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Resource Is Not Yet Exhausted: Toward a Renewal of the Concept

Mari Oiry-Varacca and Emmanuelle Tricoire

Translation : Daniel Hoffman

EDITOR'S NOTE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Often evoked like an ultimate objective, yet never clearly defined, the notion of resource constitutes an operational lever more in the field of actors than in the field of critical thought. The term alone arouses strong expectations; its use verges on marketing, including in scholarly literature.

Figure 1. “Resource”: hope for a better life

The magnet was ordered by a local pizzeria on the occasion of the 2014 ForumAlpinum, which was titled “Resources.” It was given to us by the owners when they learned that we were participating in the Forum.

Photograph: Mari Oiry-Varacca.

If a concept constitutes a currency of thought, shared values making the exchange possible; it can undergo inflation, be restructured—criticized, examined, its interpretation contested—and it is used in fertile ways in the exchange of ideas. As far as we can see, the notion of resource, that “something which, developed, can yield economic prospects”¹, isn’t used as a concept—neither in regard to the Alpes, at the ForumAlpinum dedicated to this theme², nor elsewhere in current research.

This collection constitutes a plea to make “resource” an operational concept within a critical understanding of society. It is therefore an effort to approach the notion of resources with an aim and a theoretical bearing. First we will make a necessary detour to analyze ideas about the term resource and the way it is defined. The authors of the articles that follow, researchers at times in the service of actors, can’t always freely criticize the prerequisites for their work, once they are contributing to the actions of the actors—a position intrinsic to research—and find themselves within this tension between the field of social actors and that of theoretical reflection. Our position consists of criticizing, that is illuminating and questioning the scientific and ideological assumptions of the policies and projects implemented by social actors seeking to develop resources: individuals, associations, states, institutions, businesses, etc.

During the long history of the call to resources, the immediate goal of enrichment has gradually been joined with a corollary, seen as increasingly necessary: to avoid damaging the physical and social environment. The objective presiding over the creation of new resources has become more and more negotiated, as Claude Raffestin observed in the 1980s, indeed *anticipated prior to action*. Quality of life for everyone, no longer short-term profit for its own sake, has become the essential goal of action, clarified in recent work in environmental history (Mathis, 2015) and works on the relations between knowledge and democratic power (Pestre, 2014). Dominique Pestre

shows the current limits of democratic governance to measure and circumscribe the damage resulting from the use of “resources” with no constraints beyond the market: the state, constituting a fundamental actor, linked to industrial actors, conceals environmental damage behind an exponentially increasing number of regulations, forever behind by 30 to 40 years, generated by institutions, the creation of which defused challenges to industry. Finally, the manner in which a society envisions itself, how it understands the relationship between change and continuity—therefore a reflection on regimes of historicity, that is the way in which a society understands itself in a specific time, today—is fundamental, as François Hartog has shown (2003) through his reflections on the relationship of societies to time. At present, what are the effects of conceiving of a resource in terms of producing more in order to consume more? How can resources be conceived differently?

Before proceeding, it is essential to ask what it means to live well. It is a matter thus of elaborating an ecology of resources: how to move from more to better—that is, to live better without consuming more and more, but eventually less: “*less + better = much more*”. Given the vulnerability of the biophysical and social world, and in order to analyze this ecology of resources, we integrate a tool for descriptive, analytic and programmatic social sciences—where the goal is to describe the world as it is in order to be able to think about and elaborate that which it should be—*attentiveness*, a necessary detour and a suspension of action, an attention toward the vulnerability of the world, and to the structural effects of the way new resources are developed, which shouldn’t in any case be simply a matter of marketing, or once again appealing to a certain kind of consumption. Stimulating consumption isn’t the only way of developing resources: this is an advance which should be internalized and divulged most urgently.

Attentiveness is a term used in underwater diving which may eventually help us find clarity: there one encounters a particularly vulnerable and interdependent world, a laboratory for our world, in which the diver is liable to face immediate threats or to affect the world in which he or she traverses. Divers define attentiveness³ as an “indispensable ability to maintain control of one’s environment and guarantee the safety of the group” and, more broadly, the “ability of a system or a person to constantly sense the presence and location of objects, resources, and people in order to take into account the general context of use”—use of the world, one could say. What literally could be more applicable to the today’s world, in order to understand the idea of resources in this particular site, the Alps?⁴

This preface aims therefore to describe current thinking on resources and to show how the articles in this collection fit into this landscape, and then to make some suggestions for a stronger conceptualization of the notion of resource. Coming from the context of the Alps, and concerned with accelerated processes of globalization which have tended to make them more vulnerable by marginalizing them, we find that a reconceived notion of “resource” can help think about ways of living well, preferably better, and not more. How can the concept of “resource” lead us to think about what it means to “live well” in our globalized societies? These to us are the stakes—considerable—in a critique of the notion of resource. It is a matter of, as the quality of attentiveness invites us to do, and as we appeal to here in order to clarify our approach, considering properly the agency of the idea of a resource, that is to say, to be interested in the way actors construct them, what this says about their uses of the world, their values, their

representations of living well, and the way they occupy the world concretely and symbolically.

The construction of resources in mountains: state of the art

In the research presented here, the mobilization of the notion of “resource” accompanies the shift in the understanding of mountain territories as backward places, lacking resources, and distant from innovations that were occurring elsewhere, to an understanding of these territories as innovative places where actors ceaselessly seek to create new ways of valorizing the specificities of their regions, so as to allow themselves to live well, in singular ways.

Here we will not try to make an inventory of research on innovation in mountains (accomplished by Fourny, 2014 and Giraut, 2009⁵) but rather to analyze what research on resources in mountains says about mountains and what characterizes them in relation to other spaces, and to comprehend the status of resources in their investigations and to see what they tell us about the nature of resources. It involves identifying different approaches to resources in mountains, which don't always follow one another chronologically but rather can coexist.

From “backward” mountains to “innovative” mountains

Bernard Debarbieux and Gilles Rudaz took on the task of deconstructing the social, political, and scientific representations of mountains (2010), showing how the myth of mountains as spaces removed from progress and modernity, and determined by a hostile natural environment, was constructed beginning in the 18th century. The natural environment is no longer taken as the sole source of difficulties for mountain dwellers. Nonetheless, approaches adopting a rhetoric of disadvantage, and considering mountains as stagnant and inevitably needing resources from outside, continue today. Thus the spatialist, economist approach, based on development pole theory, relegates mountains to peripheries dependent on centers; their distance from urban poles, where innovation arises, thus diminishes the economic value of such spaces. The multi-border character of the Alps exacerbates this distance, turning it into a zone of outliers. An extension of this kind of approach can be found in studies maintaining that economic globalization has reinforced a global metropolitan archipelago (Veltz, 1996) functioning as a network increasingly disconnecting from backward regions. Other studies in territorial planning have noted that mountains depend on development models invented in metropolitan centers. They see the exploitation of “natural resources” especially available in mountains, such as snow or water, as a means for integrating mountains to the dominant economy, for example by constructing “integrated ski resorts” or hydroelectric dams. In a similar vein, “new economic geography” (Krugmann, 1991) explores ways to spread the benefits of development which is seen as inevitably driven from metropolitan spaces.

Recently, a more critical economic geography (Perlik, 2015⁶) has endeavored to show the effects of the dependence of mountains toward models and representations produced elsewhere (cultural dominance, growth in social inequality). Mountains,

having become providers of resources (water, scenery, real estate, leisure) for metropolitan centers, remain subordinate to these poles.

Figure 2. Mountain resource

Image from the homepage of the site venteprivée.com, selling stays in the mountains. Are the delocalized Alps denaturalized (mountains are no longer places, but just a raw material)? No site is recognizable; the stay is simply promoted as “the mountains”.

Other studies (Gloersen, 2013; Tappeiner, Borsdorf, Tasser, 2008), undertaken at the macro-regional level, have shown the economic heterogeneity of the Alpine massif in the new context of the innovation economy, and the exacerbation of disparities between dynamic urban centers and the periphery, particularly in terms of the distance to such centers. The article published here by Erik Gloersen, Clemens Mader and Engelbert Ruoss addressing the limits of European Union policies in the Alps—which the authors deem too uniform at the scale of the massif—suggests new models for managing alpine territories, adopting more subtle criteria so as to better take into account the diversity of these spaces. Mountains here are considered spaces with diverse characteristics; they are not solely determined by their relationship to metropolitan centers. Most importantly, mountains are also seen as potentially innovative spaces, where actors are likely to create resources, without this necessarily proceeding within a relationship of dependence toward urban centers.

This approach is consistent with a trend in research to speak in parallel about resources and innovation, where resources are considered an ingredient of innovation. Framed within a positive (even positivist) vision of mountains, this itself seems a space of innovation. The notion of resource is summoned then to show the ability of social actors, by themselves and for themselves, to invent resources (and not simply to develop “resources”, designated as such by others and benefitting populations external to mountains). This way of envisioning mountains and resources can take a number of different forms.

“Resources” are mobilized in a similar fashion in pragmatic approaches looking at conditions favoring innovation while aiming to support actors in mountains. These approaches, commonly encountered at the ForumAlpinum, fall within the perspective of “sustainable development”⁷, reflecting the possibility of joining economic development, environmental protection, and improved life conditions for mountain populations, in a context of global change also affecting mountains. Here we then see the terms “natural resource”, to be valued and protected, and “economic resource”, to

be created and renewed. The term “resource”, used alone, allows us to think about how one can mobilize or create resources without exhausting them, in ways that their use can be sustained over the long term. It serves also for contemplating the sustainable development of mountains at the international scale, these being considered resources for all humanity, and similarly the need to include mountain issues as part of the international political agenda (Messerli and Ives, 1997). Here, “resource” figures as a transitional tool helping us to think differently about mountain development as sustainable development.

An analysis of “resources” as products of actors organizing in relation to a territory has also been pursued, notably in the field of territorial economics. It concerns exploring how resources particular to a territory, bearing elements of the territory’s social and cultural uniqueness, can be identified and developed (e.g. Gumuchian and Pecqueur, 2007). These authors emphasize the importance of collective dynamics and proximity in the construction of territorial resources. The notion of resource here serves for thinking about new modes of development for marginalized regions. Rather than a model based on the development of generic resources, unconnected to the places where they are produced, and leading to the dependence of mountains on regions consuming these resources, a different model is posed based on the continuous invention of new resources, specific to a locale and promising a more endogenous and sustainable development.

Innovation in mountains has also been approached analytically in cultural and political geography. In these studies, not intended specifically as support for actors, resources have been conceptualized as cultural and political constructs.

In the line of the history of representations, geographers have endeavored to show just how inventive people in mountains have been in the art of transforming mountains into resources, constantly renewed. *Le glacier est allé chercher des pierres*⁸, an amusing short documentary (11’) by Anton Michi, Stéphanie Piffeteau, and Anaïs Valentini (2015) shows how one community first sought a way to make a glacier retreat, and then later to advance, illustrating how the resources people invent shift according to the epoch and changes in their needs, beliefs and environment. The resource is not so much the glacier but rather what is asked of it.

Figure 3. Resource as process

"Perhaps we prayed... a little too much... The glacier began to retreat"

Screen capture. <https://mediaserver.unige.ch/play/89890>.

In the same spirit, Sacareau (2011) analyzed how touristic products in mountains have changed according to the evolution of touristic practices and the gaze that actors bring to mountains. Following Raffestin (1986), she approaches touristic resources as constructs of actors who evolve with time. She invites us to consider the construction of mountain resources over the long term, in the context of systems of actors and as responses to social needs. Two earlier issues of the JAR | RGA (Giraut, 2014 <http://rga.revues.org/2340>; Oiry-Varacca, 2012 <http://rga.revues.org/1779>) share this perspective of cultural geography. The intention there was to draw attention to the motivations and cultural- and identity-effects of the invention of resources, and to the fact that projects led by actors in mountains may have economic objectives and/or aim to shape values or affirm belonging to a group, especially in contexts where the group has been marginalized. To invent new resources can mean to reconfigure and redraw the contours of a collectivity. The resource is located then in the group, in the act of reproducing it or in altering its boundaries. "Identities", understood as fluid, hybrid ensembles, evolving according to the contexts and the intentions of actors, are making resources. These two issues of the JAR also showed the frequently important role given by actors to tourism when inventing mountain resources, allowing the development of objects and practices offered as heritage, emblematic of cultural values and uniqueness. Tourism becomes an instrument of economic as well as identity strategies, aiming to replicate on the public stage that which binds members of the group. Two of the articles of the present collection come share this approach, bringing an anthropological gaze to alpine resources. The article by Valentina Porcellana, Giulia Fassio, Pier Paolo Viazzo et Roberta Clara Zanini explores the stakes in the transmission of material and immaterial heritage in two valleys of the western Italian Alps characterized by strong cultural patrimony (Vaudois in the first, Walser in the second) and by important social-economic change (challenges to agro-pastoralism in the first, and a transition from mining to tourism in the second). The authors show the key role played by local actors, extended families, and municipalities in the transmission of heritage, and how they construct resources from this heritage in order to sustain communities, yet at the same

leading them to evolve. The article of Karin Sbinden Gysin concerns a community of Tyrolean origin that had emigrated to Peru several generations ago. She shows how the alpine referent structures the life of the group and is used to create a feeling of belonging, and how, over time, this referent is redefined in a dynamic of hybridization and mobilized differently within strategies responding to new community needs (for example, for economic alternatives, through development of tourism projects highlighting the alpine roots, and for evolving forms of identity).

In political geography, studies on innovation in mountains have examined forms of collective action, the interplay of actors; and territorial organization and arrangements, particularly in marginalized spaces. They have also been interested in postmodern forms of territoriality (Antheaume and Giraut, 2005 ; Gerbaux and Giraut, 2000) at all levels: from the macro-regional level for the Alpine massif (Del Biaggio, 2013), to the local level of intercommunalities. Some studies, standing at the intersection of political science and environmental science, focus on resources. The article published here by Stéphane Nahrath and Christian Bréthaut is such an example, exploring the political and institutional conditions within which territorial resource systems can be managed in a sustainable way in touristic alpine spaces. Using the analytical framework of institutional resource regimes as a foundation, the authors examine the ways actors are linked at the Crans-Monata resort in Switzerland. They argue for the establishment of “geopolitical resource strategies” at the scale appropriate to the actors and territories concerned (in the case studied, at the intercommunal level), aiming to coordinate actors and the distinct resource regimes. What leads to a resource is an ensemble of interdependent factors (water, tourism) which become a resource only when actors come together. The article thus demonstrates the eminently political dimension of resources, in the sense that they are forever renegotiated.

Innovating in research on resources in mountains.

We would like to highlight guideposts that alpine research has set for thinking differently about the construction of resources, transcending disciplinary approaches.

First, alpine research recognizes the key role of territories and spaces—situated, distinguished, and appropriated in unique ways—in the invention of resources. Territory correspondingly is understood not as a medium or vessel for innovations but rather as a compelling and constitutive part of these. Researchers from now on will take into account the diversity of territories, and their increasing differentiation. They recognize the need to adjust the analytical prism in accord with the kind of space studied—more or less marginalized, or more or less innovative. They invite us to understand processes of marginalization as relational processes by which territorial specificity is constructed. They think about ways to communicate this diversity to actors, furnishing them with analytical tools likely to help them take it into account. In endeavoring to transcend the logic of center/periphery and to be attentive to the diversity of territories, they make it possible to move forward with a more nuanced understanding of actual local dynamics, and this proves useful to actors.

Alpine research furthermore is no longer satisfied with approaches that are purely economic or purely environmental, reducing the question of alpine resources correspondingly to problems of integration to the dominant economic system or to

protection of natural resources that are somehow imminent. Researchers strive for a more comprehensive perspective. They agree that resources are social constructions: there are no resources outside of the human, no resources in and of themselves; rather, resources are fashioned by the hand of actors, corresponding to their needs, intentions, and actions. The motors for action (and their effects), if of an economic order, are also of a cultural order, as cultural geography and anthropology show. Apprehending the construction of resources in mountains is equally enriched by studies underlining the fundamentally political nature of these processes—conveying a vision of collective life. They help identify the actors behind the invention of resources—who often are not those we would expect, or would no longer expect. Valentina Porcellana, Giulia Fassio, Pier Paolo Viazzo and Roberta Clara Zanini show the key role played by local actors in these processes where various authors have accorded primary roles to factors from outside the territories (for example, newly-arrived inhabitants bringing a new gaze to unforeseen resources, which that they help to reveal). Alpine research is focused more on the interplay of actors, conflict, and emerging forms of coordination, showing that the construction of resources is a negotiated process. Analysis is directed as well to the play of scale that underlies this interplay of actors: how do actors, in their practices, connect across different scales? At what levels to they seek to coordinate their actions? What scales make sense to them? The authors in this collection take up many of these questions: Karin Zbinden Gysin shows the circulation of the alpine referent in exchanges between descendants of Tyrolean immigrants in Peru, Tyrolean tourists who visit their community today, and Tyrolean NGOs active in Peru. Stéphane Nahrath and Christian Bréthaut look at intercommunality as a new level for governance in touristic areas. Erik Gløersen, Clemens Mader, and Engelbert Ruoss work on models that can help the European Union better incorporate the diversity of Alpine territories. Taking into account of the cultural and political motivations underlying the construction of mountain resources allows recentring analysis on the actors of these processes: their needs, their aspirations, their beliefs, and their relationships. It opens the way toward a critical concept of “resources” which emphasizes the human, the residents of mountains—those who have direct stakes in the construction of resources because their lives depend on it—and the crafters of this construction. And finally, it interrogates the role of the researcher vis-à-vis these actors.

Arguing for a critical conception of resources

A necessary reflection on the place of the researcher within society

How can scientific research support actors in their efforts to make the Alps territories where one lives well, according to shared, constructive values? This question constitutes one of the guiding threads of the ForumAlpinum. A variety of responses are possible: for some researchers, it is essential to take projects of actors as a starting point and to strive to make them better. Such is the point of view of Erik Gløersen, Clemens Mader and Engelbert Ruoss, who critique the models that the European Union relies on to formulate policies in Alpine territories, and propose alternative models for collecting and managing geographical data so as to better inform decisions taken by that institution.

Researchers can also work at a more fundamental level to make the notion of a resource an operational concept. In order for the social sciences to be useful to actors,

they should decipher the assumptions and ideologies underlying the discourses and actions of actors, and develop a critical view of the way “resources” are mobilized. This implies assuming a political posture, or at least an ethical engagement on the part of researchers—that they agree that the knowledge they produce is “situated” (Collignon, 2010 ; Hancock, 2007) and that they expressly state their position, as many American researchers have done while developing a critical analysis of capitalism and demanding a radical positioning to the left on the political scene (for example, Wallerstein, Calhoun, Collins, Mann, Derluigi, 2014 or Fraser, 2016). The issue is to be aware of the beliefs and ideologies that our research conveys and perpetuates, to make these explicit, to manage to maintain some critical distance regarding interpretive schemes of the world, such that social sciences contribute to building new paradigms.⁹

How does one avoid producing an ideological discourse in order to counter another ideological discourse on resources? Two suggestions for avoiding falling in this rut: first, to historicize the social and political discourses held about resources, so as to understand the historical context in which the notion of “resources” arises and is developed, under which relations of power and which eventualities; and second, to analyze the social effects of policies and projects aiming to construct resources, to show their impact, their limits, and at times impasses. Indeed, the manufacture of resources by actors takes paths marked by many constraints and above all by representations of which the actors themselves are not necessarily aware or knowledgeable. By shedding light on the blind spots in order to consider how the idea of resource is a relatively recent construction, and by making explicit the representations that underlie the notion of resource, and their effects on social reality, social science participates itself in the construction of resources. Concerning resources, we arrive at a decisive point, the question of the contribution of social sciences to society. But the detour that social science will propose is vast because researchers aren’t experts: they make explicit the questions to which actors respond, and they can reformulate these productively so as to provoke new responses and new operations. This detour, in itself, should be discussed beforehand, first among researchers themselves: “how will a different approach to the notion of resource lead society to create resources which will have a more beneficial effect for that society?” is a question that could be examined more often by both researchers and actors. In social and political discourse, everyone gives the term “resource”, like “innovation”, a positive connotation. Applying attentiveness as an necessary cautionary principal, entailing considering the effects of each new resource on the environment and the full ensemble of actors, it is important to study the effects of projects promoted under the banners of resources and innovation, to see which social processes they in fact engender. To observe that which makes a resource, who constructs the resource and for whom, allows deconstructing the power relations underlying such projects and thus showing the distance between discourses, declared objectives, ideals, and concrete actions. It concerns, so as to understand the deeper causes of these contradictions and impasses, deciphering the myths underlying projects and discourses on “resources”: to what hierarchy of values do they adhere? The suggestions that we will develop in the lines that follow aim to build a critical conception anchored in rigorous examination of social reality, articulating an analysis of the consequences of projects based on fieldwork, and an analysis of the collective beliefs which engender these effects by placing them in the historical context from which they arose.

Historicizing social and political discourses on resources

Historians (as well as philosophers and sociologists) have strived to contextualize the rise of the principles that guide our societies, showing that such grand paradigms are profoundly marked by the social context in which they emerge and respond to collective beliefs: they constitute the blind motors of society. Inspired by this approach, we can endeavor to retrace the context underlying the rise of discourses about “resources”.

Mobilizing the historicity of the idea of resources sheds light on the recent movement to develop resources: its acceleration and even brutalization historically, how it was advanced with colonization and slavery (Losurdo, 2014), which sped up globalization. Since the beginning, these processes have been accompanied by contestation, expressed by social actors (see the works of François Jarrige on progress and its contestation) and expressed still today regarding the liberal capitalist system—thus Immanuel Wallerstein *et al.* (2014) predict the end of liberal capitalism by way of the end of consumption.

It seems in fact that one only speaks of “resources”¹⁰ since the appearance of free-market capitalism. In order to increasingly and ceaselessly accumulate capital, the definition of capitalism given by Wallerstein *et al.* (2014), it is necessary to produce goods and sell them, and thus to endlessly create new resources and exploit them ever more, and to contemplate everything that exists as being potentially exploitable and commodified. This was made possible by a new gaze toward the world, linked to a new relation to time: at the turn of the 19th century, the belief in “progress”, the faith in the ability of humanity to develop new knowledge and technologies, induced the notion of a linear progression of humanity toward a necessarily better future (Jarrige, 2014). But although the ideas of progress and liberalism, which arose concomitantly, were presented as liberating ideologies for humanity, they appeared in a context of violent exploitation linked to slavery¹¹ and colonialism¹², and immediate pollution, all of which reflected from the start as a tension between the idealized vision and its actual expression, which went contrary to the former, leading to the question: “progress for whom?”—*cui prodest*. Beyond context, we have seen that the conception of the world underlying these grand paradigms (the world seen as an array of potential resources) assumes exploitation and relations of domination. This reverberates, it seems, with the current situation: are discourses regarding innovation and resources merely updated versions of this ideology of progress?

Figure 4. The world as a vast resource; people don't exist

The map is recent, and the concept recurs frequently.

Source: tsimokagasikara.wordpress.com¹³

After the second world war, the ideology of progress was embodied by the new discourses about “development”. Gilbert Rist (1994) has shown that development became the watchword underpinning policies that nonetheless did not have the anticipated effects: the social was sacrificed to the economic, and inequality grew because what was in fact applied, in the name of development, were the principals of economic liberalism. Economic growth remained the governing term. Such development became part of collective faith, much in the way of belief in paradise after death in other societies, we might add, in the sense that it remains an unattained ideal, yet continues to permeate social and political discourses as well as the ensemble of social structures, without being contested. Serge Latouche (2009) considers that all the “phrasal developments”, such as “sustainable” development, can be considered in the same way: the environment is, in fact, sacrificed to economic growth. As such, the mobilization of the term “natural resource” in parallel with the rise of the notion of “sustainable development” in the social and political field (which implies that resources are not unlimited, and that we can’t exploit them indefinitely) doesn’t fundamentally question the great functioning principals upon which our society rests. The fact that “resource” now is most often reduced to an “economic resource” shows that its use by actors responds to needs that are understood in the context of systems which continue to make the idea of indefinite progress of society, of the production and consumption of material goods, of profitability, of money, governing values.

To be able to adopt a critical approach toward this consideration of economic value alone, and to examine alternative but minority ways of constructing resources, promoting other values, it seems essential to us to think of resources differently, in a

less fragmentary way, as that which gives meaning to a social group, that which makes sense to it, that which drives it, that which it holds high in its scale of values, that it will mobilize, develop, to make the group hold together such that it lives well, which isn't necessarily something to be commercialized but can also be the creation of social bonds, without necessarily entailing commercializing anything (why does your adolescent want an iPhone?). In mobilizing attentiveness, to bring attention to the effects of an initiative in domains other than economics—social, cultural—in a world where interdependence is experienced more and more, seems essential, and economic effects can become one objective among others, bearers of “living well”¹⁴.

Deconstructing the power relations underlying the construction of resources

What are the social consequences of projects established by actors aiming to construct resources? A number of authors, such as Stéphane Nahrath and Christian Bréthaut, analyze conflicts between actors, and the efforts by actors to coordinate their actions. We could add here a critical discourse on the power relations that overlay this interplay of actors. Indeed, to ask, in following with the notion of attentiveness, “for whom and by whom is there a resource?” implies deconstructing, even denouncing, the relations of power that underlie processes of inventing resources. Innovation means the deep transformation of society. But doesn't it concern certain social groups more than others? Doesn't it preclude some groups and some territories? It is a matter of interrogating the hidden aspects of all innovation and questioning the spread of innovations. Have innovations been appropriated by concerned populations and adapted to their needs, to their values?¹⁵

How can these relations of domination be analyzed? First, it seems necessary to understand the normative and ideological systems in which projects aiming to construct resources are inscribed, and to study how these systems are productive of such relations of power. It is equally important to identify the system of domination in which a given mountain territory is a “margin”, and what social and political processes make it considered as such at a given moment. We only touch on this proposition, developed in part above. The critical literature on the dominant liberal, capitalistic economic system (Wallerstein *et al.*, 2014), and so-called development policies, which some authors see as a corollaries (Rist, 1994; Latouche, 2009), is applicable here. It shows that this system—because it is based on ever-growing production of material goods, controlled by a minority of persons; on the concentration by these of riches arising from this production; and on the exploitation by this minority (also ever-growing) of other people in order to produce these goods—can only generate and inevitably increase social and territorial inequalities, and can only be based on relations of domination.

Can we not consider that in mountains, the construction of resources in such a context aims to, or ends up, bringing elements into the system of free-market exchange, thus monetizing them? Elements that earlier didn't form part of this system, but existed as invisible practices, services rendered implicitly (such as education in the home or environmental services realized by rural dwellers), which turned into resources has the effect of controlling, standardizing these things, the people who effect them, and the territories in which they live? Does employing the rhetoric of innovation and resources

(where only backwardness use to be seen) risk allowing marginalized places be seen as able to get by on their own, justifying an absence of public policies on their behalf? Are such discourses valorizing the capacity and agency of mountain dwellers, in one sense, merely comforting discourses regarding persons and territories that remain marginalized?

To mobilize “resource” within a critical reflection is to decipher the uses that actors make of it, and the ideologies overlying these. It is also to analyze new uses of the term, by actors who intend specifically to resist and contest the dominant models, and to invent alternatives to these in marginalized places. We must then apply the same critical analysis to their projects: What values do they promote? On what assumptions are they based? Do they succeed in creating diverse ways of living well? How do they deal with the dominant norms and values, with a system from which they can’t remove themselves entirely? Are they truly in the vanguard in entertaining new kinds of livelihoods? Will they lead people away from dependence or, again merely serve as stopgaps for territories kept in the margins? We must equally question the social relations that underlie the invention of alternatives: to work collectively otherwise can disrupt the order of things as well as reproduce and reinforce relations of power, or create new hierarchies. It concerns interrogating, in their full complexity, the relations of domination that pervade marginalized places and processes of resource construction.

Toward this end, various theoretical tools can be drawn upon. First, we can rely on the work of Raffestin (1980), who suggests viewing a resource as that which crystalizes the oppositions between actors and that which becomes an object of negotiation between them, this being marked by power plays. The analysis can then look at existent or nonexistent synergies between actors, the manner in which they participate in negotiations and decision, the level at which negotiations take place and decisions are made, but also at missing actors, in order to question the social diversity of processes generating resources. We can go as far as to consider that this diversity constitutes in itself a resource. Second, it concerns taking the point of view of actors excluded from these processes, as advocated in postcolonial studies and more precisely in the field of subaltern studies, after Spivak (1988). Little used in Alpine studies, it allows seeing these processes through their underside, their failures. To adopt the perspective of the excluded also permits questioning the system producing this exclusion and that which drives it. These fields of study similarly allow interrogating the role of elites in movements challenging dominant models, and in the creation of alternatives to these (Gayatri Spivak recalls that the “subaltern” form a category which isn’t uniform but is permeated by processes of domination). Third, one can bring to bear authors who help understand how the excluded deal with systems of domination, within a context of complex relations. Processes of resource construction in mountains can be understood as spaces of knowledge/power, political arenas in the sense that actors under circumstances of domination establish strategies and tactics aiming to negotiate their legitimacy, their place in society (De Certeau, 1980). They find their way around norms, and stitch together disparate knowledge,¹⁶ drawing from that which is imposed on them and that which they have, so as to negotiate a degree of power and better circumvent the constraints set up by dominant actors.

The construction of resources by ordinary actors in ordinary spaces

It is then important to ask how resources are made and to question the social practices, the actions undertaken by individuals and social groups to cope with dominant models and come up with alternatives. How can the alternatives devised by actors in mountains be analyzed through the prism of relations of domination, while not limiting the reflection to this alone?

This concerns, first, studying cases in their singularity, to move beyond the prism of center/periphery through which mountains are too often understood. That approach tends to reify the margins, to give the impression that the situation of mountains is fixed and endured by their inhabitants. It traps mountains into a single economist and spatialist way of thinking, which doesn't allow for the diversity, creativity and complexity of mountain territories, which are also sites of political militancy, the building of social bonds, and artistic invention. It is limited to categories and dualistic hierarchies which don't open the way to policies inspired by these experiences and experimentations.

How can this interpretive prism be changed? It is necessary to understand the relations between spaces differently, to consider that actors in mountains invent resources in relation to other actors and territories, in mountains or elsewhere. One can also ask, in what kinds of spaces does innovation occur? Authors who are interested in social innovation in cities (such as Sampieri) show that it occurs in interstitial spaces found both in the heart of the city and in its periphery, in spaces that are scattered but often networked through actors. What matters isn't so much the physical distance from a center than the possibility in these spaces of establishing a symbolic distance, to envision urban belonging differently. These reflections seek to change the way space is thought, to consider it as discontinuous and reticular.

Could mountain territories be considered "ordinary" spaces in the sense that Jennifer Robinson (2006) gives the term, that is, not as banal spaces in which nothing innovative occurs but on the contrary as spaces with particular trajectories, in which experimentation is likely to have influence beyond mountains? "Ordinary" means many singularities, and allows social science to contemplate specificity. This implies decolonizing the production of knowledge about mountains by no longer understanding them in function of differences with urban centers, their dependence on the latter, or their supposed relative backwardness. Because, in so doing, research gives credence to hierarchies produced in the social and political sphere and to the economic logics underlying them, and risks exacerbating the marginalization of mountains and above all essentializing it, deeming it inherent to mountains and no longer linked to a certain perspective, a particular scale. Mountains can be thought of as "ordinary" spaces in the sense that their territories have their own specificity, their actors experiment in their own ways, adapted to particular contexts, and are therefore not replicable, that is not able to serve as "models" elsewhere. What is important isn't to see if, quantitatively, these experimentations spread to the rest of society, but to note that which they bring qualitatively, in terms of their potential to change the established social and spatial order, to invent distinct ways of living which can have a greater reach and inspire actors beyond the mountains.

To understand mountains as "ordinary" spaces requires promoting a decentralized production of knowledge regarding mountains, developing a greater sensibility to the

diversity of these territories and the links they maintain between each other as well as with non-mountain territories, and taking as a point of departure experimentations carried out at the local level by ordinary actors from these territories. It concerns then taking interest as much in small private and collective initiatives as much in public policies, and recognizing the agency and creativity of actors operating in mountains—their ability to become engaged and to counter, or constrain, processes of marginalization when the need arises¹⁷. Following subaltern studies, we should turn toward *ordinary actors*, focusing on that which they invent, and not on their confrontation with processes of marginalization. We can find inspiration in the work of anthropologists who, like Michel Agier (1999), concentrate on the abilities of inhabitants of “undetermined” urban spaces to invent other experiences of urban identity. Historians currently explore the blind spots of history, written previously by the “victors” (of slavery, colonization, wars—therefore of violence—against women and other victims, in short the invisible people of invisible acts), still at play. It concerns therefore exploring the history of victims without reducing them to their ultimate, or rather, present quality, (thus without a teleological vision). We know better today that the colonies—Algeria, for example—territories appropriated according to an unvarying map, were in constant war with the metropole. The victims were resisters with full agency. When armed struggle wasn’t possible, they found other means than weapons. Women slaves in the Antilles, for example, were able to resist by assassinating their owners, without being detected, by mixing ground glass into their meals: how can these invisible acts carried out by the most vulnerable be traced? What would all the efforts of Fatima (in the film *Fatima*, by Philippe Faucon, 2015) for her daughter’s studies—in work, time, attention, social risk— have been worth, if she had failed her final exams? Without the final success, the value of the effort mobilized by the mother would still have been significant. To approach that which is unsuspected could be a critical way for reconstructing that which constitutes a resource, and even for planning action. Current advances in “Atlantic” history allows us to project a new and decisive gaze, both on the conditions of the slave trade and the resistance that it encountered (singing, refusing to eat: means of resistance, before being enslaved, the means that thus made America), in addition to its effects (Rediker, 2013—who begins his work with the escape attempt of a woman). It therefore also concerns reconstructing the harmful and prolonged effects of this trade—throughout the history of the United States, until today, to the time of Black Lives Matter—and interrogating a system of creating resources that inaugurated the current economic system.

It is urgent to think about resources with sensitivity, from the point of view of those who contest the dominant models for producing resources, by showing all the difficulties faced by these resisters, and the stakes, at times dramatic. They confront, in fact, the construction of resources which are more and more immaterial, in the form of data about individuals, for example—accumulated by data brokers, those present and future industrialists who now number over 4000, and who earn more than 150 billion dollars per year (Harcourt, 2015). Ordinary actors also face the commodification of resources that previously weren’t monetized. The work on care by Nancy Fraser (2016) shows that certain resources dedicated to social reproduction and the maintenance of society (education, treatment of illnesses, etc.) were not monetized by the free-market capitalism system when it arose in the nineteenth century. Care, in part the responsibility of the community in some nations, today is newly privatized. The mobilization of this resource, notably by women, is evocative of the invisibility of

certain resources, accentuated by the unitary logic of the market and the disruptions that the commodification of resources (giving them market value, thus monetizing them) can cause: migrants leave their families in order to bring this care to a Western family, so that women there can themselves work. But what happens within the societies from which mothers leave their families to provide care to others? What happened to the families of wet-nurses who came to the large cities to practice breast-feeding for hire in the nineteenth century? Looking back, with attentiveness, by historians has allowed discerning repercussions even for descendants (Romanet, 2014). It is a matter of focusing on the strategies elaborated by ordinary actors to adapt to processes of resource production in the context of the market.

From the methodological point of view, micro-history gives us important clues for thinking about resource construction by shadow actors and poorly-known forms of action: using atypical sources, giving consideration to sources which initially seemed insignificant, multiplying the scales of approach, so as to grant actors a full realm of possibilities, spending time oneself in the field, in short, considering that history, like all social phenomena, like all research, isn't a result but a relationship and a process, always ongoing. Finally, we can be inspired by anthropological data-collection methods (long-term field work, participant observation, both formal and informal interviews...), and practice collaborative research. Workshops in popular planning in cities; citizens or residents' councils; and popular universities all constitute tested ways for researchers to work with, and not above, ordinary actors, and in this way to consider their words, and bring together their know-how with university knowledge. New paths can be pursued to better return the results of research to ordinary actors in mountains (for example, to work with artists, or film and sound documentarians), so they can benefit and can apply research results to their projects; such face-to-face experiences can, in turn, provoke researchers to change their perspectives.

To analyze the experimentations carried out in mountains by ordinary actors means to turn ones attention more to new modes of collective organization, which allows them to make the collectivity a resource in itself. The authors cited earlier who work on innovation from the bottom up in urban settings (Agier, 1999; Sampieri, 2015; Robinson, 2006) suggest starting from the local, the level which makes sense to ordinary actors, and the level at which they act, because it is the fundamental level of social bonds and reconstituted trust. They invite us to study at the same time the efforts of actors to anchor their projects locally, to make them serve mountain societies and territories, and their efforts to connect with networks which spread at multiple levels, from the local to the international. This involves, following Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Manuel Castells (1996), considering the dynamics of transnationalization¹⁸ as a new lever of action for social movements: ordinary actors circulate and divulge their experiences at the local level through the networks in which they are inserted. M. Agier shows in this way that the actors of "undetermined" spaces within the cities he studies resist processes of exclusion and invent new ways of living in the city through interaction and exchange with other actors—in other neighborhoods, in rural areas, or even abroad. Social relationships at a distance come in support of reconstructing social relations in the vicinity; shared values can lead to innovative and concrete forms of engagement and political action. To capture these innovations thus demands multiplying the levels of analysis and varying the points of view.

Analyzing how ordinary actors in mountain territories construct resources and their capacity for innovation implies, finally, understanding these experimentations while

comparing them ceaselessly with others carried out elsewhere, in other contexts (urban, arid lands, etc.), focusing on the innovative character of the experiences studied. From this perspective, engaging reflections drawn from other contexts—as we have done above in relying on authors who work on cities—seems to us particularly inspiring. In our opinion, it is through the play of difference that we can reach a complex understanding of that which characterizes each local or regional context, and that which may specifically characterize the construction of resources in the Alps.

Here thus are some lines of reflection that aim, beyond specific local or regional contexts, beyond the context of mountains and the Alps, to show the extent of possibilities of a still unexploited concept, which can engage new ways of thinking about what it may mean to live well in the Alps and beyond.

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NOTES

1. Luc Boltanski, *Hors Champs*, september 22nd, 2014, Laure Adler, France Culture. (Our transcription). <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/hors-champs/luc-boltanski>. Visited 2016-12-06.
2. ISCAR (International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps) called upon us to organize an issue with contributions drawn from the 2014 ForumAlpinum. This transnational organ holds an international conference every two years. In September 2014, the chosen theme was "Alpine resources: uses, valorization and governance, from the local to the macro-regional". It was held in Darfo Boario Terme, in the Camonica Valley (Brescia), near Milan. ISCAE was founded by the scientific academies of Switzerland, Austria, Bavaria, and Slovenia, and by research entities in France (*Irstea, Université Grenoble Alpes*) and Italy (*Consiglio dei Ministri*), in order to promote scientific cooperation as envisioned in the Alpine Convention. It is one of those invaluable entities whose actions support international and interdisciplinary research. The presidency rests with one of the member states, lasting two years, and was then held by Italy.
3. French site of GUE, Global Underwater explorers. Attention is used in diving DIR (Do It Right). Visited 2016-12-06.
4. *Aufmerksamkeit* is used by Husserl and taken up again in a philosophy of attention, for example, see <http://popups.ulg.ac.be/1782-2041/index.php?id=472>, Thiemo Breyer, "Attentivité et responsivité", *Bulletin d'analyse phénoménologique*, volume 6 (2010). Visited 2016-12-06.
5. <http://rga.revues.org/783>. Visited 2016-12-06.
6. <http://rga.revues.org/3130>. Visited 2016-12-06.
7. In the same way that "sustainable development" is the great utopia of the 2000s, or governance coming soon after, the idea of "resource" is an active utopia. These utopias form the horizons by which we can understand a number of issues. The aim isn't to make them less

relevant but rather to situate them and to capture that which they produce as a coherent constellation

8. <https://mediaserver.unige.ch/play/89890>. Visited 2016-12-06.

9. Such circumspection is all the more needed as “innovation” has become a guideword for those funding research. It is precisely because “innovation” and “resource” serve to attract research funding that their social and political uses should be objects of critical study.

10. In the sense defined by Boltanski, at the beginning of this article.

11. In his *Contre-histoire du libéralisme*, Domenico Losurdo (2014) shows that in the United States the rise of liberalism was closely linked to the history of slavery, with the emergence of landed property being sustained by the exploitation of slaves, to the benefit of white colonists.

12. One of the justifications for colonization was to find new resources to exploit in order to feed an economic system based on the ever-increasing production and consumption of goods. This is reflected in colonial maps which show the “resources” of each region, indicated by symbols (a monument, a plant, a mineral...), representing so many things to be exploited by, and for, the metropole. The current use of “resources” presupposes and conveys a similar worldview (still)—the colonial and capitalist transposition of the biblical vision of the earth as a resource, over which humankind it to establish dominion.

13. <https://tsimokagasikara.wordpress.com/2015/03/07/afrique-madagascar-se-hisser-au-premier-rang-la-nation/>. Visited 2016-12-06. Original source : *Alternatives Économiques*.

14. We consider that one of the contributions of the social sciences it to show that the objective of living well is not an increased median income but a *growing refinement of shared humanity*: all that contributes—community social structures (providing insurance and security), means of social insertion (through voluntary work and training as much as employment) or practices of healing (from the surgical to the psychic)—to broaden and strengthen humanity, formed of bonds, supported through the gesture of bringing each individual into this group, which is open by definition. In this conception, borders are not walls but rather a type of filter for crossing.

15. These questions are consistent with those posed by Olivier De Sardan (1995) concerning “development”, which he defines as an ensemble of social processes brought about by voluntarist operations to transform a social milieu, undertaken by way of outside institutions or actors seeking to mobilize that milieu, relying on an attempt to transplant resources, techniques and/or knowledge. How does this insertion operate? How do affected populations engage with innovation, reinterpreting it? These interrogations make full sense in a context of development models circulating at the global level: how do mountain dwellers reappropriate, in a given time and space, that which is theirs?

16. We don’t use the terms “hybrid” or *métissé* (crossed), because these imply that there exists clearly identified, distinct knowledge. In speaking of decompartmentalization or connections, following Jen-Loup Amselle (2000), we endeavor to move beyond dualistic systems of thought which get in the way of understanding systems of domination in their full complexity.

17. The perspective that we develop here is complementary to that adopted in the JAR issue organized by Manfred Perlik (2015, <http://rga.revues.org/3130>). We propose considering mountains in their diversity, without focusing only on spaces emblematic of a dependency in relation to lowlands and metropolitan centers (as periurban spaces can be), but considering equally interstitial spaces where actors invent new resources. It likewise is a matter of adopting a critical posture regarding neoliberal models that relegate mountains to mere providers of resources for lowlands, and taking an interest in mountain actors (collective as well as individual; institutional, as well as private and communal) who intervene at the local level and invent, often in interstitial spaces and in irreproducible ways (Sampieri, 2015), alternatives to these models.

18. The term “transnationalization” is used in the sense gained in the 1990s from migration studies, and then in the study of globalization. It permits encompassing distinct social phenomena, which come together to nourish a single relational and dynamic process unfolding

at a supranational level and are not incompatible with actions anchoring territories: the displacements of people, at various scales of time and space; the links formed by individuals across borders in the form of networks; the circulation of information, immaterial elements such as referents of identity, and models of development; and the actions of individuals who “connect” over this information and through transnational networks.

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