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Isabelle André-Poyaud, Sylvie Duvillard and Antonin Lorioux

EDITOR'S NOTE

Translation: Accent Mondial

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Methodological restrictions: No additional work has yet been carried out the CSP and ages; the area studied is artificially closed: those we have called “the locals” also buy homes in other communes that do not form part of this study.

- 1 As is the case everywhere in the world, the decade just ended has seen an explosion in property prices in France. The tourist areas in the Northern Alps are among those where, outside Paris, the pressure on land and property is the strongest. The exuberance of the property market (Le Bayon & Péléraux, 2006) has manifested itself in such a way that it has become a problem in itself for the mountain regions, following the example of urban regions. The politicians have very quickly become worried about the medium-term consequences for their regions: how to accommodate the working population? The seasonal visitors? How to maintain public services where their profitability is no longer assured outside the tourist periods? This indicates the replacement of certain population categories – the working population, the locals – by others (the tourists). What is the real situation? In order to answer this, we have chosen to present a summary of the land and property dynamics in 14 communes in the Northern Alps situated at the foot of Mont Blanc, among them being Chamonix and Megève.

- 2 The dynamics of property are defined as the market flows¹ relating to developed land (homes and flats) and undeveloped land (land to be built on). The period under review (2001-2008) corresponds to the period when prices exploded, reaching a constant rate of increase of 25% per year. If being an owner does not establish the conditions for access to housing, it is one of the methods. It is much more the tensions in the property markets that determine in part the propensity of the public authorities to intervene with regard to the production of social housing. We are excluding de facto from this study two of the essential elements that arise when housing problems are addressed, namely the rental market and the purpose (use) of the property purchased.
- 3 Starting from a partial study of the market in 14 communes in Haute-Savoie – a study based on the data marketed by PERVAL² regarding sales of properties³ located in urban areas or areas to be urbanised⁴, we are pursuing a triple objective:
 - firstly, the methodology applied is based on the analysis of changes in ownership; this involves the use of a database recently placed on the “knowledge market”⁵). While access to property market data, for the purposes of partially reducing the lack of clarity inherent in the property markets (Peyrou, 2006), has been made easier by the Borloo law (ENL, 2006), the notary profession in France knew how to take advantage of it. Even if it is not possible to make an exact count of the number of sales of old housing stock (Friggit, 2007), the databases of the notaries (Leurs & alii, 2004) open up new viewpoints for the researchers. For the economists (Pouyanne, Bécue, 2006) it involves the analysis of urban configurations by taking into account the property dynamics or effectively to determine the price of the countryside based on a hedonic property pricing model (Cavailhès, 2006). The geographers will find in it other factors to analyse. The entry by price (first part) underscores *the specificities of the land and property markets on both an inter-communal and communal scale* (first part).
 - Assuming this to be the case, the differences cannot be attributed to accessibility as with the correlation established between mobility and the value of housing in large metropolitan areas (Weil, 2008). The study of the housing market in the (small) communes (Buhot, 2006) leads to the socio-qualitative analysis (geographical origin of buyers/ sellers) of the market participants and aims to reveal the *exchange systems* where *the rationale of the local population* (the game of spatial proximity – to find somewhere to live) and the *global rationale* (residential tourist areas – to invest) intersect each other. The second objective (part two) is to examine, through the geographical origin of the market participants, the processes of residentiality (secondary/principal) that result from residential flows as described by D. Buckel (Buckel, Cusin, Juillard, 2008) for the Ile de France. The same question applies to tourist areas in the mountains: how to assess the attractiveness of the regions and the resultant socio-spatial fragmentation?
 - But here, the market dynamics in a way raise conditions for *providing support to the working population* (access of the local population to housing via access to ownership) that are competing with leisure-based investments (secondary residences). This is the subject matter of the last part: to deal with the problems surrounding the supply of property not in terms of space or density but through deducing the potential local demand from the accessible supply.

A property El Dorado in Rhône-Alpes, the Pays du Mont-Blanc

Constrained space, exceptional countryside, prices based on these factors

- 4 The Pays du Mont-Blanc is an inter-community⁶ linking together 14 communes. With a very strong *tourist economy* (Mont-Blanc, the highest summit in Europe, is the emblematic symbol of this) it brings together as a whole *a large number of different types of commune*: an emblematic town (Chamonix), a world-famous village resort (Megève), a thermal spa (Saint-Gervais-les-Bains), less well-known village resorts (Combloux, Les Contamines-Montjoie, Praz-sur-Arly, Les Houches), a small valley town (Sallanches) and its suburbs (Domancy, Passy), finally communes of modest size (Demi-quartier, Servoz, Cordon, Vallorcine) but all taking advantage of the same amenities provided by the countryside.
- 5 Not all took advantage of a *strong demographic growth* normally experienced by dynamic property areas since certain communes (Megève and Chamonix) experienced a negative rate of demographic growth between 1999 and 2006⁷. Finally, dominated by *high mountains*, the contours of the region constrain and design an area that is full of contrasts: the low valley of Avre (Sallanches), the high valleys of Chamonix and the Montjoie valley, mountain passes on the Franco-Swiss borders (Balme and Montets), form with the opening out of the gorges de l'Arly and the villages of Aravis (Cordon) a whole area where the sqm that can be used is rare.
- 6 Here the property pressure finds itself borne along by the aggregate of its characteristics: constrained space, exceptional landscape and a tourist economy; the Pays du Mont-Blanc and the Haute-Savoie as a whole are competing with large urban areas as regards the development of regional property assets (cartel).

Map 1. Change in the average price of houses constituting the old housing stock between the periods (1996-2000) and (2001-2005) by commune in Rhône-Alpes

A dynamic property market

- 7 An increased price level further increases the volume of properties exchanged (Comby, 2004). In the communes of the Pays du Mont-Blanc the period 2001-2008 is characterised by an economic activity sustained by the property market⁸.

Graph 1. Change in transaction volume by type of property between 2001 and 2008 (index base 100 in 2001)

Source: Perval data

- 8 However 2004 marks a turning point, which nonetheless does not affect the markets as a whole. The decrease in the volume of transactions relating to apartments noted between 2003 and 2004 continues until 2008. On the other hand, this fall is immediately offset by a new increase in the number of transactions entered into between 2004 and 2005 for houses. The slowing down of the trend continues from 2006 and the market collapses in 2008 due to the financial crisis⁹. The market for apartments seems to be more affected than that for houses. While the volume of exchanges executed in 2008 reaches that of 2001 for houses, it falls well below that of 2001 for apartments (Graph 1). This situation results from several interrelated factors. We will touch on two of these factors. In the first place, this difference can be explained in part by the way in which the property purchased is used (property designated as the principal/secondary residence, for investment). The tendency towards purchasing an apartment as a secondary residence is stronger than that for houses, with 71% of the buyers living outside the communes of the Pays du Mont-Blanc, compared to 53% for houses, respectively. Yet, within the context of rapidly increasing prices (see Graphs 3 and 4), the market for secondary residences is more and more limited to households that remain solvent and are still able to borrow. This elimination of certain population groups can translate itself into a decrease in the volume of transactions. Secondly, the increase in property prices reduces the rental profitability for purchases intended as investments. Small private investors may withdraw from this market, thereby generating a reduction in the volume of transactions.
- 9 The most active markets are the driving force behind the prestigious communes (Chamonix, Saint-Gervais, Megève) and/or the most populated (Sallanches and Passy), where sales of apartments (representing 82% of properties sold) dominate (Map 2).

Map 2. Number of transactions entered into between 2001 and 2008, Pays du Mont-Blanc

A spectacular increase in the number of transactions and in the prices per sqm sensitive to altitudinal gradients

- 10 Prices increase constantly over the total period notwithstanding the break experienced in 2004. Even taking into account that the driving force behind this growth is the same as before, Chart 2, which shows the distribution of prices per sqm for apartments for each year under review, illustrates at the same time the extraordinary increase in prices between 2001 and 2008 and, quite remarkably, also the trend towards their widest distribution.¹⁰ The median prices of living space per sqm for apartments, indicated by a horizontal line in the rectangles, increase from € 1,889 in 2001 to somewhere between € 2,100 - 2,300 for the period between 2002 and 2004, reach € 3,228 in 2005 and fluctuate between € 3,900 and € 4,100 for the period between 2006 and 2008. While these prices continue to increase over the total period, it is important to note two pivotal years, 2004 and 2006, which mark a step in the wider distribution of the prices. In fact, 95% of the transactions in 2001 are entered into at an amount in excess of € 4,000 per sqm, whereas 70% of the transactions in 2004 are entered into below this amount. From 2006 only a half of the properties are exchanged at this price.

Graph 2. Distribution of prices per sqm for apartments by year for the period between 2001 and 2008 in the communes of the Pays du Mont-Blanc

- 11 The increase in the number of transactions for houses appears as spectacular as that for apartments. On an annual basis the average sales prices for houses has increased by 13% between 2001 and 2008. The largest increases are seen in the years 2002-2003 and 2003-2004, with increases of +27%, +24% in the sales prices, respectively. Whereas 50% of houses are sold at a price in excess of € 213,000 in 2001, 50% of the houses were sold

in 2003 at a price in excess of € 320,000. From 2006, the median price of transactions for houses stabilised around € 500,000.

- 12 The prices do not increase in an identical manner across all the communes under review. The spatial disparities smoothed out by the analysis of the price movements should be pointed out.
- 13 Sallanches and Passy remain the most accessible communes in 2008 in terms of apartment prices¹¹, where 50% of the transactions were entered into at a price exceeding €3,000 per sqm. Chamonix and Megève are the leaders in this market. 50% of the exchanges in these two locations were made at a price per sqm in excess of €4,000 (Map 3). The most sustained increases¹² are apparent in the communes of Combloux, Saint-Gervais-les-Bains, Megève, Demi-Quartier and Passy.

Map 3. Median price per sqm for apartments in 2008 in the communes of the Pay du Mont-Blanc and the change between 2001 and 2008

- 14 The least affordable communes with regard to the house market are (Map 4): Combloux, Chamonix, Demi-Quartier and Megève where there are more “excellent properties sold at exceptional prices”. In order to illustrate this phrase let us take the example of Megève where 50% of the properties were exchanged at a price in excess of € 960,000 during the entire period under review and where the rise in the median price does not stand comparison: doubling of the median price for houses between 2007 and 2008 (+110%) whereas the communes of Sallanches and Passy saw their median price stabilise between these last two years. Map 4, which shows the median prices, illustrates the exceptional cases of some communes in the Alpes du Nord. Emphasis has first been placed on the “astronomic” amounts spent by certain people in order to become a “home-owner in the mountains”¹³; in fact the socio-spatial profile of the participants is an indicator relevant to the tensions in a very competitive market. The question remains to be asked as to whom are the beneficiaries of this?

Map 4. Median price per sqm for houses in 2008 in the communes of the Pay du Mont-Blanc and the change between 2001 and 2008

To live, to make a profit, to invest, who buys what?

Strong ascendancy of foreign ownership in the market for “upmarket” properties

- 15 As the preceding section has illustrated, the distribution of property prices is a remarkable. It would then be a thought-provoking exercise to compare the volume of transactions for houses and apartments with the origin of the buyer in order to determine whether or not a homogeneous market or competitive markets existed. It is necessary to assess the real ascendancy of non-residents in the Haute-Savoie region in addition to the premise according to which the purchasing power of non-native residents¹⁴ greatly exceeds the budget of the local population. It is what R. Mériaudeau (Mériaudeau, 1985) refers to as foreign ownership.
- 16 The analysis of prices per sqm for apartments based on the origin of the buyers provides a first indication. Between 2001 and 2008 2/3 of the apartments were purchased by persons resident outside the Pays du Mont-Blanc¹⁵. The analysis of median and average prices per sqm underscores a pattern of proximity-distance where the nearest buyers purchase a property at a price per sqm lower than that paid by those living further afield. Thus, the median price per sqm increases to €2,400 for people resident in the Pays du Mont-Blanc, € 2,600 for those resident in other communes in the Haute Savoie, € 2,800 for those resident in another French department and € 4,098 for those resident abroad. This phenomenon can also be seen on a wider scale. In fact, foreign buyers pay a median price per sqm higher than local buyers across all communes of the Pays du Mont-Blanc. This price differential is even more marked in the communes of Contamines-Montjoies, Saint-Gervais-les-Bains, Combloux or Demi Quartier. A hierarchy between the prices accepted by these categories of buyers should also be noted in terms of distribution.

- 17 Houses put up for sale between 2001 and 2008 have in the main been bought by persons resident in the communes of the Pays du Mont-Blanc (49%). Foreigners are in second position with 24% of the transactions. Buyers coming from the rest of France constitute 28%, of whom 4% live in Haute-Savoie, 5% in Rhône-Alpes and 19% in another region of France.
- 18 The amounts paid by local buyers are less than those paid by people resident outside the area, whereby the median price for houses increases to € 287,165 for people resident in the Pays du Mont-Blanc, to € 401,750 for people resident in the Rhône-Alpes, then to € 463,108 for those coming from another French region, to reach € 560,000 for foreigners, namely a multiplier coefficient of 1.40, 1.61 and 1.95, respectively, in relation to the median price observed for those of the Pays du Mont-Blanc (Map 5).

Map 5. Median price for houses acquired by residents of the Pays du Mont-Blanc and the median price relationship between foreign residents and residents of the Pays du Mont-Blanc

- 19 The prices form a selection basis between buyers based on geographical origin and the standard of the properties¹⁶.
- 20 “All things not being equal in other respects”, the socio-spatial profile of the participants in a particularly strained market is an indicator relevant to the segregative processes, without however making any reference to their causality. In fact “there is in some way a dialectic use-price-use sequence” (Granelle, 2004). And, on the negative side is the exclusion of some of the working population from home ownership and even more worryingly from access to housing.

Competing residential processes, “all things not being equal in other respects”

- 21 The socio-spatial analysis of the market participants (buyers and sellers) reveals *someexchange systems*¹⁷ where the *rationale of the local population* (the game of spatial proximity – to find somewhere to live) intersects with the *global rationale* (residential tourist areas – to make a profit, invest). And all those who fuel this market – primarily sellers – profited during this period from the increase in the value of property.

- 22 On a global basis, while persons resident abroad (all properties taken together) are the only ones to buy more than they sell, it is nevertheless a fact that the majority of houses sold return to some residents of the “Pays du Mont-Blanc”. What is still true for houses is no longer the case for apartments where the former is supplanted by the “France” category.
- 23 A detailed analysis of the exchanges (Diagrams 1 and 2) illustrates how much the buyer/seller ratio is in favour of persons residing abroad: they buy almost three times more houses than they sell and two times more apartments. Yet, the sellers in the “Pays du Mont-Blanc” sell more houses to their counterparts than to others, which is not the case for the residents of Rhône-Alpes nor of France.
- 24 A clean break seems to have been established between two parallel markets: that driven by the locals (to live?) or that captured by foreigners (to invest and make a profit?), a division made easier by the eclipse (temporary) of regional and national secondary residents. The competition between the two is reflected in particular in the exchange systems for houses.

Diagram 1. Houses: Exchanges between categories of participants (buyers/sellers) based on their place of residence

- 25 The apartment market (leisure homes?)¹⁸ is markedly different inasmuch as the majority of the stock sold does not belong to the locals.

Diagram 2. Apartments: Exchanges between categories of participants (buyers/sellers) based on their place of residence

- 26 The apartment market is driven and dominated by persons residing outside the communes of the Pays du Mont-Blanc. The “France” category, the most represented, is an active driving force in this market: it sells equally to each of the other categories more than it sells to itself. As expected, it is a market dominated by leisure homes even if the locals of the “Pays du Mont-Blanc” represent the second highest number of buyers, just ahead of persons residing abroad.

A selective sorting process according to commune

- 27 The dynamics of the exchanges set out the processes that result in the characterisation of each of the communes by reference to the socio-spatial profile of the new owners.

Map 6. Typology of the communes based on the place of residence of the buyers of houses – 2001-2008

- 28 Map 6 draws up a typology of the communes in four categories with regard to the house market. Category 1 consolidates the communes of Houches, Servoz and Chamonix, in which an over-representation of foreigners is reported (+15 percentage points in relation to the total for the communes under review). Category 2, comprising the communes of Sallanches, Domancy and Passy, is focussing heavily on recruiting locals. 80% of the buyers reside in the Pays du Mont-Blanc, namely 33 percentage points above the average. Category 3 differentiates Vallorcine from other communes through the stronger presence of buyers coming from other French regions and the very high under-representation of buyers from the Pays du Mont-Blanc. Category 4, which includes Praz sur Arly, Megève, Demi-Quartier, Combloux, les Contamines-Montjoie, Cordon and Saint-Gervais, is moving more towards to French people residing outside the region and inhabitants of the Rhône-Alpes. Foreigners are very slightly under-represented.

Map 7. Typology of the communes based on the place of residence of the buyers of apartments – 2001-2008

- 29 The analysis of the origin of buyers in the apartment market underscores three commune profiles (Map 7). The first profile structured around 7 communes (Praz-sur-Arly, Megève, Les Contamines-Montjoie, Demi-Quartier, Combloux, Saint-Gervais et Cordon) is marked, on the one hand, by a high over-representation of buyers coming from Rhône-Alpes and other French regions (France: +15 percentage points in relation to the total for the communes), and, on the other hand, a high under-representation of buyers from the Pays du Mont-Blanc (-13 percentage points in relation to the average profile). Category 2, comprising the communes of Sallanches, Domancy, Servoz et Passy, is characterised by the very strong presence of buyers from the Pays of Mont-Blanc (74% against 29% for the communes as a whole). Category 3, structured around the communes of Vallorcine, Chamonix and les Houches, is defined as a market targeted towards foreign buyers (47% against 24% for the communes as a whole).
- 30 These graphical representations bring to mind at what point does foreign ownership, dominating this area as a whole, remain a variable¹⁹ that differentiates one commune from another. They also indicate the degree of resistance of the locals in each of the two markets: they are still resisting in the house market, but for how much longer?
- 31 The analysis over time allows some answers to be provided. While the phenomenon of the intensification of a foreign presence in certain regions of France has been underlined by the majority of observers, the data available on the Pays du Mont-Blanc suggests that this category is particularly sensitive to the economic situation. Their share in the house market remains stable²⁰ whereas a weakening becomes apparent in 2008 in favour of the “France” and “Rhône-Alpes” categories. The locals are also marking time²¹.
- 32 The change over time in the apartment market is characterised by a steady increase on the part of the locals²², an increase in inverse proportion to that of the “France” category²³. Over time the locals are recovering apartments and losing houses. This typology, more than a socio-spatial differentiation, suggests a new mapping of communal interdependencies. The properties change owners, the inside/outside

relationship is reconfigured and the communes stealthily alter their socio-spatial profile, a population of owners chasing the other. A subtle balancing game has been confirmed between the locals and foreigners based on the properties and the years; nothing is frozen in time, none more so than space.

Spatial interaction and the domino effect: turbulence inhabiting the Pays du Mont-Blanc

The processes of urbanisation of the mountain tourist areas: peri-urban and peri-tourist

- 33 The forms of peri-urbanisation in the mountain tourist areas are characterised by the details of the exchange dynamics (Duvillard, Sgard, Ziotti, 2007). A study based on three communes lead us to define an urbanisation process specific to the mountain tourist areas as peri-tourist²⁴ urbanisation. In the same way as the phenomenon of peri-urbanisation, peri-tourist urbanisation feeds itself at its centre.

Chamonix, a world-wide market: English in the commune that is most dominated by the increase in foreign owners

- 34 The locals are²⁵ putting up strong resistance in the apartment market²⁶; foreigners with an already strong presence in 2001²⁷ almost hit the 50% mark in 2003. The “France” residents also saw their share increase between the two periods²⁸; only Rhône-Alpes and Haute-Savoie lost market share.
- 35 Chamonix is different from the whole as regards the house market: the proportion represented by foreigners never decreased and reached 59% of house buyers in 2008. Everything else is decided between the other categories who shared the other properties: the locals, very active on average in this market,²⁹ are always ahead of the other socio-spatial categories.
- 36 The bipolarisation of the market between foreigners and locals within the strict meaning of the term is confirmed here more than elsewhere. At Chamonix, 98% of the locals who buy a house already reside in the commune, whatever the year.

Megève, a national market: a village of regional and national secondary residents: a trend reinforced in the apartment market

- 37 Megève is a commune dominated by apartments used as local and national secondary residences; foreigners have never overtaken the proportion of new owners resident in France: while they represented 28% in 2001, their share continued to decrease to only 22% of the buyers of apartments in 2008. The proportion of local buyers, mostly from Megève, also showed a downward trend³⁰ (Graph 3).
- 38 The situation is more confused in the house market. The amount of missing data (amount always in excess of a million Euro!) is significant (1/3 of the transactions at times). Yet it seems that the locals (domiciled in the commune) lose ground as the years go by: 30% on average for the period as a whole, but only 15% in 2008. However, the variations within the years for locals as well as for foreigners blur the underlying

picture. It is the buyers not resident in the commune but in France who take the most advantage of the balancing game between locals and foreigners³¹.

Graph 3. Distribution of apartment buyers in Megève based on their place of residence between 2001 and 2008

Passy: withdrawal from or recovery by the locals of properties that escaped them before? Peri-urban and/or “péri-tourist” commune?

- ³⁹ Whatever the type of property exchanged, to be domiciled in the Pays du Mont-Blanc indicates here buying more than selling³². Together with the foreigners, they are the only two categories of participants that buy more than they sell, relatively speaking³³. Unlike the situations described above, houses sold in Passy drain ¾ of the communes of their inter-communal links³⁴ (Graph 4); to put it plainly, while all those in the “Pays du Mont-Blanc” category, who buy a house in Megève or Chamonix, already reside in these communes, those of Passy, who buy in the commune where they reside, only represent 37% of the total.

Graph 4. Distribution of house buyers in Passy between 2001 and 2008 based on their place of residence

- 40 Thus Passy, a large commune with more than 11,000 inhabitants marked by the omnipresence of detached housing, is at the same time a peri-urban commune within the classical meaning of the term (welcoming of populations previously residing in the centre of town – Sallanches – towards the outlying villages) but also a “péri-tourist” commune in the sense that it welcomes people previously resident in the tourist communes (Chamonix-Megève) but rejected at the outskirts of those areas where the tourist-residential economy excludes in part the locals and/or the working population from access to home ownership. The question is to know where the latter buy?

Potential local demand and accessible supply

- 41 Let us accept the hypothesis according to which a large proportion³⁵ of the residents of a commune favour a purchase close to their place of residence. Let us conclude³⁶ for the time being that the living standards of local buyers is nothing like those of outsiders. It is then possible to assess the differential existing between the potential local demand and the accessible supply.
- 42 There is a huge variance in the gap between the potential local demand and the accessible supply from one commune to another: there are those communes where the gap is small, with the communal market satisfying the potential demand: Passy and Praz-sur-Arly in the case of houses, Sallanches in the case of apartments; there are those where the gap remains contained with the locals still succeeding in buying houses (Megève, Les Contamines-Montjoie, Chamonix, les Houches, Saint-Gervais-les-Bains); then there are those where the gap is more prevalent in the apartment market than in the house market (Passy, les Houches); finally, there are those where the locals are struggling very hard to stay in the market (Combloux, Demi Quartier, Domancy, Cordon and Servoz) (Map 8). From that moment on, dissatisfied residents³⁷ carry out their property projects elsewhere³⁸.

Map 8. Local buyers becoming owners in their commune as a proportion of the total buyers becoming owners in the same commune – 2001-2008

Who is chasing whom, to go where? Spatial interaction and the domino effect

- 43 Logically the least populated communes (Servoz/ Demi Quartier/ Cordon/ Domancy) feed the local demand the least. But these are communes where the locals, even if less numerous, buy outside their commune of residence because the inhabitants of their imposing neighbours represent the competition³⁹ (Megève/ Chamonix/ Sallanches/ Saint-Gervais-les-Bains). The communes directly affected by these transactions are Passy, Les Houches, Demi Quartier, Domancy, Servoz and Cordon ; among the latter some perceive an additional and indirect pressure: Passy and Domancy, in particular, are the communes where the inhabitants of Les Houches carry out their property investment for Passy; then some of the inhabitants of Passy do the same thing in Domancy.

Map 9. Principal origin of buyers in the Pays du Mont-Blanc based on the location of houses bought between 2001-2008 (external flows)

- 44 Through “gravitation” the bottom of the valleys is becoming an attractive area for the inhabitants of the high mountains, chased out in part by secondary residences. This is a generally well-known phenomenon which we accept in part⁴⁰.
- 45 A detailed analysis of the flow of properties between residents of the same inter-commune demonstrates the limits of property policies on a communal scale. Admittedly, the management of land is jealously guarded by the communes⁴¹, but it should be put on record here, more than elsewhere, that the communes of the Pays du Mont-Blanc are caught up in a common community of destiny⁴², even if only to think together about their future.

Conclusion: Community of destiny or inter-communal policy in a competitive tourist area?

- 46 Some communes specialise in welcoming locals, others support their international stature where the appropriation of property is one of its characteristics. In both cases the question of access of locals to property (land and buildings)⁴³, of territorial cohesion and identity (Debarbieux, 2008) and, in the end, of the governance of these tourist resorts (Gerbaux & Marcelpoil, 2004) crops up with acuteness.
- 47 The market laws are functioning at full capacity and, in an internationalised market, regulate the access to home ownership through supply and demand.
- 48 While this concerns the politician, one may put forward the hypothesis that he can only assist in a perplexed, powerless or, on the contrary, in a satisfied way with regard to the incoming sums of money that are always more sizeable on each new transaction

executed in his commune. However, he remains in charge of zoning and therefore the opening up to urbanisation; one can therefore legitimately regard him a major player in the supply of building land for sale. And actually, this market for building land for sale is the adjustment variable regarding access of locals to property⁴⁴. It is imperative for a coherent land management policy to systematically relate the construction market (individual houses and apartments) to the supply of building land for sale on a supra-communal scale. Four communes of the Pays du Mont-Blanc have taken this route: Chamonix, Servoz, Combloux and Vallorcines have just ratified a community of communes of the valley of Chamonix Mont-Blanc. The skills required to develop areas⁴⁵ constitute steps towards the implementation of a genuine property policy based on the community⁴⁶. The scale is relevant with regard to the property dynamics between locals, but inadequate with regard to the property challenges in the Pays du Mont-Blanc. If a community of destiny refuses, this places on record the strong interdependence between communes regarding the question of property policies where a substantial part of the local economy is mortgaged on the vagaries of the climate: there is nothing that lasts for ever in economics and in climatology, what is to be done if the snow becomes scarce? Can fame alone still carry the future of the area over the long-term?

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Demographic trend 1999-2006

	Population in 2006	Population in 1999	Change in %
Chamonix	9,195	9,829	-6.5
Combloux	2,042	1,992	2.5
Cordon	1,013	878	15.4
Demi-quartier	1,079	1,031	4.7
Domancy	1,848	1,710	8.1
Les Contamines Montjoie	1,211	1,126	7.5
Les Houches	3,037	2,708	12.1
Megève	3,960	4,518	-12.4
Passy	11,234	10,094	11.3
Praz-sur-Arly	1,315	1,083	21.4

Saint-Gervais	5,594	5,290	5.7
Sallanches	15,469	14,387	7.5
Servoz	942	819	15.0
Vallorcine	416	390	6.7
Pays du Mont-Blanc	60,361	57,854	4.3
Haute-Savoie	696,254	631,963	10.2

Appendix 2. Distribution of buyers of building land for sale based on their place of residence

	Communes	% Rhône-Alpes	% France	% Foreigners	% Haute-Savoie	% Pays du Mont-Blanc
74173	Megève	11.8	29.4	29.4	11.8	17.6
74215	Praz-sur-Arly	0	55.6	11.1	11.1	22.2
74099	Demi-Quartier	30.0	20.0	10.0	10.0	30.0
74083	Combloux	16.7	30.6	11.1	5.6	36.1
74236	Saint-Gervais-les-Bains	12.5	31.3	3.6	1.8	50.9
74290	Vallorcine	23.1	23.1	0	0	53.8
74089	Cordon	0	36.4	9.1	0	54.5
74085	Les Contamines Montjoie	0	33.3	4.8	4.8	57.1
74056	Chamonix	6.7	15.6	11.1	4.4	62.2
74143	Les Houches	0	11.6	16.3	0	72.1
74208	Passy	1.9	11.3	0	6.6	80.2
74103	Domancy	0	7.1	0	7.1	85.7
74256	Sallanches	2.1	5.3	0	6.3	86.3
74266	Servoz	0	0	0	0	100.0
	Total	6.5	18.9	5.4	4.6	64.7

NOTES

1. Housing stocks are ignored, i.e. property that does not change ownership.
2. Company emanating from the Notarial Office of France (Notariat de France); it markets data (raw information or treated data) on land and property transactions. The notaries provide free of charge and on a voluntary basis a range of information when a property has been sold: more than 26 criteria are available, thus allowing a profile (age/place of residence, profession...) to be drawn up of the individuals, the standard of the property (number of rooms...) and the transaction amount. It should be noted that there is a lack of certain reference data such as age, but also, more astonishingly, the place of residence of the buyer. In brief, data that is worth having, of being produced at source (by the official who draws up the deed of sale), but is not exhaustive, which should then be used on an arm's length basis and with care.
3. Land/ apartments and houses.
4. Agricultural and natural areas are excluded de facto.
5. Acquiring the data is expensive (almost one Euro per transaction).
6. The inter-communal framework has become a priori a relevant setting for examining changes in property ownership on an inter-communal scale. These inter-community links are not very active and are used at a minimum (see in conclusion the birth of the community of communes within this inter-community).
7. Refer to the table in the appendices.
8. 9,533 sales spread across 7,511 apartments (84% of the transactions), 1,459 homes (14% of the transactions) and 563 plots of undeveloped land (2% of the transactions).
9. In fact the sales of apartments fell by 21% and those of houses by 19% between 2007 and 2008.
10. In order to help in interpreting this representation, remember that the "box and whisker plots" are constructed around 5 indicators: the minimum, the first quartile, the median, the third quartile and the maximum of a statistical series. The median, which divides the series into two equal groups of numbers is represented by a line inside the rectangles. As for these, they represent the interquartile interval, i.e. half of the prices of living space per sqm situated between the first quartile (the value that isolates the first quarter of the observations in the series) and the third quartile (value that isolates the last quarter of the observations in the series). The central part of the statistical distribution appears in this rectangle. The more the rectangle is elongated and the more the central part is extended is important. The vertical lines coming from the rectangles show the adjacent values established from the interquartile interval. The "circle" and "star" markers correspond to the extreme values of the prices, displayed on an individual basis. The Y axis represents the scale of prices observed between 2001 and 2008 and the X axis the different years. Each year is therefore represented by a "box and whisker plot". This diagram allows a comparison to be made between the position values (median, first and third quartiles) and the range of the prices between each year.
11. From the median price per sqm calculated on the total period under review.
12. The median price per sqm in the communes of the Pays du Mont-Blanc has increased by 11.3% per year. We have not taken into account the communes of Vallorcine, Domancy and Servoz where the number of transactions is lower than 7.
13. Publicity slogan used by a property developer in the 70s – 80s.
14. Up until 2008 the exchange systems between European money and Pound Sterling in particular favoured the English.
15. 7% by persons resident in Haute-Savoie, 48% by persons resident in another French department and 12% by persons resident abroad.
16. A dimension not studied within this framework whereas floor space, situation, standard of construction, services are also variables that explain the price; these do not form part of this study.

17. Reference to two of the meanings given to the word system: a more or less complex method (a complex system between buyers and sellers of different geographical origins) and at the same time a structured combination of exchanges (the exchanges are over-determined by the geographical origin: sales are between locals or as a priority to foreigners).
18. A sustainable hypothesis with regard to the proportion of owner sellers residing outside the communes in which the property is located.
19. From a price viewpoint this term should be considered under its primary meaning (separates/distinguishes).
20. Between 24 and 26% of the house buyers.
21. From 50% in 2007 to 43% in 2008.
22. "Pays du Mont-Blanc": in 2001 (24.5% of the buyers) and 2008 (35%).
23. 2001: 35 % ; 2008: 21 %.
24. Buckel & *alii*, 2008.
25. Houses purchased in Chamonix: the English constitute 50% of the buyers, followed by the Italians and the Swiss; apartments: 60% English, 19% Italians.
26. 15% of the buyers in 2001, they constitute 25% in 2008.
27. 30% of the buyers.
28. From 16 to 23%.
29. 30% at Chamonix for the period as a whole.
30. 10% in 2001 and 7% in 2008.
31. 32% of foreign buyers give their residence as Great Britain, followed by the Swiss at 20% of foreign buyers.
32. 73% of apartment buyers (53% of the sellers) and 81% of house buyers (72% of house sellers).
33. Note: very small proportion of foreigners in the exchanges: 0.9% of apartment sellers, 3.5% of apartment buyers; 1.8% of house sellers and 3.5% of house buyers.
34. 10/14; 12 communes out of 14 for apartments.
35. Impossible to evaluate without going deeper into the support provided to new owners.
36. See graph 3 and graph 4.
37. Constrained or not.
38. One of the principal restrictions of this study is not being able to work on a larger scale: what about transfers affecting communes that do not belong to the Pays du Mont-Blanc?
39. Number of inhabitants/ total transactions.
40. Logically the smallest communes (Servoz/ Demi Quartier/ Cordon/ Domancy) feed the local demand the least. But these are communes where the locals, even if less numerous, buy outside their commune of residence because the inhabitants of their imposing neighbours make up the competition (Megève/ Chamonix/ Sallanches/ Saint-Gervais-les-Bains). The communes directly affected by these transactions are Passy, Les Houches, Demi Quartier, Domancy, Servoz and Cordon; among the latter some perceive an additional and indirect pressure: Passy and Domancy, in particular, are the communes where the inhabitants of Les Houches carry out their property investment for Passy; then some of the inhabitants do the same thing in Domancy.
41. Few communes have delegated the management of land at the inter-communal level (in the case of urban communities) and the Grenelle 2 may eliminate this possibility (Le Monde, 8th and 11th of May, 2010).
42. Agree to be subjected to contingent events.
43. Even if the usage of the property acquired, like the proportion of rental housing, is not known, one may assess the ascendancy of foreign ownership and its probable corollary, that of secondary residences and empty beds. In the end this method of interpreting the relationship of areas with each other is to a certain extent very awkward; to criticise the foreigner through this bias raises the head of political incorrectness. This article is meant to be objective: one should be able at any given moment to quantify a phenomenon that takes on nauseating stresses elsewhere.

(politically). However two remarks: the first: the trend over time shows that nothing is fixed and the reconstitution of the areas through this bias is very fluid; secondly, it is to ask a question that fuels other thoughts: the purchase of land by foreigners in Africa or South America and closer to home (article in *Le Monde* on Belgium and foreigners).

44. See appendix: more than 50% of purchasers of building land for sale are domiciled in the inter-community.

45. Consistent implementation of the PLU, Scot, creation of community ZACs.....

46. Bye-law no. 2009-3352 dated 14 December, 2009; préfecture of Haute-Savoie.

ABSTRACTS

The aim of this contribution is to present a summary of the changes in property ownership that have occurred in a tourist area in the high mountains. Priority is given in the text to the analysis of data by taking advantage of a database recently made available on the knowledge market by the Notarial Office of France (Notariat de France). The geographer will find in it matters to reflect upon. First of all, a communal pattern that is to be explained by social qualitative variables (geographical origin of the individuals) emerges from the mapping of the total transactions. The socio-spatial fragmentation is the result of exchange systems for properties that reveal two competing residential processes. The article aims to demonstrate how a selective sorting process operates between communes, one group specialising in welcoming local populations, the other group rejecting the same populations at their outskirts. The analysis of property transactions on this scale indicates the obvious adjustment that exists between potential local demand and accessible supply. These are among the many aspects subject to the wisdom of politicians since they are preoccupied with the question of access of the local population to property (land and buildings) and the cohesion of their region.

Cette contribution entend présenter un état des lieux des mutations foncières dans un espace touristique de haute-montagne. La priorité est donnée à l'observation, le texte s'appuyant sur une base de données nouvellement mise sur le marché de la connaissance par le Notariat de France. Le géographe y trouve matière à réflexion. D'abord, la cartographie du montant des transactions débouche sur une typologie communale qu'il s'agit d'éclairer par des variables socio-qualitatives (origine géographique des individus). La fragmentation socio-spatiale est le résultat de systèmes d'échanges de bien-fonds qui révèlent deux processus résidentiels concurrents. L'article tend à montrer comment un tri sélectif s'opère entre communes, les unes se spécialisant dans l'accueil des populations locales, les autres rejetant à leur périphérie ces mêmes populations. L'observation, à cette échelle, des transactions immobilières, signale le décalage évident qui existe entre la demande locale potentielle et l'offre accessible. Ce sont autant d'éléments soumis à la sagacité des politiques dès lors qu'ils se préoccupent de la question de l'accès aux fonciers (terres et immeubles) des locaux et de la cohésion de leur territoire.

INDEX

Keywords: access of the local population to housing, accessible supply of property, exchange system, new residential areas, peri-tourist communes, property markets

Mots-clés: communes péri touristiques, l'accès au logement des locaux, marchés immobiliers, nouvelles résidentialités, offre immobilière accessible, système d'échange

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