Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

99-1 | 2011

Processus de migration dans les régions de montagne, et en particulier dans les Alpes

Between Longing and Flight – Migratory processes in mountain areas, particularly in the European Alps

Context of contributions to this issue and outlook

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/1336>

DOI: 10.4000/rga.1336

ISSN: 1760-7426

Translation(s):

Entre nostalgie et fuite – processus de migration dans les régions de montagne, et en particulier dans les Alpes - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/1338> [fr]

Publisher:

Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine, UGA Éditions/Université Grenoble Alpes

Electronic reference

Paul Messerli, Thomas Scheurer and Heinz Veit, "Between Longing and Flight – Migratory processes in mountain areas, particularly in the European Alps", *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [Online], 99-1 | 2011, Online since 28 April 2011, connection on 08 December 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/1336> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.1336>

This text was automatically generated on 8 December 2022.

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Between Longing and Flight – Migratory processes in mountain areas, particularly in the European Alps

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Translation from German, March 2011: Margret Powell-Joss, www.powelltrans.ch

- 1 Mountain areas, including the alpine region, have always seen a great deal of migration movements. Current migratory processes, however, are related to urban population's new lifestyles and housing needs, to the construction of second homes and to international tourism. They present new challenges to many alpine regions. On 20 November 2009 the Swiss Interacademic Commission for Alpine Studies (ICAS) invited experts to discuss issues of Migration in Mountain Areas, particularly in the alpine region. The contributions in this issue of the Journal of Alpine Research (RGA) originated with that conference, and are complemented by an article on The challenge of reconciling sustainable development objectives in the context of demographic change: Evaluating asset-based development in Appalachia (USA), by John Provo and Mel Jones (Virginia Tech and State University), which identifies parallels with the alpine region.

National states promote immigration

- 2 As historian Anne-Lise Head-König (Prof. em., University of Geneva) underscored, the alpine region has seen a multitude of migratory patterns since the Middle Ages.

Waldensian intra-alpine migrations apart, economic constraints tended to force emigration until after the middle of the 19th century, after which point in time emigration was frequently overlaid by immigration. As important a part as economic factors was played by political institutions, in particular pro-active regulation imposed by national states since the end of the 19th century.

Migratory motivations

- 3 Bernard Debarbieux (Prof., University of Geneva) noted that contrary movements (immigration/emigration, seasonal movements) overlap under current demographic developments in the alpine region, and cannot be accounted for in Schuler et. al.'s *Categorisation of Communities (Gemeindetypisierung, 2006)* for the Alps and the Jura range. This is largely associated with changes in residential behaviour (seasonal residences, multiple residences – simultaneously or in the course of a person's lifetime). A National Research Project (2009-2011) analysing migratory movements under the aspect of individual motivation and biography (phases of life) has found that a key mobility factor is the value associated with the Alps and the mountain environment. In this project statistical material from the past 25 years has been evaluated, while motivations have been explored in interviews.

Attractive scenery and residential mobility

- 4 Manfred Perlik (Dr., ETH Zürich) showed that people feel strongly attracted to taking up residence and to acquire residential homes in mountain areas with their enticing scenery. It is a phenomenon that U.S. studies have termed "amenity migration"; since the introduction of the free movement of people it has become quite common in the European Union. Motivations are worsening conditions in expanding agglomerations and new forms of mobility, both in terms of new socio-cultural patterns and of new transport axes and technological advances. Of particular significance is residential mobility across great distances, for which Perlik suggested three different categories: long-distance commuting, multi-local residence (with stationary workplace), and temporary urban flight to leisure destinations (with mobile workplaces). The alpine region with its attractive landscapes has been particularly affected by these new forms of migration. Hoping to attract new, affluent residents, transport links to urban centres, and to make better use of disused buildings and land, many cantons, towns and villages want to benefit from this new mobility. However, any strategies of the (peripheral) alpine regions that entail a specialisation in terms of exclusively residential functions may not assure a gain of new strengths and may jeopardise traditional ones such as tourism.

Loss of affordable housing

- 5 Mayor and hotel owner Christoph Bürgin used the example of Zermatt to illustrate the impact of temporary residents in second homes. (Note: there is no written paper) Demand for real estate puts great pressure on the local market with the consequence that the great scarcity of affordable housing in Zermatt drives staff of local catering

businesses into neighbouring villages, which are faced with considerable problems (infrastructure, schools, minimal tax revenue, etc.). A long-term resolution to these housing market issues in the interest of tourism is one of the crucial challenges that Zermatt and similar tourist destinations in the alpine region must resolve.

Sustainability certification to halt "alpine fallows"

- 6 Areas with strong influx such as Zermatt contrast with areas of sustained emigration whose future hangs in the balance (policy of regional subsidies versus "alpine fallows"). Dominik Siegrist (Prof., Institute of Technology, Rapperswil) presented the concept of "label regions" developed in the context of Swiss National Research Programme no. 48 (Landscapes and Habitats of the Alps, 2001-2007), which suggests a possible counter-strategy to the de-population of peripheral areas. It is based on a study of public transfer subsidies and regional structures of value creation in test areas. These regions are to be granted a special sustainability certification, which will not only qualify them for preferential treatment in terms of public transfer payments, but also and in particular to benefit from the growing market for sustainable products. Such regions and their protagonists will require business and management acumen and the ability to re-invent themselves.

Migratory movements between longing and flight – conclusions

- 7 The papers were selected with a view to contextualising current migratory processes in the alpine region and other mountain areas in terms of their histories, and to identify new social and spatial dimensions as well as research needs. Motivations, directions and spatial patterns of migratory movements today are clearly and demonstrably different from those that have been identified in the past and by statistical analyses.

The shortfalls of statistical analyses

- 8 No statistical analysis or interpretation of migration balances per surface area unit will allow us to make a statement on the causality of the numbers. Negative migration balances, for example, often result from a lack of immigration to a mountain area while emigration rates are perfectly average.

The stigma of emigration

- 9 Migratory movements in the alpine region – and in mountain areas in general – are a typical phenomenon related to the pronounced third dimension, i.e. great differences in elevation across a limited surface area. The seasonal migration of parts of the population with their herds of animals has been an intelligent response to the ecological differentiation of this habitat. Nonetheless, since the Middle Ages mountain areas have carried the stigma of emigration owing to their inability to provide adequate economic support. The centre-periphery dichotomy was exacerbated by industrialisation/modernisation and migratory patterns were long explained by pull-

push models that focus on the attractiveness of extra-alpine – and previously transoceanic – labour markets. From an economic viewpoint emigration was not always considered to be negative. Arguing that mobile labour should migrate where it would produce the greatest economic benefit, demands were made to level any barriers to mobility while the negative social impact of impoverished village communities was often overlooked. Although the rise of tourism in the 1960s created new perspectives and jobs, this only benefitted tourist centres and predominantly seasonal migrant labour. Hence, the issue of the brain drain from mountain areas returned to the agenda of mountain policy. However, as in the past, people emigrating for training purposes and to find better jobs often return later on, either to invest acquired wealth, or – as is the case today – to establish a business in the service industry.

New forms of migration shaped by urban populations

- 10 The vast majority of the population today lives in cities and agglomerations – between 60 and 70% in Switzerland and in the alpine region. The lifestyle and leisure activities of this population has a vastly greater impact on the future of mountain areas than the remaining 20-30% of residents in the alpine region. Individualistic lifestyles of an urban population, new mobile forms of labour, second homes in attractive tourist regions and the availability of housing in quiet areas, new transit axes providing greatly improved access – these conditions enable an increasing numbers of individuals to live a multi-local lifestyle with residences in urban and mountain locations. Meanwhile the phenomenon of amenity migration has been widely reported with quantitative studies for mountain areas in industrialised countries (North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand).

Outlook: does migration favour territorial integration?

- 11 Qualitatively-speaking, however, some opportunities for a better integration of central and peripheral areas can be made out. If this new form of migration from urban centres can lead to "multilocals" taking responsibility for both territories and their development, this will increase the significance of secondary development axes which already reach towards the Alps from large conurbations.

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