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“Urbex and Urban Space”: A Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract

Urbex – from *urban exploration* – is a leisure activity that involves scouting abandoned and/or neglected infrastructure with the aim of touring and sometimes photographing it. Alongside its expansion since 2005, this practice has garnered increasing interest from the academic community thanks to the democratisation of digital photography and social media. My purpose here is to provide a comprehensive overview of the scientific literature on this practice over the past fifteen years, since, to my knowledge, such a study has yet to be conducted or published. I will perform a scoping review and a bibliometric analysis of the fifty-one papers I sourced that deal with “urbex and urban space”. An examination of the formal and fundamental frameworks provided by academic studies, together with an analysis of what these papers bring to this subject, will provide new avenues for research. These avenues are both methodological – inviting researchers to make use of specific tools and turn their attention to specific spaces and groups of people – and theoretical, with an emphasis on multidisciplinary studies and a rethinking of theoretical prisms. Finally, I would like to underscore the importance of urbex for academic study as a means of better understanding cities, urban spaces, and urban societies.

Keywords

Urbex, leisure activities, urban spaces, city, scoping review

Statements and Declarations

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1 Introduction: Urban Exploration, A Leisure Activity

Urbex, or urban exploration, is a hobby that involves searching for and locating abandoned infrastructure with the aim of touring and/or photographing it (Garret, 2016b). Since trespassing is inherent to this activity, it is often illegal. It is "urban" in the sense that the spaces explored by its practitioners are part of an environment built by humans and marked by a current and/or past human presence. In that sense, it is a millennia-old practice, but its modern form and success stem from the invention and democratization of photography and the Internet. Recent academic interest in this practice has mainly come from the human and social sciences, as a leisure issue. The literature on this topic is particularly robust in the realm of sports and the city (Roult et al., 2018), which describes urbex to be a "wild" – "*sauvage*" in French – practice (Gibout & Mauny, 2009), an example of "fun athletics" – "*ludo-sport*" in French – (Augustin, 1997), and a form of urban hiking (Gal, 2015). It has also been described as a form of "devotional leisure" (Blackshaw, 2018), since it seeks to provide a kind of experience that appeals to the sixth-sense, and as a "deviant leisure" (Kindynis, 2019) that aims to create new norms based on a "cool" identity. And urbex has also been amply covered through the lens of tourism. It is considered as a kind of "adventure tourism" (Fraser, 2012; Lebreton & Gibout, 2017) for risk seekers, and as an "interior tourism" (Nieszczerzewska, 2018) for those interested in exploring, discovering, and rediscovering themselves. Urbex also reflects current tourism trends, with a renewed interest in ruins (Le Gallou, 2018b) and the emergence of the notion of "beyond tourism" (Robinson, 2015) – tourism that is more authentic, more allocentric, and less consumerist.

This study seeks to provide an exhaustive analysis and comprehensive overview of scholarly research on urbex from a spatial perspective. My aim is to offer an overall view of the field and suggest new directions for study (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The in-depth, systematic, and quantitative review of the literature on a research question remains a rare practice. My research revealed that no such study has been undertaken on the subject of urbex, which makes this an unprecedented review. This comprehensive literature review "should be able to support and inform the industry in several ways" (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019: 164). I would like to note that we should not confuse urban exploration (or "urbex", "U.E.", and "UE") with other similar practices: bunkerology, urban caving, tours of urban ruins, and rooftopping. Bunkerology, from bunker archeology (Virilio, 1975), involves exploring, and even inhabiting, bunkers left to us by the wars of the twentieth century. Urban caving differs from urbex because it has its own community of practitioners, particularly in the case of the Parisian catacombs (Lebreton, 2009). Because they are sanctioned and official activities, guided tours of ruins do not fall under the scope of urbex. Finally, rooftopping, which belongs more to the realm of urban climbing, is the illegal ascent of tall buildings to photograph oneself and show off one's feats (Andrieu & Chavaroche, 2017). For the sake of clarity, I would like to emphasize that this paper deals with practices studied under the term "urbex", which is distinct from the four practices mentioned above.

2 Materials and Method: A Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis

A bibliometric analysis bases itself on a systematic literature review to examine the scholarly output on a subject in a quantitative and qualitative manner. It goes beyond conclusions drawn by individual papers and is interesting in its capacity to provide clarity on a specific topic. It is therefore a salient choice for studying urbex, for which the body of literature is recent and relatively impoverished, and can give a detailed and critical state of the field. A literature review can be built in one of two ways. A "systematic review" (Badger et al., 2000) involves systematically studying a specific problem through a critical and exhaustive synthesis of its literature (Roult et al., 2018) to identify avenues of further scholarly research and potential gaps (Munn et al., 2018). A "scoping study" (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) is a mapping of a field of research that goes beyond the stated issue to gain an understanding of its construction (Munn

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et al., 2018). As such, it provides new scholarly insights. This study has been organized into five stages (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Badger et al., 2000).

First, I gradually define the research question. After delving into databases for literature on urbex, I hone in on the issue since the topic is too vast. My specific inquiry then focuses on "urbex and the urban space". The second step is a systematic (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019) and transparent identification of resources. This I carried out in March 2020 by searching for the expressions "urbex", "urban exploration", and "*exploration urbaine*" in the titles, keywords, and/or abstracts, in several scholarly databases. The third step is to select my sources (Figure 1). No temporal or linguistic barriers have been set up as constraints. I do delineate selection criteria, both in form and substance, including the bracketing of books (Badger et al., 2000), the need for peer-reviewing, and relevance in terms of titles, abstracts, and full texts (Roult et al., 2019). The sample size was therefore reduced from ninety-two to fifty-one sources[1].

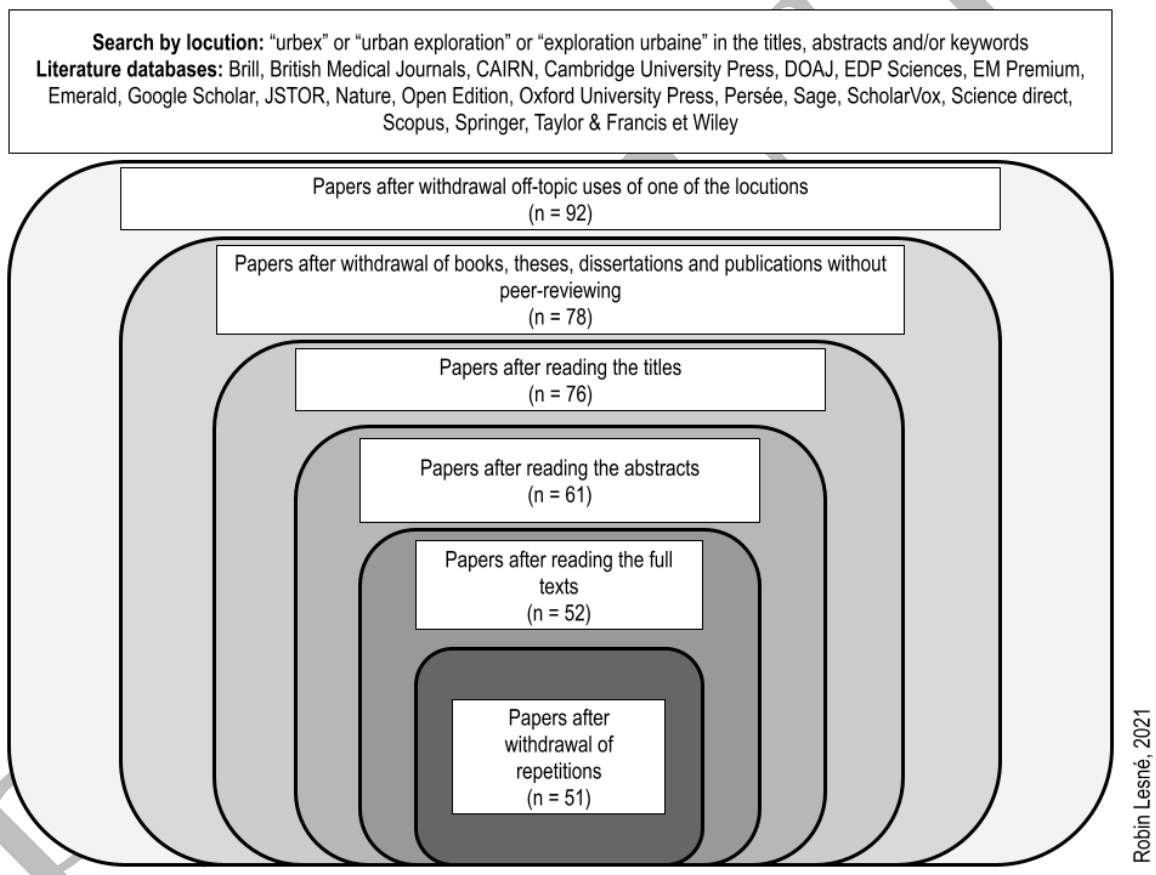

Figure 1. Identifying and selecting corpus publications.

It should be noted that the scoping review is not exhaustive, due both to the selection and rejection criteria entered into the databases. However, the lack of language constraints helps to counterbalance those factors. Fourth, I use a unique technique to gather data so as to ensure the comparability of the sources (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). I analyze eleven features of the textual corpus: authorship, journals, contexts, disciplinary fields, subjects, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, fieldwork locations, bibliographies, conclusions, and perspectives. Some information has been subject to my own interpretation, namely: categorizing paper subjects; identifying the theoretical frameworks, concepts, and disciplines used; organizing conclusions and perspectives into themes and subthemes. The last stage is a three-fold analytical presentation of my results. It begins with a contextualization of the papers,

[1] The fifty-one papers of the scoping review are marked with an * in the references section.

describing their authorship, the journals in which they appear, the research programs publishing them, the disciplinary fields, and the subjects. Second, the corpus is explored using theoretical, conceptual, disciplinary, literary, and methodological frameworks to gain insight into the processes at work in the scholarly literature. Finally, I provide a structured presentation of conclusions and perspectives.

3 Contextualization of Scholarly Publications and their "Formal" Frameworks

To begin, I am interested in understanding whence the papers dealing with this subject "speak". Interest in "urbex" by the scholarly community began at the same time as the publication of *Access All Areas* (Ninjalicious, 2005), reaching its peak between 2009 and 2015 (fourteen papers in 2015), and dropping off in 2016. However, attention from academics has always been modest (ninety-two papers in fifteen years), which I would attribute to the secret and covert nature of the practice. The social sciences dominate the study of urbex, as the first field to take an interest and with 80% of papers published. In the mid-2010s, three other fields (Cultural Studies, Information and Communication, and Economics and Management) applied their disciplinary lenses, which in my opinion reflects a trend that began to decline in 2018.

The fifty-one papers in the scoping review are divided into thirty-five articles and sixteen chapters. More than 80% are in English, the rest in French, and only one in Spanish. Spread between 2009 and 2019, their production rate is similar to the ninety-two papers on urbex. They appear in thirty-one journals, notably *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* and *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure* (four and two papers respectively). Two thirds of the journals come from the humanities and social sciences. The others are multidisciplinary. And more than a third take a spatial approach. The most prolific authors of publications (forty-eight in total) are: Garrett (six); Lebreton (four); Bennett, Kindynis, and Le Gallou (three); and Arboleda, Dauphin, and Mould (two). The scientific disciplines to which the authors belong can be divided into three groups: spatial (mainly geographic); socio-anthropological; and cultural. This division reflects important features of the practice. Non-academic authors are totally absent from the corpus even though they have had an influence on scholarly work. I interpret this as a form of protection on the part of the community of practitioners.

In Figure 2, a map reflecting authorial publication origin is compared with a cartography of deindustrialization, since the locations under exploration are often abandoned due to industrial decline and the resulting abandonment of infrastructure. I have calculated the annual variation rates of manufacturing jobs (based on available information) for each country. The authors do indeed by and large originate from Europe and North America – areas where deindustrialization has left its biggest mark. It should be noted that all of Europe is represented, including the former Eastern Bloc, but not Belgium, which is particularly fertile ground for urbex. A third of the authors come from the United Kingdom. Two thirds of the authors are from United-Kingdom, France and the United States, including the most prolific of the group. On a local level, the link with deindustrialization has been less verifiable, particularly in the Slavic, Baltic, and Balkan countries. Academic interest in urbex then seems to stem from other preoccupations as well, such as the "civilization of leisure" (Dumazedier, 1962).

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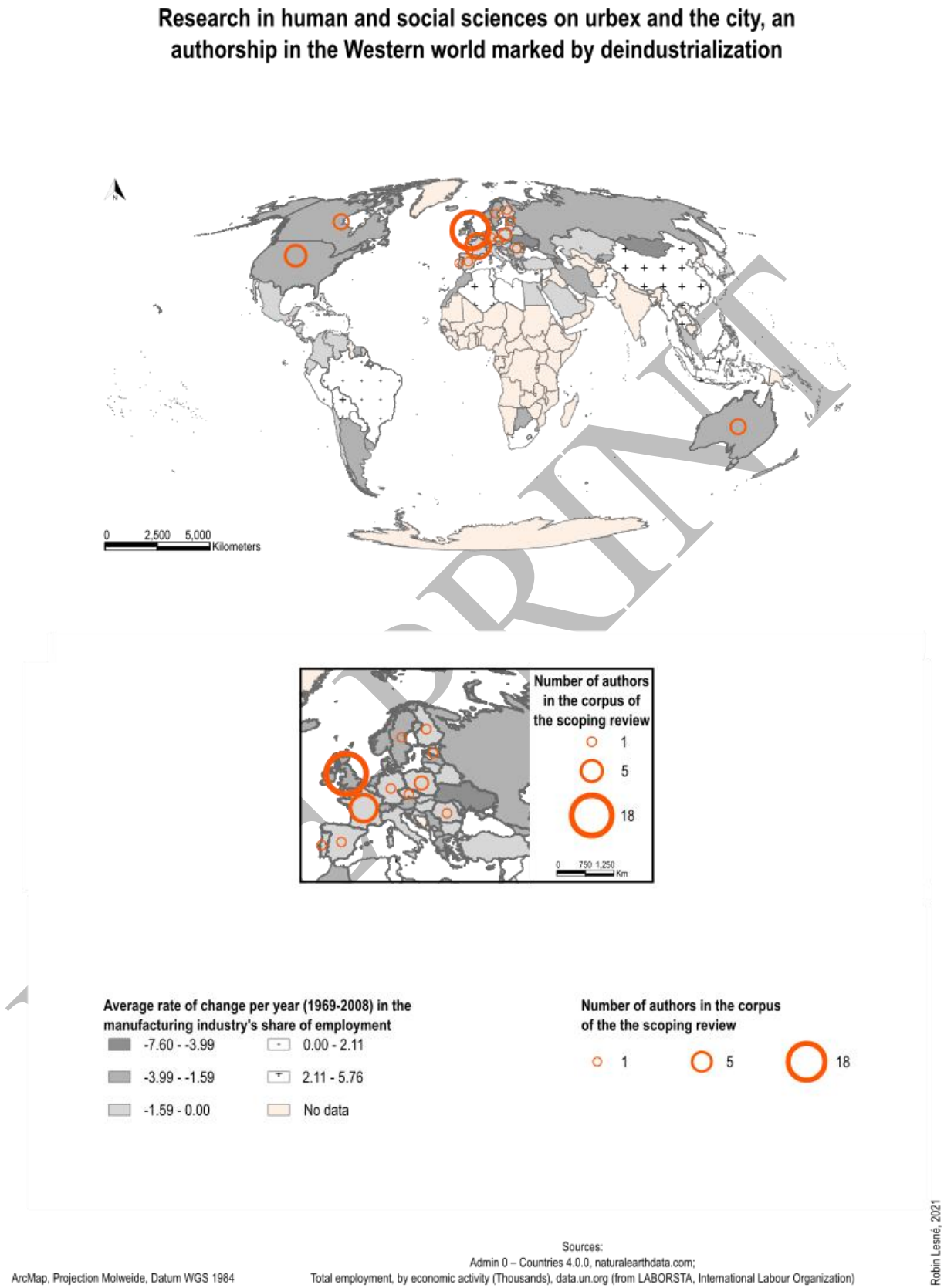

Figure 2. Mapping of Corpus Authors.

The fifty-one papers were written based on thirty-eight different studies. More than half of the papers stem from doctoral dissertations, notably those by Garret (2012), Kindynis (2016), Le Gallou (2021), and Lebreton (2009), or master's theses, in particular those by Bennett (2010) and Arboleda (2014). Only three papers are part of a non-student research program, including one which deals explicitly with urbex. 43% of the papers belong to neither of the two cases. Based on these findings, that urbex has until now appealed mostly to a handful of curious students, it would seem that the subject still needs to prove itself to potential funders.

Forty-six papers from the scoping review come out of the social sciences, i.e. three quarters of the publications on urbex. In other words, "urbex and urban space" is an important question within the social sciences for those interested in the practice. The other disciplinary fields are secondary in this questioning. Five subjects emerged out of a reading of this corpus. In descending order, they are: the value of the sites of practice; the question of experience and the attribution of meaning to the sites; the activist aspect of urbex, together with the description of urbex and its followers; and finally, the subject of a renewed relationship with the city.

4 Analysis of Publication Critical Frameworks to Understand How Thinking on Urbex is Organized

4.1 Disciplinary and Conceptual Frameworks

My second objective is to understand the logic behind the authors' reflections. I begin with a study of the theoretical influences at work within the disciplinary frameworks. Three disciplines strongly used in these papers are geography (twenty-nine), sociology (twenty-three), and philosophy (twenty-one). This reflects the makeup of the fields to which the authors, journals, and subjects belong, with the exception of philosophy, which seems to provide authors with a complementary framework. History (eight) is also a standout case given urbex's inherent connection with heritage issue. Eleven other disciplines influence between one and four papers. A study of disciplinary combinations gives further insight. While geography and philosophy repeatedly show up as examples of mono-disciplinary reflections, sociology is almost always combined, in particular with philosophy (twelve times) or geography (ten times). Sociology is therefore frequently employed as a framework for reflection, but it tends to be "dependent" on the presence of at least one other discipline. Finally, because geography also combines with history (seven times) and philosophy (four times), it constitutes the most used and versatile disciplinary approach. In addition, I study the seven paradigms and currents of thought identified in ten papers. Situationism is particularly well represented, with comparisons of urbex to a philosophical urban stroll – *flânerie* in French – (Baudelaire, 1863) and to an urban drift – *dérive* in French. Phenomenology is also frequently used to provide an ethnographic analysis of the concrete practice. In essence, the theoretical frameworks employed by the authors in these papers are largely geographic and philosophical, against a sociological backdrop.

To continue, I examine the 111 concepts identified in the papers, and seven in particular. Heritage and tourism are the concepts that appear most frequently and reflect a cultural approach to the subject. Next there are the concepts of spatial appropriation (six occurrences), commodification and embodiment (five occurrences), and tactics (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972) and leisure (four occurrences). These concepts come from geographic, economic, and philosophical approaches. A "cartography" of the concepts (Figure 3) serves to refine the analysis. Each node represents a concept and is proportional in size to its frequency of use. And their links reflect the frequency of use within the same paper. The network has been reorganized spatially. "Isolated" concepts are brought closer. And all the concepts have been classified based on their links. This epistemological map distinguishes six groups, including two dualities and two independent entities.

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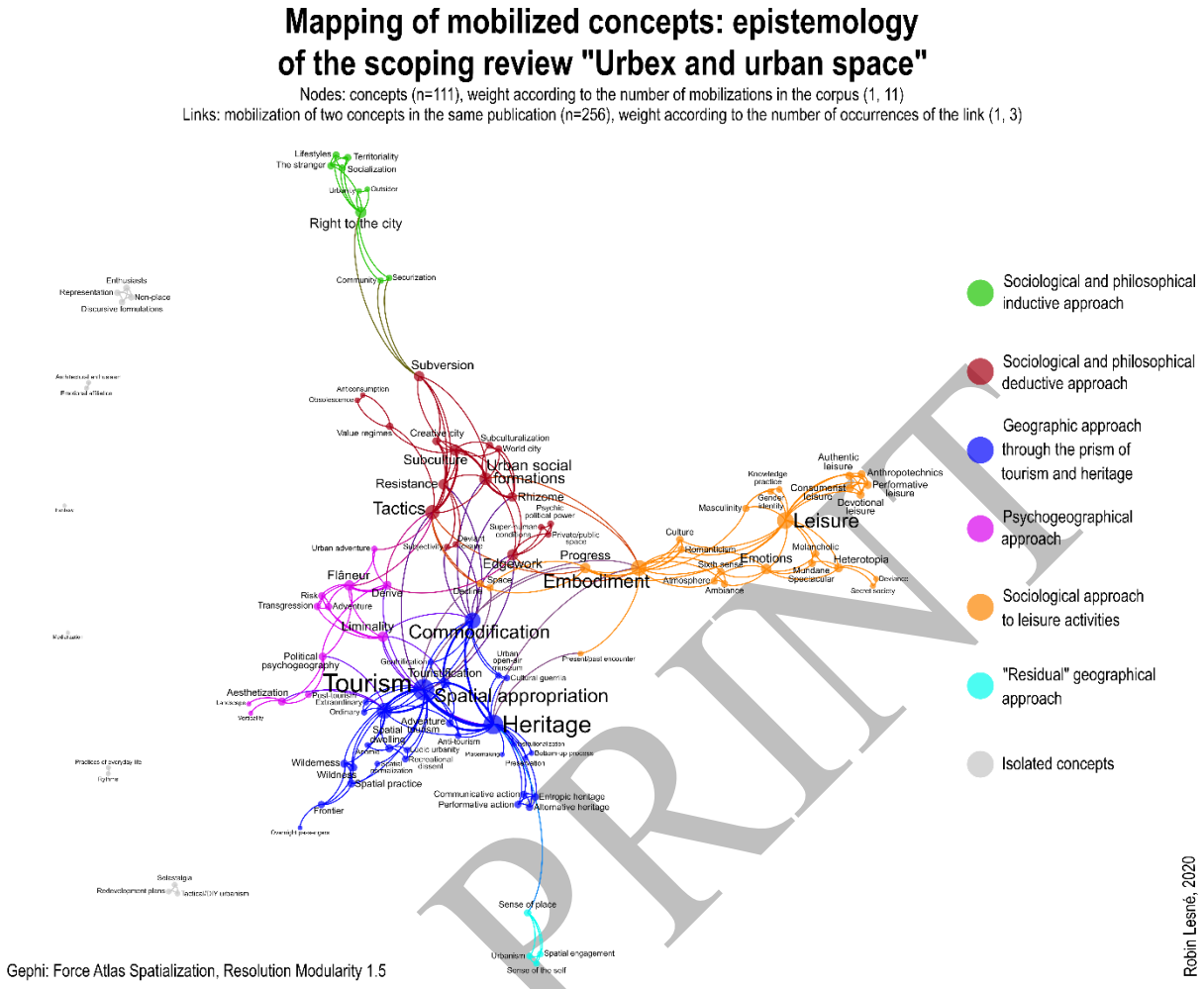

Figure 3. Reticular Representation of the Concepts Used in the Corpus.

A duality of socio-philosophical approaches is positioned on the upper central part. One is deductive and groups together concepts to be verified on urbex, in particular the concepts of tactics and rhizomes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972, 1980). It questions the inclusion of this activity in a form of alternativity, moving beyond such a classification through the concepts of edgework (Lyng, 1990) and urban social formations (Daskalaki & Mould, 2013). The other approach revolves around the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968) and is inductive because the analysis of the practice shows that it contributes to the right to the city. There is also an epistemological duality between the geography of tourism and leisure on the one hand and psychogeography on the other. The former is expressed through the five most frequent concepts in the corpus and puts forward a multifaceted approach that takes into account the spatial values, tourism, and the economy. The latter borrows particularly from the Situationist current and develops a more sensitive and experience-centered approach. A large number of concepts reflects a sociological and anthropological understanding that is detached from spatial anchoring. This perspective is interested in the bodily and psychological experience of urbex, through, for instance, the concept of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984). Finally, a residual approach can be found in one single paper (Nakonecznyj, 2019).

4.2 Influential Authors and Works

To complete our understanding of the theoretical frameworks applied in these papers, I identify the most influential authors based on the number of different references that appear for each of them in the fifty-one corpus bibliographies (Figure 4). There are six groups of authors. The first includes geographers

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and historians who have produced at least one reference work that does not directly deal with urbex (Bonnett, 1989; DeSilvey, 2006; Edensor, 2005; Graham, 2000; High & Lewis, 2007; Pinder, 2005). The second features five urbex specialists, namely Mott, Roberts, Mould, and more specifically Bennett and Garrett. There are also several big names in sociology worth noting: Bauman, Simmel, and Bourdieu for multiple publications; and Urry, specifically for *The Tourist Gaze* (1990). The influence of scholars from twentieth century French critical theory is also noteworthy, with important contributions from French Theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980; Foucault, 1975, 1984) and conceptions of space rooted in everyday life (De Certeau, 1980; Lefebvre, 1974). The criminologists Hayward and Ferrell also occupy an important space. Finally, three urbex practitioners appear in the corpus with two major publications on urbex (Deyo & Leibowitz, 2003; Ninjalicious, 2005).

Table 1. Weight of the most important authors in the corpus by group of papers (NA: Non-academic).

		Corpus		Written in				First author						
				English		French		UK		USA or Anglophone Canada		France or Quebec		
Author	**Country**	**Q**	**Rank**	**Q**	**Rank**	**Q**	**Rank**	**Q**	**Rank**	**Q**	**Rank**	**Q**	**Rank**	**Influence on papers**
Garrett	UK	103	1	93	=	10	=	59	=	12	=	12	=	Corpus
Edensor	UK	56	2	52	=	4	-	27	=	9	=	6	-	Corpus
Bennett	UK	36	3	29	=	7	=	22	=	3	-	7	-	Corpus
Ninjalicious	Canada (NA)	24	4	21	-	3	-	11	-	4	+	4	-	Corpus
DeSilvey	UK	22	5	22	+	0	--	15	=	3	=	1	--	English
Bauman	UK	18	6	18	=	0	--	18	+	0	--	0	--	UK
de Certeau	France	18	6	13	-	4	=	8	-	3	+	5	-	Corpus
Foucault	France	17	8	10	-	6	+	9	+	0	--	7	+	Corpus
Pinder	Danemark	17	8	17	+	0	--	12	+	2	-	0	--	English
Simmel	Allemagne	14	10	5	--	6	+	3	--	0	--	9	+	Fr
High	Canada	14	10	14	+	0	--	8	-	3	+	0	--	English
Hayward	UK	13	12	13	+	0	--	13	+	0	--	0	--	UK
Lewis	USA	13	12	13	+	0	--	8	-	2	-	0	--	English
Urry	UK	12	14	12	+	0	--	7	-	0	--	2	-	UK
Graham	UK	12	14	12	+	0	--	12	+	0	--	0	--	UK
Lefebvre	France	12	14	10	-	2	-	7	-	1	--	2	-	Corpus
Deyo	USA (NA)	12	14	10	-	2	-	7	-	3	+	2	-	Corpus
Leibowitz	USA (NA)	12	14	10	-	2	-	7	-	3	+	2	-	Corpus
Mould	UK	11	19	11	+	0	--	10	+	1	--	0	--	UK
Ferrell	USA	11	19	11	+	0	--	11	+	0	--	0	--	UK
Mott	USA	11	19	11	+	0	--	6	-	0	--	0	--	UK
Roberts	Finland	11	19	11	+	0	--	6	-	0	--	0	--	UK
Deleuze	France	11	19	10	-	1	--	8	+	2	-	1	--	English
Bonnett	UK	11	19	11	+	0	--	8	+	2	-	0	--	English
Bourdieu	France	11	19	11	+	0	--	6	-	2	-	0	--	English
Cresswell	UK	10	/	10	++	0	/	10	++	0	/	0	/	UK
Trigg	Austria	10	/	9	/	1	/	5	/	3	++	1	/	North-Am
Paiva	USA (NA)	10	/	10	++	0	/	5	/	3	++	0	/	North-Am
Lebreton	France	10	/	0	/	8	++	0	/	0	/	10	++	French
Solnit	USA (NA)	9	/	7	/	2	/	7	++	0	/	2	/	UK
Blackshaw	UK	9	/	9	/	0	/	9	++	0	/	0	/	UK
Dobraszczyk	UK	9	/	9	/	0	/	9	++	0	/	0	/	UK
Debord	France	9	/	8	/	1	/	5	/	3	++	1	/	North-Am
Hall	UK	7	/	7	/	0	/	7	++	0	/	0	/	UK

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Pile	UK	7	/	7	/	0	/	3	/	3	++	0	/	North-Am
Goffman	USA	7	/	3	/	4	++	2	/	0	/	5	++	French
Novy	UK	6	/	2	/	4	++	0	/	0	/	6	++	French
Vergara	USA (NA)	6	/	4	/	2	/	1	/	1	/	4	++	French
Gravari-Barbas	France	5	/	1	/	4	++	0	/	0	/	5	++	French
Gibout	France	5	/	0	/	4	++	0	/	0	/	5	++	French
Pallasmaa	Finland	4	/	4	/	0	/	0	/	4	++	0	/	North-Am
Genosko	Canada	4	/	4	/	0	/	1	/	3	++	0	/	North-Am
Maitland	UK	4	/	1	/	3	++	0	/	0	/	4	++	French
Héas	France	4	/	0	/	3	++	0	/	0	/	4	++	French
Buchli	UK	3	/	3	/	0	/	0	/	3	++	0	/	North-Am
Gonzalez-Ruibal	Spain	3	/	3	/	0	/	0	/	3	++	0	/	North-Am
Bourdeau	France	3	/	0	/	3	++	0	/	0	/	3	++	French
Corneloup	France	3	/	0	/	3	++	0	/	0	/	3	++	French
Glowczewski	France	3	/	0	/	3	++	0	/	0	/	3	++	French

My analysis is further refined through a distinction between papers written in French and those written in English. For the latter, the bibliographic influence is similar to the overall corpus. A majority of English-speaking authors move up in the ranking, to the detriment of French authors, non-academics, and Simmel. The bibliographic influence of papers written in French is markedly different. Lebreton, an important author on the overall scale, is essential in this sub-corpus, just behind Garrett. Three quarters of the writers with a declining influence are English-speaking authors and many of them are not cited at all. Conversely, new, mostly French names are emerging, and they are absent from the sub-corpus written in English. Finally, only Garrett, Edensor, Bennett, Ninjalicious, De Certeau, and Foucault regularly appear, whatever the language employed. To add further depth, I have distinguished three cultural environments of the first authors: The United Kingdom; English-speaking North America; and the international Francophone community. The twenty-two papers "from" the United Kingdom have a bibliographic influence that closely resembles the overall corpus. No British author falls outside of the top ranking, and just one recedes, and they are in the majority among those moving up or entering into the top of the rankings. The top ranked influential authors of the nine papers "from" English-speaking North America differ from those in the overall corpus. Only one author from this region falls outside of the top ranking and there are no receding authors. They may be in the majority among those who are rising, but the origins of newcomers are very diverse. The eleven papers "from" the French-speaking community have a bibliographic influence closely resembling the sub-corpus written in French. This group therefore differs from the overall corpus. The authors receding from the top of the rankings or who are not cited are predominantly English-speaking, in addition to Deleuze and Bourdieu. Only Foucault and Simmel rise in the rankings and the new entrants are both French- and English-speaking. Finally, I provide a three-part analysis summary of the bibliographies. First, I have identified five groups of very influential authors. Several, especially French scholars, are significant in the papers written in French. Others, mainly the English-speaking writers, have an important weight in the papers written in English. Authors from different origins have a particular influence on the English-speaking North American sub-corpus. Others have a major place in the British sub-corpus. There are nine major authors, including five essential scholars: Bennett, De Certeau, Edensor, Garrett, and Ninjalicious. Second, a three-fold "endogamy" can be identified in the corpus. It is at once scholarly in nature, with strong referencing between papers on the subject; linguistic, with an emphasis on references from the language in which the papers are written; and cultural, with British and American regional preferences. Third, two major influences stand out: French critical theory from the second half of the twentieth century (namely, French Theory) and British social and/or cultural geography.

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4.3 Corpus Methodologies

To cap off our understanding of the conceptual frameworks used by the authors, I study the empirical methods appearing in forty-two of the papers. They are overwhelmingly qualitative (thirty-six methods), otherwise mixed. Urbex is the sole focus of study in 80% of the cases. The four similar practices mentioned in the introduction, parkour (on several occasions), and other activities (more rarely mentioned) can also be found. Like urbex, all of these practices are characterized as leisure activities for users interested in discovery, wandering, and hijacking their environment. The ethnographic toolset – from observant participation, to autoethnography and participant observation – dominates (twenty-eight examples). In addition, interviews are used in a quarter of the studies. These "direct" methods are used much more frequently than the "indirect" methods of analyzing websites and digital social media or explorer materials. However, they should not be separated because they are often combined with interviews, observation, and participation. A “direct” qualitative method in combination with “indirect” tools appears to be the preferred approach. A mapping of the exploration sites (Figure 5) from the thirty-two papers featuring such information appears to correlate with deindustrialization. Europe dominates (thirty cases), followed by North America (six cases). The rest of the world is not well represented. The Brazilian case (Daskalaki & Mould, 2013) is considered as wall art. Urbex has therefore only been studied for a handful of “developed” countries, in particular the United States for North America, and the United Kingdom, Germany, and France in Western Europe. These are the countries that are most documented, with an additional four papers mentioning “Western Europe” as a location. Conversely, the rest of Europe, particularly in the east, has experienced a more diffuse level of investigation. Given their levels of deindustrialization, these countries provide “rich” field for exploration. However, various access constraints (laws, political regimes, etc.), particularly for local researchers, have made them less frequent objects of study. Two types of territories seem to stand out: large metropolises and medium-sized towns. But this type of precise information is too scant for analysis.

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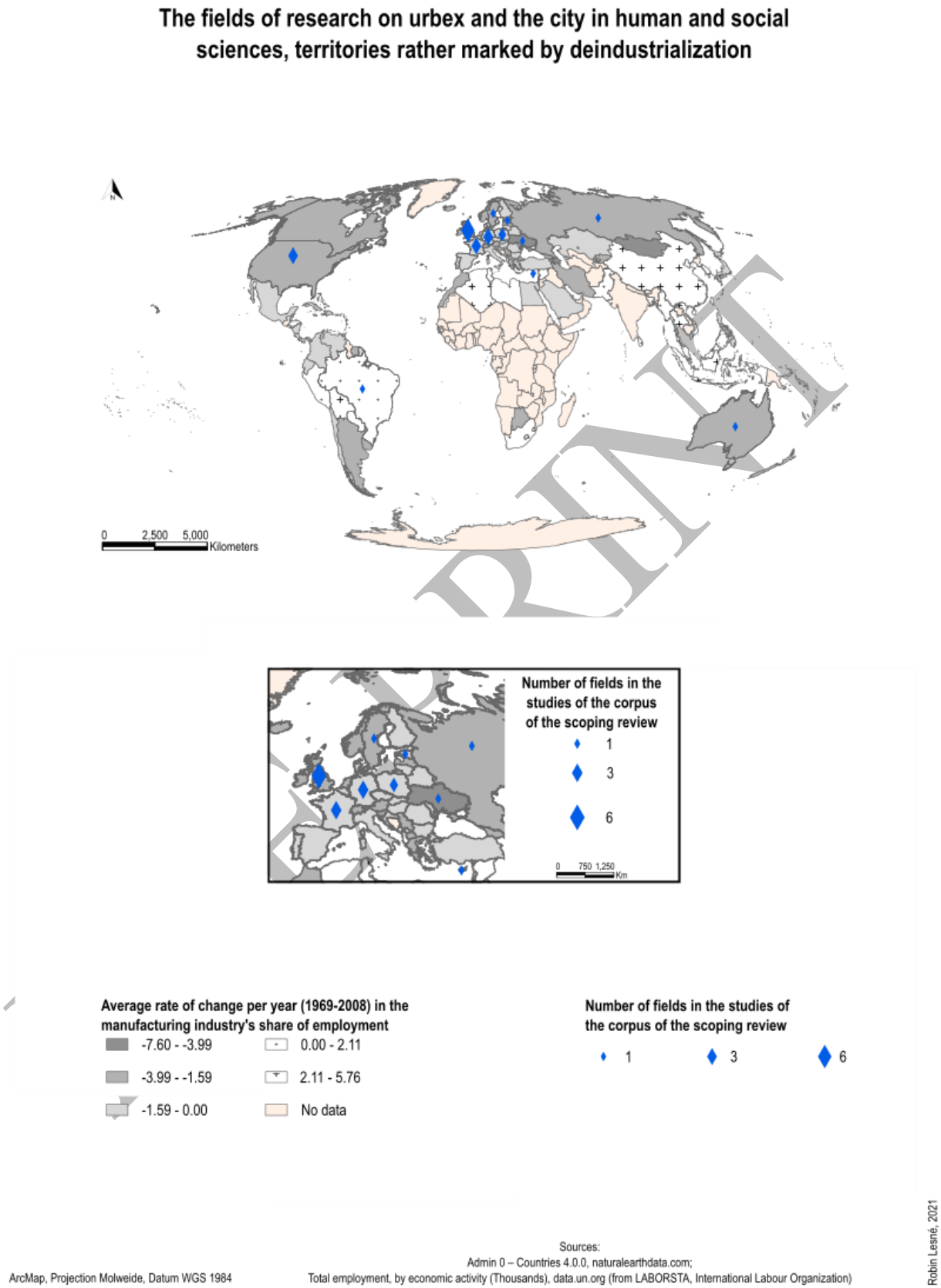

Figure 4. Mapping of the fields of study investigated in the corpus.

5 Organized Presentation of the Main Scholarly Contributions

5.1 Results and Conclusions

In the corpus, 231 conclusions have been identified and organized into four groups, with nine themes and twenty-six sub-themes. On average, each theme features twenty-six conclusions coming from twenty-four papers. The first group, which includes just one theme, covers the community of urbex practitioners – their defining features and interests. Most urbex explorers are men between the ages of twenty and thirty-five years, although this profile is diversifying. This group seeks to preserve their practice in the face of "conventionalization". They have adopted certain behavior and recognition codes, and they reject their categorization as a community. They are preoccupied with: secrecy and the protection of the sites they explore; the risk taking inherent to the practice and safety; and gender with a significant male identity.

The second group brings together three themes relating to the exploration experience. Urbex is primarily (1) an experience of the self. The practice allows explorers to construct an identity, get to know themselves, and discover themselves as they discover a site. Explorers are interested in having an authentic emotional and sensory experience that gives them new insight into the familiar or helps them understand the unknown. Because its purpose is self-understanding, urbex is akin to tourism. In addition, several papers (2) delve into corporeality as part of the urbex experience. They highlight the central place of the body – connected with emotions, feelings, and memory – in relation to space. A practitioner's body is therefore a key component of how a spatial experience can be renewed. As part of the analysis, I have identified a geographical prism (3) used to think through the symbolic relationship to space. Explorers appropriate a space through their interactions with it, their embodied experiences of it. They become one with the space. The everyday nature of this process makes urbex a practice "of" – rather than "in" – the city. In addition, urbex practitioners "aestheticize" spaces through their gazes, emotions, and imaginations. They see an aesthetic value that is proper to the sites. More broadly, they imbue the infrastructure and spaces visited with values. Urbex creates alternative meaning that is proper to the explorers' social representations. This is particularly salient in the realm of memory and heritage, going beyond the constructs of capitalist and neoliberal value regimes.

The third set of themes revolves around the questions and challenges posed by urbex. One theme deals with (1) the impacts of urbex on the city. The practice promotes an understanding of our everyday urban space and questions its ordinary uses. In this sense, it promotes a shift in our relationships to the city, urban society, and even the city itself. Urbex also questions relationships with public authorities and their management of buildings and urban spaces, calling into question their conventions, particularly in terms of memory, heritage, and tourism. On this subject, some authors speak to the paradox of a relationship between urbex and the institution. Moreover, (2) four concepts are "shaped" toward some conclusions: the sites are compared to heterotopias (Foucault, 1984); emancipation and the challenge to the ordinary link urbex to the idea of freedom; the concept of edgework (Lyng, 1990) serves to capture its constructive dimension; and some see it as a manifestation of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968). Finally, I identify (3) two recurrent ideological approaches. On the one hand, urbex is seen as anti-capitalist and opposed to consumerism, in particular because it gives renewed value to sites that have been devalued, or even deemed worthless, in the dominant system. However, to a certain degree, the self-promoting and staging of images within urbex undermine this viewpoint. On the other hand, this activity is seen as a form of resistance to relations of domination. Urbex embodies a critique on the homogenization of urban spaces, explicitly and implicitly striving for a radical change to power dynamics. Concretely, urbex puts into question conceptions of urban space and sociospatial norms. In this way, it participates in the emergence of a more recreational alternative urbanity.

The last group brings together two themes. Several conclusions deal with the place of urbex in the fields of culture and heritage. This practice questions what is "culture", favoring bottom-up logics and subverting a hierarchy of cultural elements. It breathes new life into its objects of exploration,

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championing the ordinary and everyday adventure while criticizing museumification. However, it should be noted that it also feeds off and into the dominant culture. In addition, explorers are presented as docents for urbex sites since they promote emotional, bodily, and memory-based experiences with the past, and because they protect and preserve them. Their desire to archive, promote, and document is therefore opposed to the risk-seeking behavior often associated with them. So they are considered heritage ambassadors and educators, and not consumers. Other conclusions relate to tourism and recreation. Several authors show that urbex constitutes a leisure activity, invoking the passion of its followers, the impact of the activity on their daily lives and how the practice helps them extract themselves from their ordinary condition. They also point to the tourist features of the practice, in particular in terms of authenticity. They show how it can be seen as an alternative form of tourism. Consequently, the prism of "touristification" has been applied to urbex. While it may be compared to a form of counter-tourism, urbex seems closer to conventional tourism than to dark tourism. Indeed, several authors note the development of an economic model for tourism that borrows from urbex spaces and strategies. Scholars publishing on urbex are interested in the practice's commodification linked to recent trends, treating it as a kind of economic niche within tourism. In the end, this is more a form of cooptation and therefore an example of the emergence of a parallel activity that "betrays" urbex's foundations.

5.2 Presentation of Research Perspectives

I have identified thirty-three research perspectives, which are specifically indicated in only 40% of papers, divided between six points of focus. The first two are methodological. We are invited to go beyond the transgressive vision of urbex to study its constructive dimension, in particular thanks to the concept of edgework (Lyng, 1990), as well as to open ourselves to the discursive practices and representations put forth by non-practitioners. In addition, it should be noted that the ethical issue of the investigation should go beyond the illegal character of the practice to consider that the inquiry necessarily affects the activity and consequently its authenticity. Some disciplinary logics emerge, such as the vertical turn in geography and the psychoanalytic approach. I then identify three thematic trends. The study of urbex prompts us to study other "marginal" micro-societies in order to grasp their place in urban society and space. This practice reveals contemporary cultural developments and avenues for transforming tourism, but its commodification should be further analyzed. Studying this activity promotes an understanding of the city and its dynamics of spatial production and appropriation, particularly in the realm of recreation. And it raises questions of gender, technology, disability, and even the place of emotions in the spatial experience.

6 Discussion: Methodological, Theoretical, and Thematic Avenues for Research

The scoping review and the bibliometric analysis of the corpus demonstrate that urbex is studied under the lens of multiple theoretical and conceptual frameworks. They borrow from a variety of academic disciplines, including geography, sociology and anthropology, cultural studies, and philosophy. Urbex is therefore a protean object involving a heterogeneity of reflexive paths to embrace its globality and its richness. The study of urbex therefore necessitates a multidisciplinary and even interdisciplinary approach. Just as explorers overstep certain boundaries, so researchers must cross disciplinary boundaries. It is therefore possible to study urbex on its own right, without comparisons to other activities. In addition, in the case of a quantitative approach, additional qualitative tools are needed. A qualitative empirical approach is recommended since its flexibility can account for the unstable and shifting nature of the practice. The practice under investigation shifts form from one day to the next, from one site to another, from one explorer or scholar to the next. So, a focused and consistent empirical approach can shed light on trends that should be considered against social and historical factors.

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However, this does not call into question the heuristic value of such studies, as in the case of ethnology (Agier, 2019).

Because urbex is inherently urban, takes place in an urban environment, builds a special relationship to space for users, and gives them an opportunity to take up space in the city, it opens up multiple possibilities for reflection on the city. First, it asks geographic questions about space, the city, and heritage. How are public or private and open or closed spaces produced and distinguished? Explorers question the role of practices, people, and spaces in a way that goes beyond dominant urban models. How are spatial appropriation and habitability constructed? What is the value of an neglected space and who is able to increase its value? Urbex invites us to reconsider certain theoretical prisms such as drift, everyday life, aesthetics, the wild, and heterotopia, as well as the role of the body in its relationship to space. Second, this activity can be used as a political tool. It puts into question the richness and the anchoring in the real and the contemporary of initiatives such as that of the explorers themselves. Instead of menaces to the established order, could they not be seen as components of a democracy? More broadly, urbex sheds light on struggles and legitimacy claims for one's right to the city. Third, the practice has the power to question culture and the role of everyday life in it, past and present. In addition, it provides a critical perspective on the objects, audiences, spaces, and forms of tourism and leisure activities, which tend to merge together. Urbex invites us to reinvent urban modes of production and uses of the city and its spaces, encouraging dwellers to reconsider their models. However, these messages remain implicit since urbex practitioners rarely speak in such terms. So the interest of urbex goes beyond the activity itself, extending within and on the study of the urban object.

7 Conclusion: Urbex as an Object and Not as a Subject of Research

Urbex has experienced recent and growing scholarly interest, almost exclusively in the social sciences. With regard to authorship and journals, the subject "urbex and urban space" primarily interests the fields of geography then sociology and anthropology, and cultural studies, in particular in the United Kingdom then in France and in the United States. The main context for this subject is that of the doctoral dissertation. Funded programs have rarely shown interest in urbex. Urbex researchers have mainly approached the subject through the prism of value and meaning attributions to space, based on spatial experiences. The disciplinary frameworks used are multiple but mainly stem from the fields of geography, philosophy, and/or sociology. Phenomenology and situationism contribute to the philosophical influence. A study of the concepts employed in the papers confirms the importance of the geographical and sociological prisms and reveals that of the cultural prism. I have distinguished five approaches: two are socio-philosophical, inductive or deductive; two consider urbex as a leisure activity, or even tourism, sociologically or geographically; the last is psychogeographical and focused on experience. I draw three conclusions from the analysis of the fifty-one bibliographies. Some authors are very influential on the subject and have more or less of an impact on some cultural and/or linguistic scholarly communities. I have observed a three-fold scientific, linguistic, and cultural "endogamy". The importance of French thinkers from the second half of the twentieth century and of British social and/or cultural geography is worth noting. Finally, in terms of methods used: empiricism, qualitative, and ethnography dominate. The methods are almost exclusively "direct", sometimes combined with "indirect" tools. The sites investigated are mainly in the United States and in Western Europe, but also in Eastern Europe in a more diffuse manner.

I draw four lessons for continued research on this subject. It is important to (1) favor a qualitative method and immersion into the experience by the researcher. At the same time, (2) scholars should turn their attention not just to the explorers but also to other actors in the city and to the population. One challenge is to (3) go beyond reading urbex through transgression and marginality and to consider what is constructive. Researchers would do well to put aside some theoretical frameworks borrowed from philosophy in order to favor a more inductive approach linked to the concreteness of the practice and

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already initiated by the prisms of leisure, tourism, and heritage. Finally, I identify (4) two interesting lines of investigation. The first is to use urbex to understand changes in how urban spaces are dwelled, produced, and appropriated. The second concerns the field of culture and tourism, and how urbex acts as a reflection of changes to those sectors. In my opinion, these points of focus converge via notions related to developing a recreational city (Lesné, 2021). Finally, urbex should be considered for a range of questioning whose interest goes beyond the activity itself. In other words, the challenge is to shift the scholarly mindset away from urbex as a subject of research and toward one in which it also becomes an object of research.

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