

Processes of re-settlement in mountain areas

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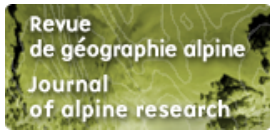
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Nouveaux habitants. Dynamiques de repeuplement en zone de montagne

Federica Corrado

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Federica Corrado

Processes of re-settlement in mountain areas

- 1 This issue of *The Journal of Alpine Research* is dedicated to the theme of re-settlement in mountainous areas in terms of territory and the construction of new forms of territoriality. After a number of years, *The Journal of Alpine Research* has returned to the issue of migration to the mountains, with particular emphasis on the alpine context. It looks at the territorial effects that this migration fosters, not only in terms of changes in demographic trends and the reversal of established tendencies, but also and especially in qualitative terms: the motivations, needs, problems and opportunities that accompany this phase of return to the mountains, along with the social and cultural changes that are triggered by the settlement of a new population.
- 2 From the studies on amenity migrations (Moss & Glorioso (eds) 2014; Gosnell & Abrams, 2009) and the research always singular conducted on the rebirth of the Alps (Bender & Kanitscheider, 2012; Cognard, 2006; Corrado et al., 2014; Fourny, 1994; Messerli et al., 2011; Steinicke et al., 2010), it is clear that there exists a global phenomenon of movement towards the mountains that cannot be reduced to a simple process of counter-urbanization. In fact, it is in many cases a real process of return, in relation to which new and different images of the mountains, of the Alps in particular, are taking shape, along with new ways of living and of using the land, new requirements, visions and lifestyles (from those of amenity migrants to those of innovators and those who migrate out of necessity), alternative and renewed economic forms, and reconstituted alpine communities. Therefore, it is a process that goes to the heart of the development of mountain areas since it generates new economic pathways linked to economies that are not only productive but also residential (Martin et al., 2012; Segessemann & Crevoisier, 2013; Perlik, 2011) and requires a rethinking of social and cultural policy and services on the part of local and national institutions.
- 3 This issue focuses on a qualitative approach to the analysis of this phenomenon, with the aim of indicating the state of the art, as far as possible, in research targeted on identifying the territorial processes through which the migratory phenomenon, combined with the local area, gives birth to a new phase of life in the mountains. The decision to adopt this approach to the subject necessarily requires a multidisciplinary approach which, using methods and techniques from different disciplines, allows us to get inside the territorial dynamics, bringing added value in terms of sociological, anthropological and, of course, geographical knowledge.
- 4 Certainly, the complexity of the mountain context is the first element that emerges from the articles and that precludes a unique reading of the migratory phenomenon either in the European or the alpine context. The diversity of the territories, in terms of physical morphology results in different levels of desertification, population density and proximity to service centres, as well as variations in speed of the economies that characterize mountain areas. In this complex situation, the migration phenomenon produces different impacts on the territories by determining highly diversified reception, integration and inclusion processes in the mountains of Europe and especially in the Alps. This complexity can also be seen through the many types of new inhabitants, the protagonists of the process, and even more in the motivations and pull factors that affect the possibilities for implementing an effective process of return to the Alps and other mountain regions. As Amrein discusses in his article, the 'neo-Valaisans' are not localized in the marginal and depopulated areas, but the path of re-settlement has followed a route laid out by public policy incentives. In contrast, the Italian situation, discussed in the Viazzo and Zanini article, emphasizes the prominence of marginal areas in this phenomenon of repopulation. And this also happens in the Pyrenees. Basically, the heterogeneity of those involved in the migration process (working-age adults with or without a family, pensioners, non-EU immigrants, young creatives, etc.) intersects a variety of situations that find themselves repeated in some way throughout the European mountain setting, thus generating de facto real typologies of new inhabitants and regions of resettlement.

5 Thus, it is not only the urban areas of a certain grade, capable of offering services to the community, that become the object of migration, but also those areas that have been traditionally marginal. And it is precisely in the alpine context that these migration processes involve also very different territorial parts:

- consolidated urban-mountain areas, easily accessible, capable of providing the necessary services to the community and of offering an urban lifestyle, although localized in environmental contexts of value;
- centres in the valley/lower valley regions that continue to act as catalysts, either for those who decide to leave the urban areas in favour of more rural but well-served contexts (peri-urban alpine), or for those who decide, even in the face of the recent migratory movement, to leave the high valleys for lifestyles that are more responsive to family needs;
- intermediate areas that are essentially localized in the middle valley, which, on the one hand, have some strengths that are interesting for the settlement process, from easy accessibility to nearby centres to the proximity of regions of environmental value (protected areas, for example), they have, on the other hand remained at the margins of the development of the valleys because they occupy an intermediate physical location that is not on the circuit of the touristic upper valleys nor that of the industrial development of the low valleys. Such small urban centres could today, however, play an interesting connecting role and offer a sustainable residential alternative;
- weak areas in the middle and upper valley, with low levels of accessibility and high levels of marginality, characterized by very poor economic and social vitality but retaining an environmental and cultural heritage of great value, which is a latent resource, potentially to be exploited.

6 With reference to this territorial framework, what emerges from this collection of studies is the conceptual transition that holds together at a general level the reading of this phenomenon. This conceptual transition makes reference to the definition of an intentional mountain/alpine lifestyle built on choice rather than derived, and on the re-definition of forms of territoriality that are determined through a re-mixing and a re-reading of local resources and how to use them in response to the challenges imposed by the global economic crisis. In this sense, there is a need to analyse the phenomenon by introducing the concept of cultural hybridization which binds together the issue of social integration, constructed identity, and the insider/outsider relationship. It is in fact at the centre of the relationship between old and new residents and between them and territorial capital, which, through a process of re-invention, contributes to the reproduction of culture and local identity, produces the territory and promotes the process of territorialization (Raffestin, 1981; Turco, 2010). The new inhabitants enter into a process of construction of territorial identity: "...the confrontation/clash between traditional and innovative contributions is continuously subjected to a relentless work of negotiation between social actors (...) To become a shared identity, they need renewed consent, explicit or implied, ever new forms of the sense of belonging, to ward off and combat the fear of new advances..."(Salsa, 2009, p. 125). However, the path of confrontation with the 'other' is not always easy, and for this reason appropriate policies are necessary at the institutional level that put in place structures for the interaction between old and new inhabitants: knowledge of local history and language, sharing problems, and opportunities for leisure activities

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Droits d’auteur

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