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# Migrants as providers of new regional knowledge in mountains

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# 1. Two approaches in regional development of mountain areas

**A.** Territorial capital and **agglomeration advantages** are crucial

- Increasing population as an advantage (economies of scale, agglomeration advantages, embeddedness)

**B.** Beware of lock-in: New options of the **void** by depopulation

- The counter-position: Emptiness as a chance (weak ties).

Both positions have good arguments:

- **institutional thickness**, social and territorial capital on the one hand;
- risks of strong ties and **lock-in** (inertia) on the other hand.

I'm clearly prioritizing **A.** compared to abandoning the European mountain regions (in favour of parks) or compared to a replacement of the current population (in favour of high-end dwelling).

## 2. Migration flows make regionalist identity policies obsolete

- Alpine policies of the last decades: **Identity thinking**, unique selling propositions, regional competition on international tourist and real estate markets
- Migration makes visible: mountains are **no isolated islands**
- Mountains **have to be integrated** in European policy
- But: Alps have own socio-economic **trajectories**:
  - different problems, demands and requirements
  - the Alps are also a laboratory to study the migration history of Europe (Holenstein/Kury/Schulz, 2018).
- Mountains areas may offer **alternative options for refugees** than the metropolitan hubs.



### 3. Borders and distinction

- Rejection of the “foreign” is a **constant in history** and as such it is explainable.
- Especially in the question of **regional development**:
  - Who may use which area and how?
  - Who has invested in a territory?
  - Which rules should be valid?
- The historic trajectory in Europe favoured sedentarism, especially in the lowlands; it resulted:
  - as the **normal** case: the sedentary farmer;
  - as the **special** case: the mobile migrant
- In African countries we see **migration as a long practiced strategy** which becomes intensified in cases of economic crisis. Sons of poor families undertake rural-to-urban migration and also transcontinental migration. They oscillate between grounded expectations and illusionary dreams (Roth, 2018).
- Regional policies must take into account these historic conditions but should be aware that they are the result of power relations which are **not inevitable** and can be changed.

## 4. Refugees can strengthen regional development

In the interest of migrants and locals:

- Refugees should **contribute** to regional development. However, they may not be abused for this purpose. It needs an open communication and transparent declaration - at all levels.
- A policy conforming to **human rights** and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) must be the minimal standard.
- Regions should not take only those people that are obviously beneficial for them. Hosting also complicated individuals gives **knowledge** and competence and skills for the host.
- Hosting unqualified refugees indirectly create **qualified jobs** and can mitigate unilateral cluster risks based on tourism and resort functions: teachers, social workers, psychologists, integration officers, etc.
- Refugees may bring in new external knowledge to marginalized areas which generates Social Innovation.

## 5. Social innovation in mountain areas

Definition from the Horizon 2020-project SIMRA (Social innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas)

- **“The reconfiguring of social practices in response to societal challenges which seek to enhance the outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily include the engagement of civil society actors.”**

## 6. Social innovation: Example Val Lumnezia

- Local actors of a valley with 2000 inhabitants in Grisons/CH, decided to remain agro-touristic; they were searching for external advice; they created the association Pro Val Lumnezia (PVL).
- PVL founded in the 1980s as a political organization as part of the jurisdiction.
- atmosphere of change, spirit of optimism.

Most important outcomes:

- **Environmental NGOs** were brought in, de-blocking of a long lasting confrontation.
- Preparation of the **fusion of the municipalities** of the valley, 2013.
- Now, **second home owners** become integrated.
- Stable, but not growing population.

→ Crucial: **searching for new external knowledge and being open for new cooperations with other social actors**

## 7. Conclusion: Opportunities for mountain regions

- Make hosting refugees a **Social Innovation**.
- Try to prove a **better integration** in smaller units a quality and create an advantage for mountain jurisdictions.
- **Confirm the legitimization** for mountain subsidies by participating on resolving national and transnational problems.
- Benefitting from **external knowledge** of migrants.



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