

TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local

e-ISSN: 2386-9968

Number 8 (2021), 44-67

DOI 10.7203/terra.8.18764

IIDL – Instituto Interuniversitario de Desarrollo Local

# **Mountain Races in the Valencian Community (1995-2019). Evolution, territorial distribution and incidence in protected areas**

**Jonathan Piqueras-Torres**

Graduado en Geografía y Medio Ambiente (Valencia, España)

sorieta92@hotmail.es

**Adolfo Calvo-Cases**

Catedrático de Geografía Física del Dpto. de Geografía e Instituto Interuniversitario de  
Desarrollo Local (Universitat de València)

Adolfo.Calvo@uv.es

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8497-4571>



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## ARTICLE SECTION

### **Mountain Races in the Valencian Community (1995-2019). Evolution, territorial distribution and incidence in protected areas**

*Abstract:* The fast increase of the mountain races events, has motivated recently the appearance of several studies. Still are few the available references at local scale, although some at Spanish level. There are regional differences that enhance the need of study that kind of events in a local scale. The Comunitat Valenciana, with large forested mountain areas (56 %), the number of natural reserves (646) and total protected proportion (40 %), becomes a good case of study. A literature review and an analysis of the collected information allowed to know the figures an evolution of the that practice during the last 25 years, its spatial and temporal distribution, among other relevant characteristics, like the kind of events and involved actors. The tendency to organize that kind of events on Natural Protected Areas enhance the needs of evaluation of the affection to that areas, chosen for this paper, that seem clearly significative. The need arises then to consider whether the management and regulation methods are adequate. The objective is not to limit the mountain races, since from a social and economic perspective they provide many benefits, but to make their existence compatible with the protection and conservation of the natural areas.

*Key words:* Trail running, Valencia Autonomous Region, Natural protected areas, Environmental impact.

Reception: October 22, 2020

Review: December 04, 2020

Acceptance: February 17, 2021

*Citation:*

Piqueras-Torres, J., y Calvo-Cases, A. (2021). Mountain Races in the Valencian Community (1995-2019). Evolution, territorial distribution and incidence in protected areas. *TERRA. Revista de Desarrollo Local*, (8), 44-67. DOI 10.7203/terra.8.18764

## IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS / IDEES CLAU

1. Las carreras por montaña han experimentado un considerable aumento en las últimas décadas.
2. El número de carreras de montaña ha aumentado y se ha extendido en la Comunitat Valenciana.
3. Las carreras y el tránsito público afectan cada vez más a más espacios naturales protegidos.
4. La normativa medioambiental va detrás del aumento y desarrollo de eventos como las carreras por montaña.
5. En el desarrollo de la normativa hay que tener en cuenta varios factores.

1. Running on the mountains has experienced a considerable increase during the last decades.
2. The number of running mountain races has increased and spread in the Comunitat Valenciana.
3. The runner's and public transit imply to many protected natural areas.
4. Environmental regulations go behind the events increase and development.
5. Several factors must be taken into consideration in the development of the regulations.

1. Les carreres per muntanya han experimentat un considerable augment en les últimes dècades.
2. El nombre de carreres de muntanya ha augmentat i s'ha estès en la Comunitat Valenciana.
3. Les carreres i el trànsit públic afecten cada vegada més a més espais naturals protegits.
4. La normativa mediambiental va darrere de l'augment i desenvolupament d'esdeveniments com les carreres per muntanya.
5. En el desenvolupament de la normativa cal tindre en compte diversos factors.

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>

During the past decades, in many countries of the world, the human sportive activities at the mountain areas experienced a very notable increase in the number of people that practice these sports and, in the number and success of the sportive events organized, mainly mountain or trail running races and hiking competitions.

The Comunitat Valenciana, in Eastern Spain, is a territory with extensive mountain areas (56 %) and good weather conditions, that favour that practices. Also, have a large number of natural reserves (646) and the total protected proportion of the territory reaches 40 %. Taking into consideration that most of these areas are in mountain ranges, the implications of the affection of the sportive activities can be considerable.

Both from the social and natural point of view, the study of the increase in the mountain activities has created interest in the literature during the last years. In this paper, after a literature review, we collected and analysed most of the available information that illustrates the evolution of that practice during the last 25 years in the Comunitat Valenciana territory.

The paper also focuses in the spatial and temporal distribution of the organized events, looking for a classification according to the kind of events and involved actors.

The information available in several web sites of associations and event's organizers, has been compiled and grouped by municipalities and county areas. Also classified by kinds of activities, length of the routes, period of the year and daily time span.

Also plotted on the municipalities maps the information has been overlapped to the available natural reserve's maps. Considering that an event of a specific length implies a natural protected area when this is in a circular distance of 5 km around the town centre. To check the affection on micro reserve areas, the events tracks have been plotted over the reserve's maps. Obtaining in both cases the proportion of the course length affecting the natural protected areas.

Results show that, in the Comunitat Valenciana, the number of evens has been increasing since 1995 to 2018, although a slight decrease in 2019 can indicate the beginning of saturation of the curve (Figure 1), perhaps as a consequence of an excess of event's supply.

The events are mostly organized in medium and smaller towns and preferable in the mountain areas closer to the coast (Figures 2 and 3). Most of them (63 %) on towns with less than 5000 inhabitants.

The seasonality of the events organization and the spatial distribution is clearly related with the better climatological conditions of the spring and fall, moving to the higher mountain areas during the summer months and to the coast in the winter (Figure 4, table 1). The maximums of events during the spring months are very sensitive as can affect to vegetation and fauna reproductive cycles.

A classification of the events according to their length and discriminated by running and hiking trails (Tables 2 and 3) show that the majority are shorter than half marathon, although there is a significant number of events (37.6 %) between the 22 to 40 km in distance.

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<sup>1</sup> Traducción exclusiva de los autores / Authors' exclusive translation.

There is clear trend in the organization of the events near or within the natural protected areas that provide nicer landscapes. More than 80 % of the events are crossing natural protected areas of several categories (Figure 6 and 7, table 4), although the incidence on micro-reserves is lower in kilometres (table 5), but implying a considerable number of events.

In Spain and in the Comunitat Valenciana there is clear lack of regulations for the vegetation, fauna and soil protection, in relation with the events organization. The natural conservation authorities must negotiate with the event's organizers the routes and to propose changes between the years, but an adequate and effective regulations seem necessary. The objective is not to limit the mountain races, since from a social and economic perspective they provide many benefits, but to make their existence compatible with the protection and conservation of the natural areas.