

Amenity Migration: a comparative study of the Italian Alps and the Chilean Andes

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Abstract:

Amenity migration involves people moving to perceived desirable regions, usually for non-economic reasons, such as a physical or cultural environment that is seen as more beautiful, tranquil or inspirational than their current, usually urban environment. The Italian Alps and Chilean Andes have recently experienced significant amenity in-migration after decades of net population decline. Whereas amenity migration in other parts of the Alps, and the Americas is well-studied, here we represent some of the first demographic data, and also cultural-geographic analysis, comparing these two regions. In many respects, the two regions are similar, including the socio-economic situation of existing population and the principal reasons that amenity migrants arrive. In both regions, perceived beauty and tranquility of the natural mountains environment is the main attraction for amenity migrants. In addition, migrants come to experience a different cultural milieu that they perceive as less stressful than the usually urban environments that they emigrate from. In the Italian Alps, close proximity to urban areas bring more day migrants, and the longer cultural history of the region has led to more conflicts of values between amenity migrants and long-term residents than is seen in the relatively culturally young Chilean Andes.

Introduction

For about two or three decades now we have seen a growing tendency for people to move from their urban domicile to rural areas within their own or another country. The target regions are characterized by high environmental quality, traditional local culture and often a good tourist infrastructure. Mountain regions are among the favourite destinations. Elderly people looking for a nice residence upon retirement were the first to migrate, followed by wealthy people looking for a second home. These days, also younger people who are not tied to a fixed workplace are the drivers of what Moss called “amenity migration” and defined as “the migration to places that people perceive as having greater environmental quality and differentiated culture” (Moss 2006: 3). McIntyre (2009) refers to the lifestyle and the socio-ecological dimension and calls it “lifestyle migration” and Bourdeau (2008) regards it as part of a post-tourism movement.

A themed issue of the journal *DIE ERDE* (Borsdorf 2009) took up the discussion and demonstrated by exemplary contributions the variety of forms of this new migration. In this issue, Glorioso (2009) analysed the consequences for management and governance and developed a variety of scenarios.

Amenity migration is often motivated by the search for “paradise on earth” (Kuentzel & Mukundan 2005; Moore et al. 2006). Among older people, the prospect of a senior residence in such an Elysium is the main driver. Younger amenity migrants include physicians, lawyers, architects and people with a teleworking job.

While the phenomenon has been well studied in the United States (Nelson & Lynch 2006, Löffler & Steinicke 2007), Canada (Moore et al. 2006, Chipeniuk & Rapaport 2009) and the Alps (Perlik 2006, Beismann et al. 2011) or the Carpathians (Bartoš et al. 2009), few analyses have been carried out in the Andes (Ortero et al. 2006, Borsdorf & Hidalgo 2009, Borsdorf et al. 2011).

Based on our own experiences in the Alps and the Chilean Andes, we present an initial comparison of amenity or lifestyle migration as a global phenomenon.

The Italian Alps and the example of Friuli

During the 20th century, with socio-economic transformation, parts of rural regions became distinct out-migration areas. Such mountain regions in Europe include the Scottish Highlands, the French Massif Central, and vast regions of the Pyrenees and the Apennines. The southern and western parts of the Alps suffered particularly from losses of population, some even became more or less marginalized. Despite these negative conditions, in several Alpine out-migration areas a demographic turn began during the late 20th century, eventually resulting in population increases.

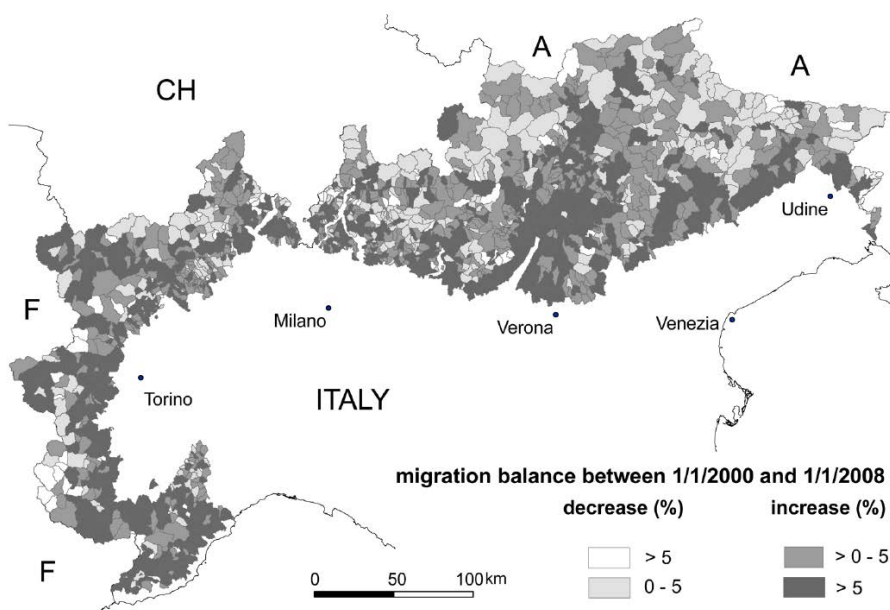


Fig. 1: Migration balance in the communities of the Italian Alps 2000-2007 (source: Beismann 2009)

A recent evaluation of the demographic processes in all communities in the Italian Alps confirms this new development (Beismann 2009): Between 2000 und 2007, an annual net migration surplus of 6.1‰ has been registered (Eastern Alps: 5.8‰, Western Alps: 6.7‰.) A community level analysis (Fig. 1) shows that the remote areas of the Alps are particularly affected by this demographic turn. In most parts of the French Alps as well, this development has already resulted in population growth (Coy & Steinicke 2006).

The Friuli Alps in Italy are an impressive example of a former depopulation region, which nowadays receives remarkable in-migration. The region has not shared in the economic upswing that the foothills and the southern plains have experienced since 1970 (Steinicke 1991). In 1990, the Friuli Alps were among those Italian areas that suffered the heaviest population losses in Italy since World War II (see for the following: Steinicke et al. 2010). While it has been possible to expand job opportunities considerably in recent years, demographic figures still show a downturn in the mountain regions' population. In some parts of the Friuli Alps, there is even an accumulation of completely abandoned villages ('ghost towns') like nowhere else in the Eastern Alps - despite a population segment of periodic holiday-makers. Although the big waves of emigration have already tapered off, they have left behind a skewed ratio of older people to the population as a whole. This, in turn, has been accompanied by relatively high death rates and falling birth rates. Since neither the socio-economic development strategies nor the demographic situation have been remedied as yet, and since the implementation of unorthodox promotion strategies seems unrealistic, it can be assumed that depopulation processes in Friuli's mountain region are likely to continue.

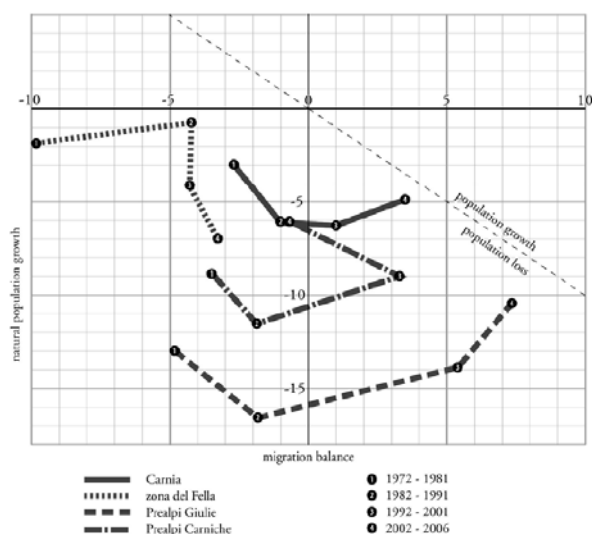


Fig. 2: Demographic development in communities of the Friuli Alps (Steinicke et al 2010).

Nevertheless, a demographic countertrend has begun: analyses of the population statistics show that there is no more migration deficit. Since the end of the 1990s, northern Friuli has seen more in-migrants than emigrants (migration balance 2000–2006: +2.3‰). Interviews in the Resia Valley proved that the newcomers to the Friuli Alps have moved there from outside the Alps (Steinicke et al. 2007). As yet this has not led to demographic growth, but the trend reversal is remarkable (Fig. 2). Whereas between 1962-1971 the Italian Alps lost 2,29 % of their residents per year, in the period of 2002-2011 the annual loss was reduced to 0,2 %.

Pull factors for the migrants are the Alpine scenery and environmental amenities which provide recreational facilities, the quietness and cooler climate, which offer health benefits, progress in the telecommunication and transport infrastructure, which mitigate the remoteness of

the destinations. The migrants flee the haste and bustle of their urban origins, the environmental and traffic problems, noise, heat and crime, which they perceive as push factors. The real estate price levels at the new destinations is another favourable factor.

In the Italian Alps, amenity migration causes a variety of positive and negative effects for the destinations. The revitalization of abandoned buildings and villages has a big impact on the local construction industry and trades, the newcomers stimulate local services and suppliers, their taxes allow improvements in the municipal infrastructure and even create jobs and stimulate tourism. However, there are also negative effects. First of all, the newcomers do not integrate in the existing cultural life but remain outsiders. Furthermore, real estate prices increase, environmental damages may occur, land consumption increases, social conflicts between newcomers and autochthonous people in general and farmers in particular may happen. The incoming urban culture may lead to a decline of rural traditions, and, especially in the minority German-speaking villages, the ethnic minority language may be threatened. To conclude: with amenity migration the character of the cultural landscape – which was one of the attractions for migrants in the first place – changes.

The Chilean Andes and the example of the Frontera Region

Chile is transforming rapidly into a more developed country. Some structures of the national socio-economy can already be compared with those of Italy (all figures for 2008, Fischer Weltalmanach 2011). In Italy, population growth is about 0.8%/year, in Chile it is 1.0%. Life expectancy is 82 years, in Chile 79 years. Catholicism accounts for 89% of the population, in Chile 70%. Italian GDP reaches a level of 35,460 USD per capita, in Chile it is only 9,370 USD, but the Italian economy has lost -1% whereas the Chilean economy grew by 3.2%. The inflation rate was 3.3%, in Chile 8.7%, and the unemployment rate 6.7 %, in Chile 7.8%. Italy had a current account deficit of -76.2 billion USD whereas Chile's deficit was -3.4 billion USD. Thus, while Italy suffers a period of economic stagnation, Chile still enjoys a fast growing economy. In terms of standard of life expressed in buying power, we find that Chile as a whole has already reached the level of South-Italian regions. This short comparison may prove that socio-economic changes like the phenomenon of amenity migration are ongoing in Chile as well as in Italy.

Favourite destinations for Chilean amenity migration include the desert regions in the North, such as San Pedro de Atacama or Pisco in the Pisco Valley because of their climatic conditions. Regions near Santiago de Chile, such as Olmué in the Coastal Range and San José del Maipo in the Andes (Borsdorf & Hidalgo 2009) are favoured for their vicinity to the capital, and the southern regions, like the Lake District of the Frontera, even attract non-Chileans because of their natural beauty and climatic conditions similar to those of the countries of origin. The following case study was carried out in the Frontera, which was not fully integrated into the Chilean state until the late 19th century and was colonized afterwards by European immigrants, mainly Germans (Hartwig 1966). The tongue basins of the Pleistocene glaciers are filled by beautiful lakes with moraine amphitheatres (Colico, Villarrica, Calafquén, Panguipulli), the scenery includes parkland with groups of trees or forests, as well as symmetrically shaped volcanoes like the Villarrica, the Llaima (both with ski runs), Mocho and Chosenuco.

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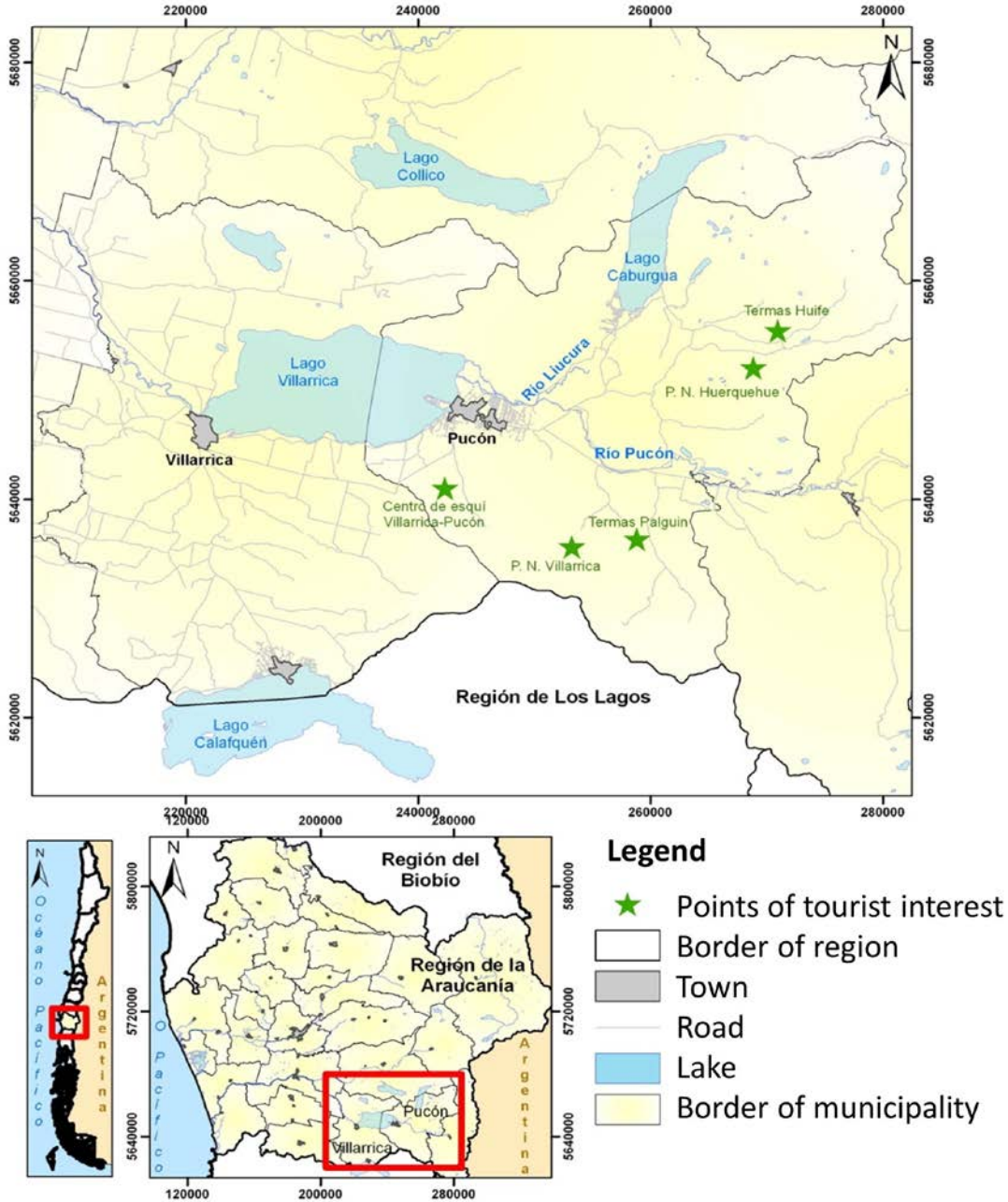


Fig. 3: Location and facilities of the Pucón-Villarrica region

Pucón is a fashionable lake resort, with Villarrica another preferred destination. Currently, tourism is the main economic activity. Pucón is known as the capital of adventure tourism in Chile, with 5000 tourist beds in 30 hotels, 9 apartment hotels, 39 pensions, 21 pensions and 78 cabañas (bungalow hotels) as well as 40 restaurants. Strolling, walking, wellness, sailing and boat trips, skiing, mountain hikes and participating in the rich cultural life (rodeos, con-

certs, theatres) are the main activities of the tourists who travel to the region from Chile, Argentina and Europe. In addition, the Mapuche culture can be experienced there. These are the amenities which have not only attracted tourists but also migrants to move to the Lake District, among them many foreigners. For Germans, the acculturation is facilitated by the presence of their language in daily life and in many loanwords in the Spanish spoken by Chileans (like *Kuchen, Torte, Bier* etc.).

In 1992, Pucón had a population of 8.023, risen by 2002 to 13,750 inhabitants. For 2011, the population is estimated at about 20,000 people and forecasts assume that in 2020 more than 40,000 persons will live there (INE 2008). Villarrica has also experienced strong growth, from 35.867 to 45.531 people (2002). Thus, as Marchant & Sánchez (2011: 90-91) pointed out, the region has the highest load in the factor of population growth, tertiarization and accessibility to basic services among the Chilean mountain municipalities. The amenities of the region formed the principal motif for immigration for at least half the newcomers.

An enquiry of 120 migrants carried out in 2011 in Pucón and Villarrica (Zunino & Hidalgo 2010; Borsdorf et al. 2011) showed that one quarter (23.4%) moved in from foreign countries, from Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Singapore and the United Kingdom. About half of the migrants came from the capital region of Chile, 14% from other metropolitan regions, and 2,8% from the desert areas in the north and the humid areas in the south of the country. According to their motivations and interests, they can be divided into those with a mainly cultural and those with a mainly ecological interest. They encourage initiatives for cultural events and environmental protection. 56% of the interviewees declared that they engage in the community life according to their interests, two thirds mainly in environmental issues, one third mainly in cultural activities.

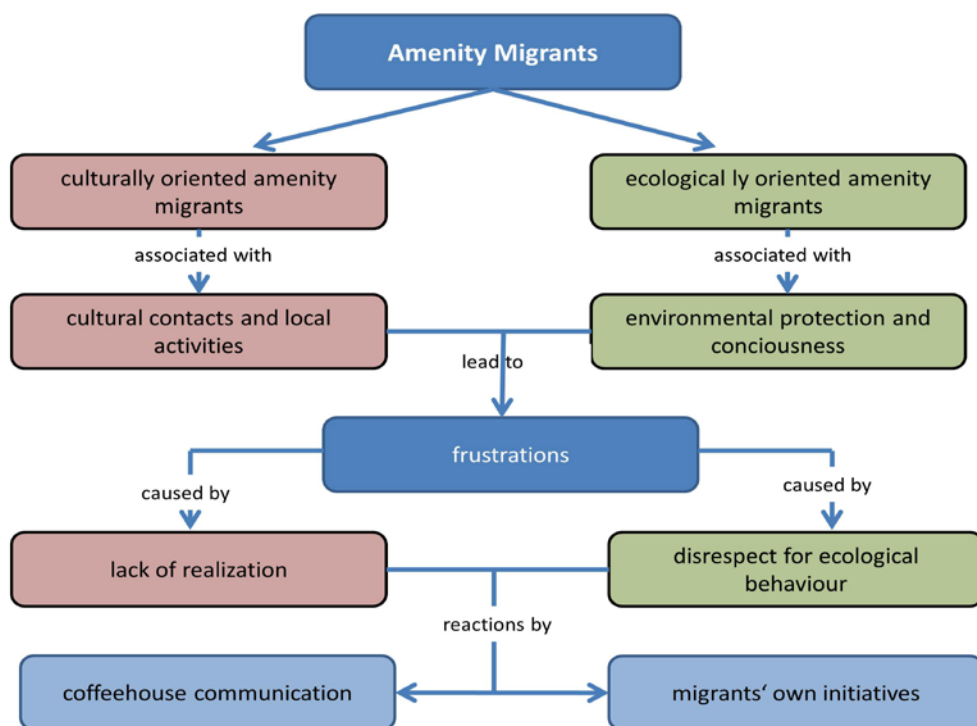


Fig. 4: Classification, expectations and frustrations of amenity migrants in Pucón and Villarrica

For the culturally interested immigrants, the local culture or the possibility of initiating their own cultural activities was the main motivation for immigrating. They are involved in the cultural life of the new residential municipalities, visit talks, concerts, theatrical performances, read local papers, found groups and associations, often with a spiritual-esoteric background. 13% of the immigrants valued the possibility of letting their children attend lessons in the Rudolf Steiner school in Pucón and being involved there. Two thirds of the locally engaged amenity migrants are culturally active in this manner (Fig. 4).

Although these migrants have been attracted by the local culture, their personal position often does not correlate with the local religious setting. Among the 111 people who provided information on this topic, only 10.8% declared themselves Roman-Catholic, 59.5% called themselves agnostic or atheist, 11.2% held natural-religious, humanist or Buddhist views, another 14.4% defined themselves as religious without belonging to any denomination. There were also three Protestants, one Mormon and one Jew.

18 facilities in the Pucón-Villarrica region were established on the initiative of amenity migrants. Seven are of a religious nature (spiritual unions, energy centres etc.). Four are aimed at disseminating ecological consciousness and information. Seven offer cultural facilities, school or adult education, talks, art openings or concerts. Four provide health facilities (massage, physiotherapy etc.). Many of the amenity migrants are involved in several of these associations. The humanist, spiritual and personality-pedagogic facilities concentrate in the small village of Curarrehue which has developed into an esoteric centre. Buddhist, shamanistic, esoteric and other nature-religious practices are exercised there.

The ongoing immigration has stimulated building activity in the region. From 2002 to 2009, 1.722 new high-rise apartment buildings (13%) or single-family dwellings (87%) have been erected. Living space in the bungalow sector grew on average about 1,500 m² per year, with a maximum in 2002 with 19.684 m². In the same year, living space in the apartment sector rose by 20.382 m². The new flats and houses were constructed by big real estate companies and mostly in the legal form of condominiums (vertical and horizontal gated communities).

Conclusion

The region around Lake Villarrica is an important destination area for national and international amenity or lifestyle migration. However, it shows a profile which clearly differs from regions in the Alps like Friuli. Both target regions offer amenities which the newcomers missed in their regions of origin. The idyllic scenery, fresh air and leisure options in nature as well as the local culture are main attractions in both regions.

However, integration in the new environment takes different forms. In the Alps, and specifically in the Friuli part of it, migrants are more or less passive towards the local culture. They enjoy the scenery and the manifold activities offered by the new environment, but on the whole they do not engage in environmental protection, social or cultural associations. In contrast, in the Chilean lake district, the majority of immigrants are actively involved in environmental education, cultural or service activities. Their main motives for immigration include the opportunity to develop their own cultural activities, even of an esoteric and spiritual nature, as well as sportive activities like hiking, water sports, mountaineering, skiing. The relatively young age distribution of the migrants also distinguishes this region from Friuli, where the majority of immigrants are “urban refugees”, as Steinicke et al. (2011) call them. After retirement, they return to their home regions or look for a calm and healthy environment.

In Chile, life among like-minded people, safety from crime, the children’s education in an environment which corresponds to their parents’ own life style and proper values are impor-

tant motivations for migration. Despite some frustrations, most expectations come true and lead to close amicable bonds between the immigrants but also between them and the local population.

However, there are also some negative results of the immigration. The actual state of the natural environment no longer matches the perception by the migrants. This also corresponds to the results Lynch (2006: 107) reported for Jackson Hole, Wyoming. In Pucón and Villarrica, the limits of environmental and social compatibility of tourism have already been reached and the situation is exacerbated by the dynamic immigration and the increasing consumption of free spaces. Bit by bit, these trends may destroy the very amenities that enticed the migrants to move there in the first place.

There are other differences to be mentioned: Perlik (2009: 81) stated that in many amenity migration regions of the Alps the short distances between the metropolises are significant and even allow day-tripping or commuting. To a certain degree, this is true also for Friuli, whereas the migration distances in the Chilean case are much greater. In Chile, migrants found an existing tourism infrastructure and efforts of tourism managers to keep it alive, in Friuli migrants came to abandoned villages and a region in decline.

On the other hand, newcomers to Friuli came to a traditional cultural landscape and made great efforts to reconstruct and renovate it. The Frontera in Chile – in terms of the material cultural heritage – is a young space, so immigrants add new elements to it rather than renovating and reconstructing it. Here the immigration of people who speak German better than Spanish is an element of preservation of the German language in a region which was colonized by Germans in the 19th century. In Friuli, the immigration of Italians endangers the German-speaking minorities of autochthonous people and may even lead to ethno-cultural conflicts (Steinicke 2008: 158). According to Bourdeau (2008: 30), the migrants are celebrating a continuous vacation or even their “longest holiday in a lifetime”. These observations have led him to postulate a new period in tourism which he calls “post-tourism”. Ferrario (2008: 113) stresses the remodelling of rural space by amenity migrants as “leisure landscapers” and their impacts on the redevelopment of remote or even abandoned mountain villages.

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