



## Visiting/living (in) the Alps: towards a tourist-residential convergence?

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# DI CHI SONO LE ALPI?

Appartenenze politiche, economiche e culturali nel mondo alpino contemporaneo

# WHOSE ALPS ARE THESE?

Governance, ownerships and belongings in contemporary Alpine regions

a cura di/edited by

Mauro Varotto, Benedetta Castiglioni



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## **Visiting/living (in) the Alps: towards a tourist-residential convergence?<sup>1</sup>**

Philippe Bourdeau<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

*Visitare/vivere le Alpi: verso una convergenza turisti-residenti?* – L'atto del visitare – un'azione che definisce la pratica turistica – implica un particolare senso della cultura, specifiche pratiche sociali e politiche di pianificazione territoriale, a lungo definite in opposizione al vivere nelle Alpi. Questa netta distinzione è divenuta sempre meno rilevante in ragione della crescente ibridazione tra territori ricreativi e funzioni residenziali in aree turistiche. Questo contributo prende in considerazione la convergenza turisti-residenti utilizzando quale indicatore le amenity migrations, proponendo esempi del suo manifestarsi nelle Alpi francesi, e sottolineando le contraddizioni e la posta in gioco in termini di sostenibilità di questo sovrapporsi del vivere/visitare nelle regioni montane.

<sup>1</sup> A first version of this text was published in Moss L.A.G., Glorioso R.S. and Krause A., *Understanding and managing Amenity-led migration in Mountain Regions. Proceedings of the Mountain culture at the Banff Centre Conference, May 15-18, 2008*. Many thanks to Laurence Moss who introduced me to the “world” of amenity migration.

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## 1. Introduction

Amenity migration bestows new functions and identities on traditional tourist destinations. It also mobilizes tourist references and attributes – architecture, scenery, heritage, leisure, sociability etc. in the production of new residential premises in areas having no pronounced tourist tradition. This double process of tourist-residential convergence is much more than a simple indicator of the reconversion of tourist, industrial or agricultural areas. It is in fact sharing in the in-depth re-composition of the “world arrangement” established in the twentieth century between the spaces, times and practices of the “Here” (town, everyday, work) and the “Elsewhere” (nature, out-of-the-everyday, leisure). This mutation is characteristic of territorial post-modernity, which produces multiple betweenness and dissolves boundaries by establishing continuities and hybridizations where spatial, temporal, cultural and functional divides and fragmentation has previously prevailed: town-nature, near-far, inside-outside, natural-artificial, tourist-non tourist, work-leisure, everyday-holiday, and the like.

In this framework the proposed approach replaces the topic of amenity migration in an observation of the change in the relationship between town and mountain in the context of French Alps. It rests on a cultural geography approach which shows that fitting the image of holiday into the everyday world finds its expression in a paradox: while becoming central to lifestyles, territory and economy, recreational practices (leisure, tourism, sport) seem to dissolve and to increasingly fade as autonomous objects and operators. This phenomenon, in which a growing hybridization between residential, economic and recreational functions plays a key role, is analysed here with the help of a reading of “after-tourism”, of which amenity migration is a particularly useful indicator.

## 2. “Here-Elsewhere”: from Dialectic to Betweenness

The hypothesis which states that tourist practices gain their substance from the temporary break with everyday space, time and activity (Rauch, 1996) is widely accepted. This “here-elsewhere” dialectic functions as a construction of meaning on the part of city dwellers to compensate for the dissatisfactions and frustrations associated with daily routine in an urban environment: occupational alienation, economic difficulties, social control, traffic hold-ups, town planning failures, pollution, noise, insecurity, reduced time, compartmentalization of social relationships, etc.

However, the rereading of recent works on the evolution of the relationship between town and mountain shows that there is hesitation in the way in which sports cultures, tourist and territorial operators or advertising set out the relationship between

town and nature through recreational or residential utopia, and this shift has speeded up since the mid-1990s. The compensatory need to imagine the mountains as an idyllic “Elsewhere”, this “mythology of paradise” evoked by Franck Michel (Michel, 2000), is coupled with a new or rediscovered eye, both on nature shown as a place of tension and confrontation, and on the town as becoming an alternative referent for practices and their geographical imaginary, thanks to climbing walls, white water stadiums, urban adventure courses, *snow domes* and the like.

The attempts to reintroduce distance and otherness between “town” and “nature” are, of course, many: the development of interstitial and out-of-bounds practices; architectural (fake old chalets, etc.) or gastronomic (fake “authentic” culinary dishes) neo-patrimonialization growing representations of nature shown threatening as well as threatened (Bourdeau, 2005); the exploration of the body as an “Elsewhere” through the taking of risks (*Crash and learn. Your body is a lab, not a museum*, ACG advertisement, 2001), the development of adventure tourism (“going elsewhere but differently”), etc. Despite these dialectic rebounds, relaunchings and bursts, the initial “Here-Elsewhere” pattern seems to be increasingly inscribed in a modern Fordist vision transcended by the typically post-modern hybridization and mixing of places, images, social practices and times.

In this moving context of contemporary territorialities, amenity migration is a cultural and functional mediator, particularly active in the re-composition of the relationship between the here and the elsewhere, in the form of a residential betweenness. The rhetorical figure of the betweenness thus makes possible the re-thinking of the dynamics within which new ways of thinking are prepared between the two terms making up a relationship marked by dualities, ambiguities and hybridizations in which differences are replayed and boundaries blurred (Sibony, 1991; Entrikin, 1991).

For that matter, the recent advertising production concerning the relationship between town and mountains in Europe is full of textual and iconographic images testifying to this “pas-de-deux”, which is sometimes transformed into a “hesitating waltz”: links (cable car between the Eiffel Tower and a snow-covered peak, Salon Objectif neige advertisement 1992), interlinks (trail and rope-bridge between a valley metropolis and high-altitude mountains, Trezetta advertisement 2005), the telescoping of places (“Buoux, Arco, Berkeley, Bleau, Bercy, le Verdon and the garage”, Millet advertisement 1991), superimpositions (between shots of urban walls and rocks, One Sport advertisement 2000), substitutions (a climb which becomes a lift with a sun as push-button, La Sportiva advertisement 2001), and even radical mixing of territories (Paris installed at the foot of the Alps, BMW advertisement 2004).

### 3. “After-Tourism” as a New Reading

Beyond the transcendence of the traditional divide between spaces, times and practices of the everyday and the non-everyday, an increasing hybridization is coming into play between taking root and mobility, work and leisure, residential, productive and recreational functions, close-to-home tourism and tourism involving a stay away from home, visitors and visited, and the like. In many ways this phenomenon, transcending the usual categories of thought both of actors and observers, can be interpreted as a transcendence of the tourist utopia and uchronia, marked by the end of the consensus which holds that tourism is positive, humanist and progressive (Bourdeau et Al., 2006). This *crisis of tourism* thus gives rise to a *tourism of crisis*, whether demographical (ageing population), climate (greenhouse effect), energy (“the end of oil”), economic (precarity), identity (alarming otherness, guilt feelings), sanitary (pandemics) and security (attacks on tourist destinations). While towns are re-enchanting and becoming exotic, thanks to urban ecology, tourist sites and practices seem, on the contrary, to be stricken by a kind of disenchantment: ordinariness of the landscape, repeated attacks, epidemics, multiplication of social conflict (seasonal workers, tourist office employees, Himalayan porters, etc.), pollution, crime, tensions between local societies and visitors or tour operators, a new rise in the economic and political criticism of tourism.

This mutation can, however, be approached as being a sketch of outlines, as yet very blurred, of an “after-tourism” bearing new values of relocalization and hybridization of residential and recreational practices in a context of long-term adaptation and repositioning of contemporary societies. On the basis of this process the issue of our relationship to mobility in contemporary societies is bound to be called into question. This movement also refers as much to the “end of oil” as to the relocalization of the economy, based on ethical or ideological commitments which range from “sustainable development” to “sustainable degrowth” for example. In this context also themes, which refer to the point or the necessity of close-to-home tourism, become common. Moreover, the latter no longer concern militant ecologist movements alone. They are appropriated and developed by tourist and territorial operators. Many local and regional communication campaigns thus rest on slogans such as “So near, yet so far” (Isère Départemental Tourism Committee 2003), “No need to go far to feel good” (Rhône-Alpes Regional Tourism Committee, 2005), or again “Madagascar? No, the Jura!” Départemental Tourism Committee of the Jura, 2008). In the same way, in the “Explore Unusual Worlds” campaign (Swiss Federal Railways, CFF, 2008), pictures of the Alps are mixed with those of astronauts, the Loch Ness monster or King Kong in New York, etc.

As regards recreational practices, such a movement rests on multiple re-readings of close-to-home spaces and times that transfigure their triviality and lead to the

(re)discovery of multiple experiences and situations as if neo-situationism. The three-week urban hike “Here becomes Elsewhere” organised in 2002 in the Grenoble urban area and related in a work entitled “The Scenery was Exceptional” as an exploration of the ways urban space is used, is symbolic of this approach: camping in public spaces, accommodation with local families, “performances” and get-togethers at markets, collecting and broadcasting of sounds and images (Ici-même, 2004), etc. Here we are getting close to an “experimental” tourism, served by an unbridled, playful creativity (Antony, et al, 2005).

The forms and consequences of this process are manifold: in no particular order we can cite the stagnation of long-distance travel; the emergence of tourism in “ordinary” places (in small towns, urban sprawl, suburban zones, which have neither a tradition of tourism nor a remarkable heritage); the efforts intended to re-enchant the everyday town (from “Paris-Plage” to the idea of the nature-city developed by town planners); or again the growing number of holidays spent at home (‘staycation’), the place where French people spend most of their time during their holidays, etc. In the Alps, the increasing weight of visitors coming from bordering areas or the beginnings of residential conversion in many tourist sites, which is linked to retirement mobility, the development of working from home and quality of life choices, appear to be part of this general movement. One of the most radical dimensions is a current where people, either or collectively or individually, are giving up the idea of going on holiday when car or air travel is necessary (notably low-cost flights). In January 2007, British press agencies went so far as to issue a communiqué stating that Prince “Charles is giving up skiing to save the planet”. There again, beyond positions of environmental responsibility, the phenomenon is becoming a line of communication in its own right for the regional tourist promotion services against a background of environmentalism and civics. For example, in France, the communication campaign “Don’t Go Away on Holiday Anymore” (Bouches-du-Rhône Regional Council, 2007) invites a large number of the public to join “those who have decided to stay” with a competition on the theme “My Holidays at Home”.

In fact, if such campaigns rely on ecological values and the importance attached to “cocooning” at home, they are also in keeping with a context of awareness of the economic weight of having people living, working and holidaying in the same place. The aim is therefore to avoid the escape of populations - and therefore of consumers - to other tourist areas. Thus this “residential economy” (Davezies, 2008) appears as a counterbalance to the risks run by the sectors exposed [to economic crisis], as asserted by the title of a seminar organised in Paris in May 2008 by the International Observatory of Regional Forecasting (OIPR). Here the challenge is to play on the ability of a territorialized socio-economy of everyday life to take over from productive forces to ensure the development of a “self-supporting local economy” capable of becoming a “new foundation on which the dynamism of the territories” can be built.

The diversity and scope of the phenomena mentioned thus make it possible to take into account three levels of definition of the post/after-tourism notion:

- a) In the most limited sense, post-tourism may be defined as a process of residential transition and reconversion of tourist resorts and regions. In the case of France, this is notably illustrated by the work of Jean Rieucan on la Grande-Motte (Rieucan, 2000), of Philippe Violier on la Baule (Violier, 2002), and by the long-term reflections of Jean Viard (Viard, 2000 and 2006). This approach obviously includes the observation of the new residential strategies of the working and retired populations who, in the form of amenity migration, spread over the tourist areas. This is a phenomenon which testifies to the generalization of its representatives seeking to make the imaginary, the environment, the lifestyle and the sociability of holidays an integral part of everyday life (Urry, 2002; Viard, 2006).
- b) In a wider sense, post-tourism may also be defined as a post-Fordist and post-modern form of tourism, renewed by phenomena of re-inventions, and geo-tourism and recreational hybridizations which place great emphasis on the heterogeneity of sites newly opened to tourism (Sarajevo, the Antarctic, coal mines, etc.) and the new eye, practices and links that are being deployed, notably the acceptance of playing with the unauthentic, the show, the superficial and the ephemeral. This acceptance of post-tourism is widely marked by the work of English-speaking researchers (Urry, 2002; Bauman, 2000; Feifer, 1985), but can also be found in the approach to contemporary excitements by the sociology of Michel Maffesoli (Maffesoli, 2003).
- c) In its widest sense, what we propose to name 'After-tourism' relates a change of status in tourist areas and practices in the context of globalization and post-modernity, that is to say the whole of the phenomena quoted above in the framework of the betweenness "Here-Elsewhere" relationship : amenity migration (Moss, 2006; Moss, Glorioso and Krause, 2008) and new residential practices; the calling into question of the utopia and uchronia of tourism, the search for continuities between practices (recreational, social, cultural, spatial, etc.) for holidays and everyday practices; the touristification of ordinary places, experimental tourism and neo-situationism; new town-mountain relationships in the context of metropolization; going beyond the boundaries of tourism through hybrid practices, which mix leisure and travel, cultural, professional and militant times, spaces and activities, the "renunciation" of tourism, and the like.

This wider acceptance of "after-tourism" –distinguished from more restricted sense of post-tourism– therefore points to the transcendence of the scope of thought, structuration and practice of tourism, at the same time because of the global evolution of society and the evolution of the recreational sector itself. It takes note of the



fact that, while becoming central to the economy, territory, culture and lifestyles of the 'developed' societies, tourism seems to be dissolving as a practice and autonomous object, as several writers note or suggest (Urry, 2002; Viard, 2006). This therefore supposes for the observer the integration of new indicators. We cite inexhaustively the new dimension of the concept of "housing" [Habiter] worked on by geographers (Lazzarotti, 2001; Stock, 2004 and 2006); the passage from reasoning in terms of tourist-mode economy to terms of presence-mode economy (Davézies et Lejoux, 2003) because of the growing weight of welfare incomes; the passage from the notion of "tourist" to that of "recreresident" (Lajarge, 2006).

#### **4. Concluding remarks about amenity migration in the French Alps**

The reading offered by the (temporary) notion of after-tourism obviously only partially clarifies the issue of amenity migration. Conversely, it is clear that the growth of a residential and recreational betweenness contributes to the practical and symbolic re-composition of the relationship between the "here" and the "elsewhere" as constituting a major vector of generalised touristification. There is today more and more autonomy in the choice of a place to live, and for some observers our contemporary world moves towards a "society of mobile individuals" (Stock, 2005). The search for a "perfect" place to live is then taking over from the quest for tourist paradises and is bringing up to date in an unexpected way the old situationist project of "transfiguring everyday life". In this case the slogan "beneath the paving stones, the beach" written on the walls of Paris by the students in revolt in May 1968 takes on the form of a search for "all-year living in a holiday house" (Viard, 2000), and thinking more and more of everyday life and places in terms in quality and sustainability. The "good life" is then seen as a continuous holiday (Urry, 2002), as well as retirement can be seen as "the longest holidays of the lifetime" (Rodriguez, 2001).

On a meaning level, the potential of this process for cultural innovation is particularly interesting. On a practical level, the subject brings, of course, many challenges as to the observation and construction involved in directing knowledge towards action. In fact, post-tourist hybridization is already presented as a basis for conversion and transition for tourist or rural regions in a context of competitive globalization. For instance, in the French Alps, winter sports resorts are now integrating amenity migration into their town planning and architectural policies, notably by building more spacious flats that will be able to become main homes, but also by setting up an offer of intensified services for the population, even giving themselves the goal of increasing the number of permanent residents. Moreover, on the outskirts of the large French alpine towns, conversion of tourism to residential after-tourism is taking place "naturally" by the transformation of tourist accommodation into main homes. A growing between-

ness then appears through the generalization of “temporary inhabitants” (Stock, 2001) or “permanent tourists” (Jaakson, 1986).

In spite of this structural change, amenity migration in the Alps is closely linked with “metropolisation” and cohabits with a persisting tourism (Perlik, 2006). This differs from “massive” amenity migration in many French remote rural areas, which are both non-metropolitan and non-tourist areas (Limousin, Auvergne, etc.). In France, amenity migration is less massive in the Alps than in rural areas and overall in coastal areas, where the number of permanent residences has grown 67% in the last 20 years, and where seaside resorts become “post-tourist towns”. Statistical link between “owning a second home” and “retirement migration” is much less important in the French Alps than in other rural areas as “retired people don’t go to live over 5000 feet high –1500 meters–” (Talandier, 2007). In such a context, most observations also show that amenity migration is more temporary in mountain areas than in seaside or rural ones regarding problems of accessibility and mobility, adverse climate or snow cover. This is why it appears that amenity migration benefits sometimes more mountain county-towns than ski resorts (Hélion, 1999).

To discuss the link between amenity migration and tourism, we have to take into account the fact that tourism enables potential amenity migrants to “test” places where they intend to live (Cériani, 2006). Secondly, we can notice that amenity migration stimulates residential recreation, and can even stimulate “visiting friends and relative (VFR) tourism”. On the other hand, if tourism seems to be still essential to mountain economy and demography, amenity migration can appear as a solution for diversification, helping mountain areas to find a way out of “all tourism”. Amenity migration can also increase the resilience of tourist place in case of crisis, and may help to “embody” winter sports resorts in their territory, and then contributing to a “territorial turn” (Pecqueur, 2006). This is so even if the cohabitation of amenity migration and tourism is not always a “quiet river”: loss of tourist beds, loss of income in ski-lift industry (less skiers), “strain” in uses of time and places, in lifeways, etc. And there are very few experiences and knowledge on how to manage this process.

Of course, such a mutation poses many problems regarding the welcome of new populations, their impacts on amenities (health, transport, schools, cultural activities, etc.), as well as on the environment, and automobile traffic; all are intensified as a result. The process of relocation, of which amenity migration is a part, is therefore only partial for the moment as far as the goals of sustainable development are concerned. Additionally, we have to notice that links with urban areas are too strong to enable an economic and social “autonomy” of new residential places, as economic status is based on “invisible flows of wealth”: such as wages earned in urban and industrial areas, unemployment benefits, retirement allowances, welfare incomes (Davezies, 2008). On the other hand, if amenity migration areas are often said to “benefit from urban areas”, we can also consider that urban areas may “benefit from amenity migration areas” if

they are able to bring dynamism in attracting population and offering quality of life, providing that sustainable mobility answers can be found.

Amenity migration may still appear as a “low intensity signal” in the European Alps, but with climate change and downsizing – and in the long term end – of snow tourism, it will be more and more a topical question. This accentuates the challenges of monitoring of amenity migration, notably from the point of view of their relationship with cultural, social and economic mutations; both global and local. This is why we have to develop case studies to understand the tracks of “tourist and residential convergence” as a part of after-tourism: temporary or permanent amenity migration; mono or multi residential uses; cultural experience of place; trajectories of tourist places; managing local identities between « People from here »; second home owners, people who left and came back and new inhabitants in their diversity... Maybe finding a new vocabulary to share meanings and actions, and looking for the setting of a common culture in relationship to work, time, landscape, culture and nature...

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