage, the two authors met and made sense of the data through discussions. We realized that they were describing a process of selection of practice embedded in what we call a 'socio-ecological dilemma'. In fact, the place is not only as a physical location but also a dramatic moment where decisions must be made about the lives to save. We recognized that the process encompasses two stages intertwined with one another: 'Experiencing/being caught in the socio-ecological dilemma' and 'solving the socio-ecological dilemma'.

In a third stage of data analysis, we revised our previous coding and we inductively coded the additional quotes we included from the interviews. This fine-grained analysis shed light on issues relating to time and temporal work. For example, we noticed that in the quotes we initially coded 'weighing/balancing lives' the word 'if' was recurring. This repetition made it obvious that actors were engaging in temporal work by thinking about what may happen. Therefore, based on the similarities between the 'ifs' as a first-order codes, we created a second-order code 'hypothesizing' that we included in the 'experiencing/being caught in a socio-ecological dilemma'.

This third and final stage of our data analysis confirmed that we arrived at the point of saturation of data analysis. We concluded that our data are indeed a case of a socio-ecological dilemma process, that we detail in the findings section.

4. FINDINGS

As an introduction of the findings section, we share one of the stories we were told during our interviews (see Vignette 1). We want to provide a typical illustration of the practice of 'saying no', and of the unfolding of the 'socio-ecological dilemma' process that we detail in the remainder of this section. The chunks in bold highlight distinctive features of the dilemma.

Vignette 1. The crevasse under the storm (Albert)

*A climber was on the edge of a crevasse, with his partner in it. The storm was around them. He was talking to us, and the lightning was hitting **six or seven meters** away from us. We were curled up under a rock, and we said, "What are we going to do?" We said, "**If I go down into the crevasse to find him, and his friend holding the rope is hit by the lightning, there are two at the bottom.** What do we do?" And we took **shelter** in a hut a bit further down. We **went back up** there a few hours later with adequate equipment because we had very light equipment, close to nothing. We were parachuted onto the glacier. The helicopter said, "I'm going to refuel, I'll bring you a doctor, equipment and everything." And it was **never able to come back.***

*We had **the climbing partner with us**, we looked into each other's eyes and asked ourselves, "What do we do?" Are we **saving our skin**? Do we take all the risks to find the unfortunate man at the bottom of the hole? We didn't save him. We went back up, he had died. It is also a failure. I wouldn't say I made a choice. It happened **naturally with my teammate, with***

*the climbing partner. He saw that we wouldn't be able to do anything. We were **compelled to take shelter, to wait a little for the elements to calm down, to get support from others.** Unfortunately, we did not to save him. Maybe if we'd **tried right away, ignoring the external risks a little, we'd have been heroes.** Or maybe there would have been three or four of us slammed on the glacier.*

4.1 *Experiencing a socio-ecological dilemma*

As illustrated by Albert's story in Vignette 1, 'saying no' refers to putting the rescue operation on hold and resuming it when possible. Other narratives also show that saying no is also refusing to project the rescue team at the place of the accident. As explained by Jean-Pierre: *"unlike common law assistance, there is not necessarily a claim, a response. The decision may consist of tempering by requesting a bivouac or providing advice."* Our findings suggest that such a decision is the outcome of a socio-ecological embeddedness dilemma where rescuers assess ecological conditions while feeling pressure, navigating ethical considerations.

Assessing ecological conditions. Ecological conditions refer to the environmental cues that the rescue team attends to. It encompasses weather conditions like storms or snowfalls, the topographic setting like operating in a crevasse, and temporal concerns as the night obscures electric cables that might be deadly if one does not see them. In Albert's story, the storm and the lightning are critical features that make the rescuers wonder about whether they should keep on or say no.

Resonating with Albert's story, rescuers were in strong agreement that ecological conditions are the main reason why they feel compelled to say no. They emphasize that despite being used to working in the mountain setting with its objective risks they sometimes consider that the conditions expose them to higher risks than usual: *We have the equipment we need, but sometimes the elements are stronger than we are, we're still human beings and, at some point, we're nailed down. We're stuck* (Henri). Ecological conditions are then balanced with the level of emergency the situation requires: *You're going to be landed in the Vallée Blanche, in winter, and then the emergency implies that you're not going to do something by the book, but you're going to try to get as close as possible to the victim.* (José)

Ultimately, the underlying assumption that whatever the conditions the rescue team would heroically respond and put themselves to the extreme limit of their own safety before saying no does not come without any pressure.

Feeling pressures. Mountain rescue is legally bound to 'saving people from the immediate peril that threaten them' (Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2011). Albert's story shows how delicate it can be to say no while a friend, a family member, or a partner of the victim is next to the rescuers. However, this situational pressure is not the only one that rescuers experience. They also have to deal with internal pressure coming from their peers and external pressure embodied by the media.

Journalists portray mountain rescuers as 'guardian angels of the mountain' in the titles of the local newspapers articles where they report the daily activity of the unit. Big events, like deadly serac falls or avalanches, are even reported on national TV, which reinforces the heroic image. The implicit assumption is that they will do whatever is needed to succeed and save the victims: *"we have a societal pressure, we want to impose on ourselves an obligation of means or of result, but this is what will make take bad decisions"* (Xavier). Indeed, a lot of rescuers consider they have a moral obligation to do something and prove people right.

Part of this external pressure cascades internally onto rescuers in the form of peer pressure: *"The rescuer I was paired with had been here for twenty years. He whistled twice and he said 'We'll have to wait until it refreezes tomorrow, in two days... They're dead, aren't they?' And then, who comes in? Henri! He says 'OK guys, you chicken out! I'll go and see!' [...] He comes back and he says 'See, it could be done!'"* (Xavier). By overcoming the decision to say no, bickering at them and in a sense bragging about his success, Henri diminishes his colleagues. Simultaneously he sends the implicit message that no is not an option and that rescuers should try and put their lives on the line whatever the circumstances.

Both external and internal pressure send rescuers back to their own reflections, limits and expectations of the mountain rescue profession. Ultimately, saying no seems to question what it entails to be a rescuer, how it aligns with what one considers to be the safe boundaries, and how it aligns sometimes contradictory demands from the general public and the rescuers family.

Navigating ethical considerations. The possibility to say no draws attention to the lives at risk and the inherent ethical tensions.

In the story in Vignette 1, Albert talks about 'saving our skin', referring implicitly to saving three lives - his colleague's, the climbing companion's, and his own life - in parallel with the victim in the crevasse. He is indeed 'weighing/balancing lives'. The considerations are not solely about

numbers, the victim is actually the primary concern. When the victim is on the verge of death, rescuers push a bit more.: *"It also depends on the victim's condition. If, for example, we know that the victim is dead, we're not going to risk our lives for someone who's dead. Someone who's alive, it's something else. We may push a bit more, up to the limit. We'll try to save them to a certain point."* (Régis).

On a more emotional and subjective note, one rescuer marginally reckons that they engage in *Balancing lives worth*, which refers to judgmental evaluations of the lives at stake in the operation at hand. The most illustrative quote is probably: *"I will never let anyone die if there is something I can do. Afterwards I prefer to be in the butcher's place than the veal. There is no one life that is worth more than another, and even less so when there are four to one. Even if we put it in the balance it's your job [to save the victims], my job is not to go die or make my friends die"* (Xavier). We believe that these reflections illustrate the fundamental concerns of rescuers regarding the difficulty of carrying and embodying the values of the profession and of mountaineering that are embedded in daily practice and risk work.

4.2 Solving the dilemma

To move away from the dilemma, mountain rescuers engage in hypothesizing and building consensus.

Hypothesizing. In his story in Vignette 1, Albert shares his doubts about involving the climbing partner to secure him going down in the crevasse and continuing the rescue operation. He starts thinking about what may happen, like the climbing partner being hit by lightning and the consequences in terms of death. This is what 'hypothesizing' refers to.

Although Albert illustrates such a practice when he is next to the victim, most rescuers speak of it when referring to the regulation phase. In a certain way, thinking about hypothetical events amounts to hypothesizing risks: *"In fact, you imagine the vital risk. Even if it is not present right away, there is a high probability that it will be there in a very short time. And above all, you won't be able to intervene when you can intervene now"* (Xavier).

Hypothesizing probably touches the bottom line of the socio-ecological dilemma in the sense that imagining the worst calls for selecting the appropriate practice (saying yes vs. saying no). When the worst is deemed acceptable, losing just a finger or spending the night outside, saying no becomes easy as it is consistent with what happens in mountaineering every day. In the end,

whatever the response, it must necessarily be aligned with the multiple expectations of the different stakeholders, but also with the values and traditions that mountain rescuers embody.

Building consensus. Being the turning point of the dilemma that enables the selection of practice, hypothesizing allows rescuers to move on a solve the dilemma. Whatever the selected practice is, building consensus is essential to the selection process. In the story in Vignette 1, Albert says that despite the difficulty of leaving the crevasse, the decision was taken *"naturally with my teammate, with the climbing partner"*.

Other rescuers emphasize that discussions are essential when they are regulating the claims in the office. In case they doubt, they can ask for support from their hierarchy *"we are never alone"* (Régis). During rescue operations, when hiking caravans are set up, because the helicopter cannot fly but the situation requires urgent intervention, they also explain they make decisions collectively: *"In the majority of cases, we get together when there's a night departure, i.e. both us first-aiders and the crew, and if possible the doctor, we get together and talk. It's not too urgent because, in any case, there's nobody left at the DZ. What we've got is this: do you still think we should go? And then you say to yourself 'no, I can't go any more. You can only go in a caravan. So are we going to go in a caravan? So here we really have a discussion"* (José).

Building consensus is about creating a shared big picture of the situation at hand. In turn, all interpretations and perception can converge and be voiced or tacitly shared. Consequently, when the team says no, it is a collective decision that engages everyone and their professional responsibility. Again, building consensus looks aligned with the values of solidarity of the profession and of mountain places. The implicit assumption is that no one is left behind.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we aim to explore an under-researched yet critical practice: saying no. By considering first-responders as custodians, our ethnographic study about *in situ* mountain rescue operations offers two contributions.

Our first contribution is to the literature on custodianship. We show that selecting the practice of 'saying no' triggers deep deliberations and critical temporal work to actualize and re-actualize those values and traditions (Dacin et al., 2019; Eyerman and Jamison, 1998). Looking at the controversial practice allowed us to highlight the dilemma cus-

todians experience when selecting it, which enlightens why and how practices decline. Our findings suggest that it is not only due to technological obsolescence and the disappearance of related knowledge and competence (Wiedner et al., 2024), but also because of the ethical consideration at play. Ultimately, saying no means going against social and societal expectations linked to the profession, which generates controversy, reinforces internal pressures (Wright et al., 2021). For rescuers, saying no also means refusing the risk of dying a hero, hence stepping away from the military tradition, and joining in the lineage of great mountaineers like Hillary, Bonatti or more recently Ueli Steck. It's wasting your chance to go down in history as with the last gendarmerie promotion which was named in August 2024 after a rescuer trainer who died in the mountains.

Hypothesizing proves to be critical in moving away from the dilemma and selecting the controversial practice of saying no, hence maintaining it. In contrast to 'taping' intangible resources by selecting idealized stories of the past to revive them in the present (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013), rescuers find 'authenticity' in imagining a worst-case scenario future. This form of temporal work connects them with the mountaineering tradition, which embeds saying no and embracing the potential deadly risks victims accepted when climbing. Indeed, our case unveils the tensions that arise when multiple traditions coexist within a profession, which challenges the assumption that when carriers of traditions are also performers they perform better for their similar worldviews and experience (Dacin et al., 2019).

Our second contribution is to the literature on place. By moving away from the traditional built places to ecological settings we illustrate the 'polymorphic' nature of places invested with multiple layers (Dacin et al., 2024). Our findings suggest that the mountains are a recreational place for mountaineers, climbers and hikers. They are invested with the historical values of adventure, conquest, and self-achievement. Along with perspective comes the mountains being a dangerous place with multiple opportunities of accidents that can claim any life at any moment. Our findings suggest that under extremely dangerous ecological conditions, there is a 'crack' (Montgomery and Dacin, 2021) or a 'fissure' (Staggs et al., 2022) in this interplay. Accidents break the sense of the mountains being a recreational place for mountaineers; simultaneously, they maintain the setting as being a workplace for rescuers. When they feel compelled to 'saying no', rescuers experience a socio-ecological dilemma that is connected with the senses of

the place. On the one hand, 'saying no' contradicts the institutional definition of mountain rescue engraved in the law and in the Ministerial notice. It also comes against societal expectations and the heroic image that the general public has of the professions. Finally, it breaks the meaning of the mountains being a workplace. On the other hand, 'saying no' is aligned with the less obvious side of mountain rescue where one claim must not necessarily be addressed immediately, which is aligned with the basic rescue lessons to protect oneself first and avoid worsening the situation. It is also consistent with the mountaineering logic of renunciation because the most important is not the summit but coming home alive. Finally, 'saying no' maintains the sense of the mountains being a dangerous place where anything can happen and any life may be claimed. In conclusion, severe ecological conditions disentangle the different layers, and mountain rescuers engage in a socio-ecological dilemma to restore this sense of place as being polymorphic yet consistent.

In conclusion, examining what makes professionals say no helped us to unpack the dynamic interplay between places and custodial work when selecting an appropriate practice. We showed that places may put custodians in a position where they have to disentangle the different layers of places. Doing so, they question they re-actualize their own practices that embed their professional traditional and values.

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