

New Horizons for the Alps

Ethnographies, Reshaping Challenges, and Emerging More-Than-Alpine Relations

Almut Schneider, Elisabeth Tauber (Eds.)

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Exploring Ethnography for Moving Mountain Confines

An Introduction

Almut Schneider – HES-SO Valais-Wallis

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For a few months of the year, your municipality resembles a nest of hornets gone wild, thousands and thousands of people cavort noisily on the slopes, roads and footpaths, there is no silence, no breathing, the going is tough. In the end, collective exhaustion. From one day to the next, the spook is over. Now, after the end of the season, anyone who takes a tour of the villages in the municipality ... feels as if they are close to the apocalypse: About three quarters of the houses are uninhabited, far and wide there is no open cafe, no open restaurant, hardly a person to be seen. Social and cultural wasteland. (Vescoli, 2023 [authors' translation from German])

This is how a stunned villager in her open letter to the mayor of a touristy municipality in the Italian Eastern Alps, published in a local weekly, describes scenarios that already interested the historian Lucie Varga in the 1930s. Varga describes the phenomenon of a change of perspective from “from below” to “from within”:

Today, many fewer Ladins are forced to leave to earn a living: tourism has changed everything. Instead of one hostel, there are three; instead of one job for three, there are thirty, because you not only have to provide accommodation for the tourists, you have to wash, iron, knit and sew. They buy shoes, stockings, boots and provisions. And, slowly, the inhabitants adopt a dual idea of value for work. The work sold to foreigners is much more expensive and they are still surprised to see the tourists pay without batting an eyelid. (Varga, 2023[1939], p. 145)

In her research in two Alpine valleys, one in South Tyrol (Italy), the other in Vorarlberg (Austria), Varga succeeded in examining the causes of change – towards National Socialism in Vorarlberg, towards modernity in Val Badia, South Tyrol – and analysing the “turning points” that emerged in the years before the Second World War (Schöttler, 1991). Varga’s work remained unnoticed for a long time (see Lanzinger, 2023; Schöttler 2023; Viazzo, 2023), but a few decades later, her interest was taken up again in various regions of the Alps with an initial strong phase (Burns, 1963; Honigman, 1972; Friedl, 1974; Cole and Wolf, 1974; Weinberg, 1975; Netting, 1981) and a later second wave (Viazzo, 1989; Heady, 1999; Stacul, 2003; Grasseni, 2009).

We started our respective field research in 2018 and we were somehow surprised not to find an international anthropological community in which researchers exchange and debate ideas in specific journals, meet at conferences and hold working groups on Alpine matters. At the same time, the term “Alpine anthropology” is widely used (Kezich, 2022; Zanini and Viazzo, 2022) and there exists something like an understanding of Alpine commonalities. Between 1991 and 2007, there had been a very active Italian working group led by Giovanni Kezich and Pier Paolo Viazzo, the Permanent Seminar on Alpine Ethnography (Seminario Permanente di Entografia Alpina) in San Michele all’Adige (Trentino) discussing Alpine particularities with geographers and historians. However, in 2018, what we missed most were recent ethnographies to fall back on, and this became a methodological and analytical challenge; due to the lack of a scholarly community concerned with this area, we missed occasions of communicative exchanges, suggestions, opportunities for orientation and criticism. Overall, this impression became rather more pronounced, and we realized that anthropological approaches were often lodged in interdisciplinary projects, some of them focusing on finding solutions in terms of concrete applications for this mountain area. When embarking on this volume, we therefore wanted to gather anthropological and ethnographic studies focussing on the region to get a sense of the present state-of-the-art.

The present volume follows *Malinowski and the Alps* (Tauber and Zinn, 2023), where another phenomenon of absence had become the topic of discussion. Whilst the first volume features authors dealing with an anthropological and historical search for traces of a Tyrolean Malinowski, who had lived

with his family in Oberbozen South Tyrol in the 1920s and 30s, this second volume is to a certain extent committed to ethnography in the original Malinowskian sense, accepting that Malinowski himself “had never made the Alps an object of study, and therefore never had an impact on the Alpine anthropology” (ibid., p. 1). The contributors assembled in the present publication have been invited to focus on ethnography as the key discipline for anthropological analysis, to revisit their own, older data, present more recent research to explore new ethnographic possibilities and openings, and arrive at a sense of what is needed for future research.

The Alps have been considered a showcase of beautiful nature since their tourist discovery around 1780 (Bätzing, 2019, p. 11). The “grandeur of the surroundings” that Hertz (1983[1913], p. 55) refused to be distracted by, this power of “nature”, challenges the ethnographic gaze to avoid being overwhelmed and instead focus on the practices and relational networks of the inhabitants. At the same time, Hertz was convinced that the “mountain is a marvellous preserver, on condition of course, that the tides of the plain have not yet swept over it” (ibid., p. 88); just as he saw in the Graian Alps, alongside sociological phenomena such as the cult of St Besse or the presence of ibex, which he believed was already extinct elsewhere, and “where the rarest Alpine plants abound” (ibid.). More than a hundred years after Hertz’s reflections, the possibilities of the mountains as preservers has changed. In this volume some authors show how practices in the Alps can be exceptionally thought-provoking, others show how the logics of the plains have overtaken the Alps.

The volume gathers stories whose heterogeneous situations and problems inscribe and shape themselves afresh in Alpine landscapes: people leaving high places, forests coming back (Paini); generational transitions on high Alpine pastures (Ledinek Lozej); the agency of microbes for making cheese (Grasseni); high-tech inventions to tame melting glaciers and save the tourist industry (Nöbauer); economic predominance in magical bubbles (Bosco-boinik and Cretton); meadows becoming greener and telling of industrial farming in mountain heights (Schneider), and of people who do not have to own land for relating to it and for whom space and time “are the others” (Tauber). We divide the volume into three thematic areas: I. Anthropological

traditions, ethnographic returns, and recent approaches; II. Landscapes and agri-cultures; III. Engaged futures and perspectives from “elsewhere”.

In the first part, Pier Paolo Viazzo discusses dilemmas in the anthropological study of Alpine societies, Cristina Grasseni considers mobility, the relationship with the surrounding lowlands and a “global system of commodities” and Valeria Siniscalchi scrutinizes questions of economic and political scales of analysis in relation to research in the Alps in comparison with the South of Italy.

Pier Paolo Viazzo, a profound expert on the history of social science research in the European Alps, deals comprehensively with the various traditions and approaches of anthropological studies in this region. He thus complements and completes his contribution to the first volume (Viazzo 2023), in which he traces the origins of ethnography in the Alps, where the influence of Bronislaw Malinowski is almost invisible. In his present contribution, he explores the question of different research approaches in the Alps by critically examining the work of “foreign” researchers and the impact of their presence on “local” researchers. He analyses how the research of colleagues from other countries affects existing research traditions, and is interested in the prevailing knowledge cultures and the question which knowledge hierarchies prevail. Viazzo asks how the relationship between “native” and “foreign” anthropologists should be described and what might be deduced from this for present and future research in the Alps. However, Viazzo points to various examples that show that the question of local anthropologists is not easy to answer. After all, in this region, boundaries can become already relevant a few kilometres further away; the anthropologist working in the neighbouring valley of his or her birthplace might very well be confronted with a relatively “foreign” situation.

In the author’s view, the current perspectives for research in the Alps depend above all on *how* the major processes of change that can be seen in the Alps in the 21st century will be approached ethnographically. If in the 20th century the focus was on modernity and its relationship to traditional social structures, in the 21st century the attention is on questions of climate change, species extinction or new inhabitants of the Alps.

Within this context, Cristina Grasseni observes that Lombard cheese-making – formerly part of a more complex seasonal movement of herds – problematizes the connection with the pre-Alpine plains and the outside world, which was always part of the local repertoire. Reflecting on the evolution of transhumance and cheese-making practices from the 19th century into the 21st century, she notes that what was once widespread mobility has now become sedentariness imposed by the national and international standardisation of cheese as a local product. However, these people find a creative solution by transforming their “transhumance dairy product”, Strachitunt, into a sedentary product, anchored in their locality.

Through this example, Grasseni shows the entire field of tension in which local practices meet global dynamics. For her, the ecological knowledge of the Italian Alps available are an acute source of inspiration for interdisciplinary research. The reasons why it is worthwhile to keep an eye on the Alps in terms of research are obvious to her. Here, in diverse contexts, global developments are sometimes radically re-thought and put into question. She refers to multispecies, microbial and high-tech research, which, according to her, is echoed in Alpine practices of fermentation, the handling of institutional guidelines for the standardisation of cheese production and the flexible applicability of low-tech and high-tech techniques. For Grasseni, the Alps remain a place “good to think with” because of their diverse nature, the character of the research traditions in and around them, and because the end of the Alps is both the surrounding plains and the global dynamics, their cities and new forms of aesthetics.

Valeria Siniscalchi approaches the French Alps from another mountain massif in Italy, the Apennine Mountains, through a comparative angle. In a re-reading of her own research and data, she observes that her analytic focus was increasingly both broadening as well as narrowing to be able to perceive different economic and political scales. Although in the 1990s she was still doing research in a mountainous region in Italy’s south, and her reading was oriented alongside the new historiography of the Italian Mezzogiorno, as well as its political economy and anthropology, she became interested in the Alps. She began applying her ethnographic gaze to both mountainous regions in parallel, travelling back and forth, being involved with scholars working in both regions. Inspired by her research in the south of Italy, she

asks what the two “mountain realities” have in common, despite their different history, ecology and economic organisation. She asks how themes such as marginality, mobility, but also economic and political domination as exterior forces – important in both the Apennines and the Alps – can be compared.

Through the literature on political economy, she introduces the concept of different scales into her perspective; through dialogue with historians, she makes the non-linearity of developments visible. She is interested in how to be ethnographic when working on power relations in the broader process of expansion of capitalism. Against this background, the Alps are relevant for her anthropological comparison, and she applies Wallerstein’s (1981) notion of economic space and his vision of economic power centres, peripheries and semi-peripheries to both her research regions. This approach makes it possible, so she claims, to read local social phenomena into the context of long economic and political processes and to connect different levels of analysis with each other. She illustrates this with the concept of *heritage* that in itself carries the risk of obscuring political and economic mechanisms of local practices. Consequently, she leaves the analytical instrument of heritage behind to instead deal with heritage itself as an object of research.

Landscapes and agri-cultures characterize the second part in which Špela Ledinek Lozej, Anna Paini, and Almut Schneider elaborate on the re-shaping of Alpine landscapes through humans and not-exclusively local practices.

Spela Ledinek Lozej takes us right into one of the core topics of the Alpine region: high mountain pastures. From her exceptionally detailed ethnographic description, we understand that much about the fate of these vast areas above the tree line, about this old cultural landscape, hinges on very few people and depends on how they work with the animals they look after during the summer months. We get to know Cecily, who had worked as a cow herder and cheesemaker on Krstenica Alp (Slovenia) for 23 years by the time Ledinek Lozej spent her first summer there in 1998. After her initial research period, the author re-visits the alp for five summers until Cecily retires in 2015, at the age of eighty. The author’s numerous stays on Krstenica Alp, which continue with Cecily’s successors, give us a rare long-term ethnographical insight into the diversity of tasks as well as the endurance required to “keep this landscape open”, free from encroaching scrubs and into the so-

cial and political interdependencies which are involved in the coordination of herders, cheesemakers, animal-owners and shareholders of the pastureland. We understand the long and varied history of the Krstenica Alp since the Middle Ages and get a sense of the challenge and risk involved when a change of generation occurs.

Cecily had always worked with her (grand-)nephews and nieces on the Alp and enjoyed transmitting her knowledge. She was hopeful when two of them took her place in 2016, but they stayed only for three summers, claiming that the work was too strenuous and badly paid. The local Agrarian Community (the Alp's shareholders) has since taken over hiring herders and a cheesemaker, and the staff is changing from year to year. Interestingly, the author relates the growing conflicts around the management of the Alp also to the decreasing role of agricultural production and to the fact that none of the shareholders depends financially on the Alpine pasture any longer.

Pastures, as well as meadows and fields that have been out of use for a long time and are therefore responsible for drastic changes in the landscape, are at the centre of the contribution of Anna Painsi. Woodland is encroaching upon the village where she did fieldwork, and if the inhabitants perceive this as threatening, it is not so much because "the forest eats everything" but because they understand this phenomenon to be a sign of a lack of engagement between people and their environment. The village of Vinigo, in the north-east Italian province of Belluno, had been a vibrant place for centuries, with a solid sense of history, an unusually high level of education, always (it seemed) surrounded by fields, meadows and pastures. Like most mountain areas in the province, Vinigo experienced various forms of emigration in the 20th century. In some cases, it was a seasonal movement, in others a permanent move to other European countries or overseas. The effect of this depopulation, the neglect of the cultivated land, has a visible effect on the landscape and is acutely perceived by the villagers.

The loss of cultivated land goes hand in hand with the disappearance of knowledge, a change of microclimate in the valley, species loss, and an overall alteration of the social dynamics of the place. Vinigo inhabitants explicitly state that since the disappearance of agriculture, the land no longer receives the necessary care and maintenance. It was precisely this that was ensured by the so-called "Rule" (*Regole*), a local institution that not only controlled

community life but also the management of the land for several centuries; “if there had been no *Regole*, the environment in Cadore [the region in question] would have been devastated” is the comment of an informant. In her contribution, Paini gives a lot of space to the residents’ assessments of the changed social conditions in the village and thus of the significantly altered landscape that surrounds the village, or might it be the other way round?

Taking the example of South Tyrolean mountain farmers, Almut Schneider shows how the ethnography of micro-level, small farmers, can complement and correlate with the study of economic and political macro-level, global agricultural modernisation, and vice versa. Since the two levels are interrelated, she adopts double vision as an investigative method. She shows how mountain farming practices – a “monstrous” concept of South Tyrolean identity construction, reflecting hybrids of nature and culture (Latour 1993) – are directly intertwined with agricultural policies, their local, national and supranational economic orientations, as well as their constant content changes. Here, we encounter the paradoxes of modernity, whose expression, according to Almut Schneider, depends on the respective perspective of the actors. On the one hand, an enormous bureaucratic apparatus to support the farmers, even if the yardstick for doing “business” on the mountain is the valley bottom type of agricultural business. On the other hand, the South Tyrolean mountain farmers themselves, who would not survive without the support of public money. For them, this means playing along in the bureaucratic game as administrators of contributions and as followers of countless rules. Nevertheless, from their perspective, they do not see their farms and land as subject to the industrial development it surely is, and farming practices – rather than being paradoxical – are a pragmatic survival strategy that conceals the extent to which they make use of industrialized components.

Schneider retraces how mountain farmers live an ideal of autonomy while at the same time implementing a global system of agricultural modernisation: They are far from the ideal of the farmer living off the land; indeed they effectively earn little more than the minimum wage due to the high costs of this industrialised agriculture. Her conclusion is that when comprehensive modernisation measures were introduced in the early 1970s, policy makers did not consider how small the farms were, what topographical and climatic conditions they were exposed to, and what impact the former cultivation of

mixed arable and livestock farms had had on the ecosystem over a long period of time.

Whilst change may again be underway in small-scale industrialised agriculture, we come to the final third part of engaged perspectives from “elsewhere”, where possible futures and transformations of analytical categories are in full swing at various levels.

Thinking with verticality, Herta Nöbauer is concerned with another example of discrepancies and paradoxes that shape Alpine high places and human-cryosphere relations in her contribution on glacier ski resorts in the Austrian Pitztal. As her fieldwork took place at the high end of the Alps, between 1,700 m and 3,400 m a.s.l., Nöbauer pays special attention to the very fact of verticality and the analytical framework it provides for her understanding of people working in this environment. As anywhere else, high, cryosphere places need to be understood as a web of human and non-human relations where different actors and agentive powers negotiate place-making against the background of particularly concrete impacts of climate change. The author considers her main question, “how people live with snow and make a living from it”, from various perspectives, working with village inhabitants of Pitztal, both those directly or indirectly involved with the resort, with technicians, legal advisors, security personnel and with company managers. However, her principal focus is the “male world” of the glacier workers, responsible for maintaining the infrastructure of the ski resort – cable cars, snow depots, snow cannons and groomers, and the enormous All Weather Snowmaker – all of which contribute to accessing and securing new spaces to be used by tourists and profitable to economic interests.

Modern winter tourism becomes part of a broader process of shaping and promoting modernity and the capitalist economy in the European Alps. This involves various highly mechanised processes of transforming natural snow into the commodity of “white gold” which is, as a matter of fact, industrialised snow. Research in this highly technological cryosphere zone leads Nöbauer to observe a remarkable reversal: the common attribution that urban and lower-lying regions in the Alps are associated with progress and modernity, while higher-lying areas are associated with tradition and backwardness, is here turned on its head: The ski resort companies, as well as their em-

ployees, attribute progressiveness to this high place, whereas, in their view, the valley lacks any belief in change.

New residential models are at the centre of the contribution of Andrea Boscoboinik and Viviane Cretton when dealing with lifestyle and working migrants who find a “magic bubble” and a “place of strength” in Valais, Switzerland. They enquire and compare how the increasing mobility of people takes part in and reshapes existing models of social relationships in Verbier and Zermatt, resorts emblematic of deep transformations due to industrialised tourism, both presenting a high number of non-local, often international residents. The authors tackle the complex relational dynamic between human practices, imaginaries and place that is brought about by the increasing mobility towards these two cosmopolitan places. Most of the new inhabitants, be it owners of second homes or migrant workers employed in the tourist industry, are “temporary residents”.

What is interesting is that this is a characteristic they share with the local farming population, who change over the seasons between living in the village in autumn and winter, at middle altitudes in spring and on high mountain pastureland in summer. As the local farmers, they are multilocal and live the seasons, intensively, as well as the landscape and “nature”, the latter unanimously linked to strong imaginaries with a positive connotation throughout. Whereas for the residents of Verbier, it is the entertainment, the “Verbier vibes” and the cosmopolitan, liberal atmosphere which is attractive against the backdrop of the mountain scenery, in Zermatt, it is a “special kind of energy” that makes it a “place of strength” which many seasonal inhabitants and regular guests seek out.

Most of the contributions of this volume could be placed relatively conclusively in one or other of the categories that we as editors have created. The “elsewhere” contained in the title of the third part is not meant geographically; it does not refer to other regions but to the cultural practices of the Sinti with whom Elisabeth Tauber reflects on a quite different form of and an enlarged scope of relationship to Alpine land. The Sinti are engaged in cultural practices whose categories of space and time are profoundly different from those commonly discussed in Alpine contexts. Thus, for an anthropological understanding, the categories of Alpine societies as they are familiar to us are no longer applicable. More than that, the condition of possibility by

which the Sinti conceptualise society runs counter to the Alpine categories we know, especially because they do not need to own any land to feel connected to it. The Sinti's presence in the Italian eastern Alps goes back generations, probably several centuries; yet they never appear in the literature on the Alps. They are the Others.

In her contribution, Tauber addresses a thorny situation that cannot easily be resolved epistemologically and is one of the reasons for this puzzling absence of the Sinti. The question is a double one – the silence of the Sinti themselves and of the others who do not consider Sinti as inhabitants of the Alps. It is in memory of her mentor, Patrick Williams, that she states one can only relate to this research field if one fully recognises that these groups are part of the societies they live in (Williams, 2021). She both uses ethnographic data from twenty-five years ago and draws on recent archival research to reflect on the meaning of memory and history, belonging, relations to the dead, and relations to land.

The volume concludes with an epilogue by Werner Krauß, who did research in the Swiss Alps in the late 1980 (Krauß, 1987). Subsequently, he undertook fieldwork in other parts of the world and most recently in Northern Germany on topics to do with environmental conflicts, national parks, climate change and renewable energies. With the perspective of these experiences, he looks regularly in the direction of the Alps and is an acute follower of changing developments, new data and analytical approaches in this region (Krauß, 2018).

At the end of our work with this collection of essays, we have a clearer picture. At the beginning, we complained about the absence of an anthropological community exchanging views about current events and approaches; this phenomenon might be associated to the fact that in the Alps, history, geography and folklore studies are always part of what anthropologists do. This interdisciplinary situation contributes to the fact that anthropologists often put their core business – ethnography – on the back burner. What we do, somehow automatically, in interdisciplinary situations, is the same kind of translation work, here between disciplines, that we are used to doing in inter-cultural contexts. Could the prevalence of interdisciplinary approaches over the

last two decades be a reason why the focus has shifted away from ethnography and would thus explain why there have been so few monographs recently?

The contributions in this volume confirm that the Alps can indeed be understood as “a laboratory of social innovation and a space of cultural creativity” (Viazzo, p. 17, this volume) where we can observe urgent issues concerning capitalism, climate change and loss of biodiversity more intensely than elsewhere, since the region serves as a kind of magnifying glass. We also realised the growing and indeed urgent relevance of connecting what we perceive within the Alps to what happens elsewhere, and thereby discovering stimuli for new experiences in this laboratory. What we see in the contributions to this volume is an aspect of global connectedness that needs to be taken into account with more vigour. In the contributions of Boscoboinik and Cretton, Grasseni, Nöbauer, and Pains lies huge potential for this analytical prospect. Siniscalchi, Schneider and Tauber show how the perspective from “elsewhere” – considering different political and economic scales; thinking of industrial farming when analysing the situation of small-holding mountain farmers; introducing an understanding of relationality with land that directs our gaze beyond the Alps – is necessary for considerations aiming at a longer and broader range. Krauß has chosen yet another emphasis by showing how the Alpine landscape represents “the epoch of the anthropocene” (2018, p. 1) that can best be grasped when thinking with assemblages, necessarily including non-local and more-than-human actors.

Thus, working on this volume has made it abundantly clear that the Alps do not stand for themselves but always relate to “others” and to themes emerging elsewhere. Finally, we come back to the concerned villager’s description that opened this introduction. Her motive for describing the state of the village was that the mayor had been delighted to offer a building plot to an overseas millionaire who had shown interest in erecting a villa there. What happens here, happens of course all over the world: land turning into a commodity and this process accelerating without an end in sight. For the anthropologist, how can the additional challenge of thinking with an ever stronger “global other”, such as land speculation, pesticides and herbicides, concentrated cattle feed, high-tech industrial items, lifestyle migrants, be put into concrete ethnographic practice? All these more-than-Alpine relations –

and the overseas millionaire could be taken as an epitome for these phenomena – call, in our opinion, also for a more orchestrated ethnographic gaze on other horizons that move these mountain's confines.

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Anthropological Traditions,
Ethnographic Returns,
and Recent Approaches

A Remote Land in the Heart of Europe

Some Dilemmas in the Anthropological Study of Alpine Societies

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Abstract

This chapter traces the development of Alpine anthropology from the community studies conducted by American researchers in the early decades after the Second World War up to the present day. The first question it addresses is whether the theoretical approaches and ethnographic methods introduced by these studies proved beneficial or, rather, stifled pre-existent national traditions of research in the European countries which share the territory of the Alpine region. The chapter then reassesses the relations between “native” anthropologists and their colleagues coming from faraway countries, and the past and present status of Alpine anthropology and anthropologists within the wider realm of anthropological research and its practitioners. It is suggested that in at least some Alpine countries and across the Atlantic the perception of the Alps as being close and remote, strange and familiar, undermined their recognition as a fully legitimate field site for ethnographic research. The final part of the chapter argues that the status of Alpine anthropology in the future will largely depend on how successfully ethnographic investigations and anthropological reflections will be able to grapple with the many changes the Alpine region has been experiencing since the beginning of the new millennium, from the effects of global warming to the unexpected settlement of new dwellers after a long period of depopulation.

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Introduction

Sixty years ago, Conrad Arensberg (1963) argued in his introduction to a special issue of the *Anthropological Quarterly* that it was high time for social and cultural anthropologists to pay professional attention to the cultures of the “Old World peoples” and to establish a proper anthropology of Europe. Arensberg’s introduction was followed by four articles, each devoted to a European culture area that had been identified and deemed worthy of ethnographic and theoretical inspection. Remarkably, one of these four culture areas was the Alpine region, whose coverage was entrusted to Robert Burns (1963), an American anthropologist who had recently completed a study of Saint-Véran, the highest village community in the French Alps (Burns, 1959). The Alps were thus established as a legitimate and important field for Europeanist research, alongside the Mediterranean area and the more vaguely defined cultures of the “Atlantic belt” and of the “Great Plains” of Central Europe. Such a status was confirmed a decade later in the first comprehensive survey of the anthropological literature on modern Europe (Anderson, 1973). Burns’s contribution to the special issue of the *Anthropological Quarterly* was itself remarkable. On the basis both of his findings in Saint-Véran and of his perceptive reading of a still meagre and fragmentary literature, he proposed a tentative list of ten cultural traits as distinguishing features of the Alpine region – or, rather, of what he termed the “Circum-Alpine area”, a culturally discrete zone including most of the upland regions of Southern and Central Europe (Burns, 1963). Although the soundness of some of his contentions were questioned by later research, in other respects Burns’s insights were confirmed by subsequent anthropological and historical studies, in particular his suggestion that the Alpine area may have been traditionally characterized by an unexpectedly high degree of literacy and education.

We will return to this and other issues in the next sections. First, however, it is necessary briefly to outline some of the basic themes in Alpine anthropology and the main phases of its development. We will try to assess whether the studies carried out in the Alps by American anthropologists like Burns proved ultimately beneficial for Alpine anthropology or, rather, stifled pre-existent national traditions of research. This will lead us to reconsider the relations between “native” anthropologists and their colleagues coming

from faraway countries, but also the past and present status of Alpine anthropology and anthropologists within the wider realm of anthropological research and its practitioners. A status that in the future will largely depend on how successfully ethnographic investigations and anthropological reflections will be able to address the many changes the Alpine region has been experiencing since the beginning of the new millennium, from the effects of global warming to the unexpected arrival of new inhabitants, which might give the Alps a new centrality as a laboratory of social innovation and a space of cultural creativity.

Anthropologists in the Alps

Most accounts of the history of Alpine anthropology (Anderson, 1973, pp. 69–78; Viazzo, 1989, pp. 49–66; Ortmayr, 1992, pp. 132–140; Sibilla, 1997; Minnich, 2002, pp. 55–60; Albera, 2011, pp. 69–79) seem to agree that after small and largely unrecognised beginnings, the anthropological study of the Alps started properly in the first decades after the end of Second World War, when a number of fieldworkers from North American universities headed for the high Alpine valleys: they included, in addition to Burns, the likes of John Honigmann, Frada and Raoul Naroll, Leopold Pospisil, Eric Wolf, John Cole, Robert Netting, Harriet Rosenberg, John Friedl, Daniela Weinberg, Rayna Rapp Reiter and Sandra Wallman, to name just a few.² In the early 1930s a leading *Volkskundler* had defined the Alps “the El Dorado of folklore studies”, a reliquary of old customs, sayings and artefacts long disappeared in most other parts of Europe (Helbok, 1931, p. 102). Two decades later, the survival of old traditions and habits was still the focus for some of the first studies of Alpine villages carried out by American anthropologists. Their attitude was, however, quite different from that of the folklorists that had preceded them in the study of Alpine culture. John Honigmann’s work in Styria, for instance, was largely concerned with cultural survivals, but his aim was, in

2 For a long if incomplete list, see Ortmayr (1992, pp. 134–135). Wallman is of course British-born and was trained at the London School of Economics, but in the years of her Alpine research she was teaching at the University of Toronto. A recent book (Wallman, 2020) provides an affectionate account of her fieldwork in a village of the Piedmontese Alps in the early 1970s.

fact, to demonstrate the limitations of the “geographical marginality theory” favoured by folklorists, and also the economists’ view that in the Alps modernisation and economic rationalisation were hampered by the conservatism of the local populations (Honigmann, 1963, 1970).

An even greater difference separates previous studies of mountain folklore from the ecological approach which has been a trademark of Alpine anthropology since its very first days. Another article by Burns (1961) is indicative of the programme of ecological anthropology in the Alps: following the lead of Julian Steward, he was trying to demonstrate that in the valleys of the Dauphiné, in the French Alps, the spatial and social-structural evolution of the village communities had been shaped by environmental constraints. Cultural-ecological models were soon to be replaced or supplemented by ecosystemic models, most notably in Netting’s work on Töbel, a community in the Swiss Alps (Netting, 1981, 1984, 1990). In some cases, American anthropologists who had left for the Alps to work almost exclusively on mountain ecology quickly discovered, once in the field, that the local economy had gone through startling transformations. Thus, the focus of their research shifted from ecology to social and economic change, as shown in an exemplary way by Friedl’s experience in Kippel, also in the Swiss Alps (Friedl, 1974). One basic question was to establish whether these changes marked a radical break with the past, or, on the contrary, significant continuities were still detectable underneath, as Weinberg (1975) argued for yet another Swiss village, Bruson.

Thus, as Anderson (1973, pp. 69–80) aptly noticed in summarising the state of play in Alpine anthropology around 1970, the two key-words were “ecology” and “change”. As we shall see in the final section of this chapter, the study of ecology and change is still of primary importance for Alpine anthropology today, albeit in markedly different terms. However, another major line of research was inaugurated in 1974 by Cole and Wolf’s landmark book *The Hidden Frontier. Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley*: the study of ethnicity, and the formation of identities at regional and local levels. Especially in the 1990s and in the first decade of the new century these issues were to become a central preoccupation for anthropologists working in the Alpine area (Minnich, 1998, 2002; Heady, 1999; Stacul, 2003, 2005; Grasseni, 2009; Porcellana, 2007).

Based on ethnographic and archival work in two adjacent villages in the Eastern Italian Alps, Cole and Wolf's book was also a plea for an approach combining anthropology and history. Indeed, it was largely because of their influence that in the Alps anthropology and history converged at an earlier time than in most other sectors of anthropological research. Prior to the publication of Cole and Wolf's book, however, at least two other North American anthropologists had complemented conventional ethnographic fieldwork with intensive and imaginative archival research in their studies of Alpine communities, both carried out in the early 1970s. Netting's skilful blending of anthropology and historical demography paved the way to the recognition that in the past, far from displaying a "primitive" high-pressure demographic regime characterised by high levels of both fertility and mortality, as assumed by most demographers and geographers (Veyret, 1952; Guichonnet, 1975; Hagmann and Menthonnex, 1979), Alpine populations had in fact experienced low birth and death rates (Netting, 1981, pp. 70–185). This entailed a rethinking of many central issues in Alpine historiography and demography, in particular the causes and consequences of emigration (Viazzo, 1989, pp. 120–152). In the same years, Harriet Rosenberg discovered during her stay in Abriès, a village in the French Alps not far from Saint-Véran, what subsequent historical investigations have confirmed, namely that literacy levels had been definitely higher in the Alpine valleys than in the surrounding plains, thereby vindicating one of Burns's most iconoclastic assertions (Burns, 1963, pp. 149–151), and more generally that such high levels of literacy went hand in hand with much greater prosperity, openness and political autonomy than had been previously surmised or taken for granted.³ Rosenberg's conclusion was that, "if 'traditional' is taken to mean illiterate, passive, isolated, and poor", then clearly Abriès "did not look or behave like a 'traditional' peasant community" (Rosenberg, 1988, p. 3). By virtue of such a precocious and intense involvement with history, village studies by social and cultural anthropologists were instrumental in undermining the canonical image of the closed and inexorably backward upland community conjured up by the historians.

³ See especially Fontaine (1996, 2003), Fontaine and Siddle (2000), and, on literacy, also Roggero (1999, pp. 237–255).

Much more could be said on the origins and development of the anthropological study of the Alps and on the broad themes that have just been mentioned. Instead of belabouring these points, however, it seems more profitable to highlight in the pages that follow a few dilemmas, partly stemming from its history and partly from the very geographical and symbolic place of the Alps within Europe, that Alpine anthropology has faced in the past, is facing in the present and is likely to face in the future.

The “Native” and the “Foreigner”, Or: Do We Need American Anthropologists in the Alps?

The first of these dilemmas almost inevitably concerns the relations between “native” anthropologists and the “Americans”. As we have seen, most historical accounts assume that Alpine anthropology started with the arrival of American researchers and the establishment of the Alps as a discrete culture area and a proper field of anthropological study. A revealing common feature is that all these accounts, when they look for European forerunners, show a definite preference for scholars who have some kind of direct or indirect connection with the Anglo-American mainstream tradition. A favourite ancestor is Robert Hertz, whose study of the cult of Saint Besse, a martyr saint worshipped in a cluster of communities in the Western Alps (Hertz, 1913), was praised by Evans-Pritchard (1960, p. 10) as an early example of anthropological fieldwork. A less obvious but no less interesting female ancestor might be Lucie Varga, the Austrian social historian who in the 1930s was helped by Malinowski himself to work out her plan to do research in the Vorarlberg and was one of the very first scholars to import “exotic” methods of fieldwork into the European scene⁴. Although it would be hard to argue that there was any continuity between these early studies and those carried out after the Second World War⁵, both Hertz and Varga look genealogically attractive because

4 Her debt to Malinowski is explicitly acknowledged by Varga (1936, p. 1). A portrait of Varga as an “excluded ancestress” of modern anthropology is provided by Stade (1999).

5 Which is not to say that such early studies are not capable of providing a stimulus to contemporary research in the Alps, as shown by the use of Varga’s work made by Albera (2011, pp. 176–178) and especially by the spectacular revival of interest in the cult of Saint Besse as well as in Hertz’s Alpine work: see e.g., MacClancy (1994), MacClancy and Parkin

their methods and theoretical approaches differ considerably from those of folklore studies in the first half of the twentieth century.

Such a distancing from folklore studies calls to mind the distinction between modern and backward varieties of anthropology made by John Davis (1977, pp. 3–4) in his book on the anthropology of the Mediterranean and his unabashedly disparaging and unfortunately phrased warning that “a contemporary ethnographer from France or England or America, carrying the very latest lightweight intellectual machine gun in his pack, may be suddenly confronted by a Tylolean or Frazerian professor appearing like a Japanese corporal from the jungle to wage a battle only he knows is still on”. Contemporaneous attitudes of this kind were understandably not taken lightly in southern Europe (Leal, 2001) and fuelled considerable tensions between most Iberian and Italian anthropologists and their British and American colleagues (Vizzaro, 2021a, pp. 303–307). Did similar theoretical, methodological and sometimes political contrapositions also arise in the rather different transnational space of Alpine anthropological studies?

Predictably enough, in the Alps the relationships between “native” and “foreign” anthropologists were not always easy and relaxed. Arnold Niederer, the great Swiss *Volkskundler*, has recollected that his first meetings with Netting had made him quite suspicious of the American’s ecosystemic models and that he could not understand his guest’s excitement about the new vistas opened up by historical demography (Niederer, 1991). And in Austria, too, there was debate about the methodological pros and cons of the research styles used by foreign anthropologists in the Alps,⁶ as testified by an essay by Norbert Ortmayr entitled *Amerikaner in den Alpen* (1992), and, very explicitly, by Reinhard Johler’s article *The idea of an “Alpine society”, or: why do we need the Americans in the Alps?* (1998).⁷

(1997), Horden and Purcell (2000, pp. 450–460), Isnart (2009) and more recently Demarchi (2016, 2021).

6 Some Austrian and Swiss scholars were unimpressed by a methodological recipe prescribing that fieldworkers should focus “intensively” for one year on a single village community. This was in stark contrast with the “extensiveness” of Alpine research in both Austria and Switzerland, characterized by long-term investigations that often covered the territories of entire valleys and might lead researchers to inhabit their fields for large parts of their lives. On these issues see Centlivres (1980, p. 40) and more recently Krauß (2018, p. 5).

7 It is worth noting that the “Americans” whose works are discussed by Ortmayr and

Michał Buchowsky (2004, p. 10) has referred to Ortmayr's and Johler's pieces to contend that the encounter between foreign and native anthropologist in the Alps produced a "hierarchy of knowledge" which in turn generated "a vibrant discussion on the presence of Anglo-Saxon anthropologists in the Alpine region and the value of their scholarly output". Although this is undeniable, as we have just seen, there are reasons to believe that tensions were not as strong as in Mediterranean anthropology. An especially enthusiastic appreciation of John Honigmann's work in Styria is provided by Volker Gottowik (1997, 1998), who insists on the importance for natives of "being othered" by anthropologists from outside. But if we go beyond the provocative titles of their articles, we discover that Ortmayr and Johler, too, ultimately acknowledge that on balance the arrival of the "Americans" was beneficial because they helped enliven the stagnating world of Austrian folklore studies and to rescue them from a pernicious tendency towards a celebration of Alpine values and ways of life at times bordering on racism. Similarly, Niederer eventually came to recognise the value not only of Netting's work but also of the "alien" tradition he represented, and to complain that "Swiss and Austrian students of folklore know very little, or nothing at all, about Anglo-American or even French research in the Alps" – adding that "this is a general feature of European *Volkskunde*, which has long been conceived of as a national science" (Niederer, 1996, p. 286).⁸ Thus, both Niederer in Switzerland and Austrian scholars like Ortmayr and Johler are denouncing, from within, the national-

Johler are by no means all American. Rather, "American" is used as a label that stays for "modern" anthropology as opposed to folklore studies and may also cover British social anthropologists like F.G. Bailey, or even anthropologists from Alpine countries like Switzerland and Italy who had been trained or had taught in "Anglo-Saxon" universities.

8 Kuhn (2022, p. 244) has recently suggested that it was not until the nationalistic narrowing of the 1930s that German-language folklore studies "lost the anthropological, and often comparative, perspectives that had been present before". Especially in Austria, as is well known, these comparative perspectives gave way to an emphasis on nationalistic (*volkisch*) ideologemes that were consonant with National Socialism. Even after 1945, however, a tendency to "shrink and isolate" (Niederer, 1986, p. 286) still prevailed for several decades in both Austria and Switzerland.

istic drift and the resulting insularity of the “backward” national traditions scorned by Davis.

The skein to be untangled is obviously intricate. Much depends on the different histories of ethnological and anthropological studies in the various countries, and of course not all Swiss and Austrian anthropologists working in the Alps would necessarily agree with Niederer, Ortmayr or Johler. Nevertheless, we may note that in Italy some studies by foreign Alpine anthropologists have been very well received by local scholars. This is the case not only of Cole and Wolf’s 1974 book but also, for instance, of Patrick Heady’s study of a valley in the Friulian Alps (Heady, 1999), which has been translated into Italian (Heady, 2001) by the University Press of Udine, the capital of the region where he conducted his fieldwork, and has been praised by Italian anthropologists.⁹ On the other hand, one cannot easily forget Dionigi Albera’s scathing attack on F.G. Bailey’s study of a village in the Italian Alps (Bailey, 1971b, 1973), launched in an article published by a major anthropological journal and entitled *Open systems and closed minds: the limitations of naivety in social anthropology – a native’s view* (Albera, 1988). It should be stressed that Albera was not writing against “Anglo-Saxons” per se. His article was more of a criticism of the transactionalist and anti-historical paradigm incarnated by Bailey than of anthropologists from outside. Nevertheless, it is significant that he decided to emphasise his status of a native anthropologist. But how native are the native anthropologists who have worked in the Alps? And how much was – and is – their work valued by the anthropological communities of their native countries?

The “Domestic” and the “Exotic”, Or: Are Alpine Anthropologists True Anthropologists?

When Netting announced his plans for fieldwork in a Swiss peasant community, the first and most frequent response from his American colleagues was: “Why is an anthropologist and an Africanist going to alpine Switzerland?” (Netting, 1981, p. x). In the eyes of many anthropologists of the time the Alps

9 See e.g., Gri (2001) and Stacul (2003).

and more generally Europe – were definitely no good: there seemed to be little point to try and find out “how the Swiss plant potatoes and what brand of transistor radio is preferred in a Serbian village”¹⁰. Such an attitude was still dominant at the end of century and probably persists today. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson ironically remarked, echoing Orwell’s *Animal Farm*¹¹, in the Anglo-American academic system there was, in principle, no hierarchical difference between field sites, “but some ‘fields’ are more equal than others – specifically, those that are understood to be distant, exotic, and strange” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, p. 13). It is worth noticing, in this connection, that while some of the Americans who did research in the Alps in the 1950s and 1960s had already made a name for themselves in more exotic settings (as was the case of pioneers like Honigmann, Pospisil, Wolf or Netting), most of those who followed in their footsteps were “absolute beginners” working towards their doctorates. For those falling into the former category, doing research in the Alps could easily be seen as a sort of apostasy, but their academic positions were secure; for those falling into the latter category, on the other hand, it was a risky business as they might be accused of failing to go through the prescribed initiation (or being initiated in the wrong place)¹².

As a consequence, the “Americans” who ventured on their research journeys in the Alps were likely to experience the uncomfortable condition of being, so to speak, between the devil (their more orthodox colleagues’ disapproval) and the deep blue sea (the suspicious attitude of local anthropologists). It is tempting to take it for granted that things must have been quite different, and easier, for “native” anthropologists intending to do research in the Alps. There are reasons to doubt it. The recollections of the doyen of Italian Alpine anthropology, Paolo Sibilla (2004, pp. viii–ix), are strikingly reminiscent of Netting’s experience across the Atlantic. In the late 1960s, when

10 On these venomous criticisms and, more generally, on the widespread hostility in American anthropological circles towards the budding Europeanist anthropology, see Cole (1977, pp. 351–355).

11 As readers of Orwell’s satirical novel (1945) know, “All animals are equal” was the seventh and most important of the commandments inscribed on one of the farm walls after the animals’ successful revolution. When the despotic pigs eventually took control of the farm, however, the seven commandments were replaced by a single commandment that ran: “All animals are equal but some animals are more equals than others”.

12 On the potential consequences of doing research in field sites that are “less fully anthropological”, see Gupta and Ferguson (1997, pp. 13–15).

Sibilla started his research in La Thuile, an upland community in the Aosta Valley, Italian anthropology may well have been marginal as compared to Britain, France and the United States, but in Italy, too, anthropology (or *etnologia*) was meant to be essentially the study of distant, preferably primitive peoples. There was, therefore, little sympathy for those who claimed that proper anthropological studies were possible and legitimate also at home: the Alps, like southern Italy, provided an appropriate terrain for folklorists, hardly for true anthropologists.¹³

It would be interesting to investigate whether the low status the Alps held as a suitable field site within Italian anthropology in the 1960s, and possibly still holds today, is to do with the fact that not all Alpine countries are Alpine in the same way and to the same extent. “Alpine country” is a label assigned to France, Italy, Switzerland and Austria, along with Germany, Liechtenstein and Slovenia, in a variety of formal and informal contexts ranging from the Alpine Convention¹⁴ to winter sports. There can be little doubt, however, that the Alps carry far less economic, demographic and symbolic weight in Italy, or France, than in countries like Switzerland, where they have long been a powerful symbol of national identity (Berthoud, 2001), or Austria, especially in the territorially diminished and much more Alpine state that emerged from the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire after the First World War (Johler, 1998, pp. 165–166). In fact, focusing research on the Alpine region helped anthropological and folklore studies to gain institutional respectability in both Switzerland and Austria. However, the enduring prominence of old-style folklore studies ultimately delayed, as Konrad Kuhn has recently argued, “the site-specific re-formation of the discipline at the universities in Switzerland and Austria through the adoption of new, present-oriented analytical perspectives and social science methods” (Kuhn, 2022, p. 260).

13 On the relations between anthropology, ethnology and folklore studies in Italy, see Viazzo (2017).

14 The Alpine Convention is an international treaty promoting the sustainable development of the Alpine region and cross-border collaboration. Opened to signature in 1991, it involves Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland and the European Union. (Source: <https://www.alpconv.org/en/>)

There is one more point which should not be overlooked, though, namely that at least some of the “Americans” were driven to Europe by reasons similar to those that led Pierre Bourdieu, roughly in the same years, to return as an ethnographer to his native Pyrenean village in the Béarn. Having previously worked in Kabylia, he thought that it would have been interesting to do a kind of *Tristes tropiques* in reverse and observe the effects that the “objectification” of his native world would produce (Reed-Danahay, 2004). Bourdieu’s desire to engage in domestic research is somewhat akin to Austrian-born Eric Wolf’s decision to go back to the mountains of South Tyrol where he had spent his holidays as a child. Wolf’s case is a reminder that some “Americans” were actually European by birth¹⁵ and were therefore able to claim native status. This is just one of the many indications that the category of “native anthropologist” is far more complex and nuanced than is usually assumed. It is a matter of degree and possibly dissonant and conflicting recognition by different groups, from the “local community” of the villagers among whom fieldwork is conducted to the national and international disciplinary communities of anthropologists.

All anthropologists must cross boundaries to “enter” the community they want to study and live in. It is my impression that such boundaries may prove surprisingly numerous and insidious for those who want to study village communities in nearby and seemingly familiar Alpine areas. This is a point I have made elsewhere (Viazzo, 2003), largely on the basis of my own field experience. The village in the Italian Alps I studied in the early 1980s is located only some 100 kilometres from the place where I was born: yet, the boundary between my native rice-growing plains and the adjacent, steep mountain valleys was very evident. Moreover, the village where I did my fieldwork was German-speaking, an “exotic” feature that contributed to undermine my status as a (quasi-)native. My impressions have been confirmed by two books written by Italian anthropologists who have worked in the Italian Alps. Although he was neither a native nor a local resident, Jaro Stacul’s study of two

15 Another notable case is that of Leopold Pospisil, who was born in present-day Czech Republic and carried out his research in the Tyrolean village of Obernberg in the 1960s. For an early use of his Alpine field material, see Pospisil (1971, pp. 322–335), where he proposes a comparative formal analysis of inheritance laws in Tyrol and among the Kapauku of Papua New Guinea. His monumental, and definitive, book on Obernberg’s peasant economy was published only a quarter of a century later (Pospisil, 1995).

villages in the Vanoi, a valley in Italy's Trentino province, one of the Trentino valleys, met most of the requirements for being classified as anthropology at home. Until the First World War, however, this Italian-speaking area had been part of the Austrian Empire. In a valley that still preserved vivid memories of its Habsburg past, Stacul (2003) did not feel completely at home, especially when the local people referred to him as "the Italian", a term used by these Italian citizens to designate outsiders. The case of Cristina Grasseni (2009) is even more paradoxical. Born in a mid-sized town in the north of Italy located on the edge of the Alps, she had to work hard to overcome the qualms and feelings of guilt generated by her desire to do fieldwork not in faraway places but in the nearby mountains – only to discover that once in the field, in spite of minimal distance and no linguistic barrier to negotiate, she was not regarded (and did not regard herself) as a "native".

This helps us understand why Sibilla (2004, pp. viii-ix) speaks of a "presumed" or "deceiving" domesticity of the Alps, thus implying that "they may turn out to be more exotic than domestic, if by exoticism we mean what appears to us to be distant and different". Indeed, one all-important feature of the Alpine region and possibly of the whole Circum-Alpine area is that they are at the same time close and remote, strange and familiar. Their "remoteness", to use Edwin Ardener's (1987) notion, has always set them apart not only from the surrounding plains but also from the urban world and from the eighteenth-century savants, who were the first to climb the valleys for scientific purposes, and their modern successors, the anthropologists, whether born in an "Alpine country" such as Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy or Slovenia, or in Northern Europe or America. Unlike other parts of the Old World, the mountains of Europe tend therefore to constitute a sort of liminal zone ambiguously suspended between the domestic and the exotic (Viazzo, 2003). Placed right "in the heart of Europe", to quote the title of a famous book (Veyret and Veyret, 1967), the Alps have nevertheless been long perceived as a pocket of primitive and scarcely European customs and beliefs. It is no accident that the exploration of the Alps and the exploration of the Pacific took place roughly in the same period and in surprisingly similar ways, producing largely similar representations of native life (Walter, 1996).¹⁶

16 See also Schär (2015).

The “Local” and the “Newcomer”, Or: Who Are the Keepers of Alpine Culture?

“High in remote Alpine valleys”, Anderson wrote in the early 1970s, “change comes more slowly than in villages on the plain. Peasant traditions hang on more persistently” (Anderson, 1973, p. 69). The opportunity to observe social and cultural change in slow motion and the associated survival of peasant traditions were central to making the Alpine region, and its communities, interesting field sites for anthropologists. Nevertheless, it was patent that a growing number of marginal Alpine villages were becoming purely residual communities. Anthropologists were aware that for centuries seasonal migration had been a feature of upland regions and that surplus population had been reduced through permanent migration: but this process, as Bailey mournfully remarked, “remained one of emigration; it was not yet depopulation. [...] Sufficient people were left on the land and in the families to keep the family farm going and to maintain a highly complex labour-intensive farming programme. The mountain communities, at least, were left intact”. Since the end of the Second World War all this had changed and the final demise of peasant farming in mountain areas was now in sight (Bailey, 1971a, p. 33). The gloomy pictures painted by Bailey, and others, while capturing important strands of economic and social change in the Alps, may easily obscure the fact that demographic decline was not uniform throughout the Alpine crescent, and depopulation far more severe in the French and Italian Alps than in the Swiss and Austrian Alps (Bätzing, 2003, pp. 271–298). What is more, even in the same region, or in the same valley, while some or most villages lost population, others were gaining new inhabitants primarily because of the economic alternative provided by tourism. Broadly speaking, the attitude of the first ethnographers who witnessed tourist development in the Alps was diffident or plainly hostile. This is partly explained by the realisation that “many new resort developments were owned by outside (and sometimes foreign) companies and that local people found only menial, low paying jobs in their home communes” (Hartley, 2006, p. 7). More generally, Alpine anthropologists shared with their colleagues who had stumbled across tourism in other parts of the world a dislike for the intrusion of external values and new economic incentives into indigenous communities that could

scarcely claim to have been left intact. Even when the growth of tourism was accompanied by a revitalisation of rituals, they felt – to use a famous phrase coined in a different context to describe comparable situations (Greenwood, 1977) – that local people were “selling culture by the pound”.

In the intervening years this attitude towards tourism and its effects has mollified, and anthropologists studying Alpine societies are no exception. It is now conceded not only that tourism has prevented complete depopulation in some areas,¹⁷ but also that it has often played a decisive role in supporting Alpine farming and livestock production, thereby helping preserve traditional agricultural and pastoral practices, and even in ensuring the survival of festivals and other rituals that would have otherwise been doomed. Indeed, while earlier anthropological observers tended to criticize tourism as a destructive force for authenticity and creative expression, later research has suggested that commoditization does not necessarily destroy the meaning of rituals and cultural products, although it may change it or add new meanings to old ones. Attention has been drawn, in particular, to the role of co-creation and to processes of “communal creativity” that can develop and involve both locals and tourists and are best analysed by sharpening such notions as creativity, authenticity and sincerity (cf. Viazzo and Zanini, 2014, pp. 4–5).

Rather paradoxically, hamlets which had been abandoned because of their geographical and productive marginality – and therefore left “intact” – are now in a better position to reap the benefits and opportunities offered by modernity and its demand for uncontaminated authenticity, which is closely intertwined, in such sanctuaries of tradition as the Alps, with heritage tourism. Precociously deserted villages, once considered to be lagging behind, have now acquired (or may acquire in the future) a modern or innovative status. They can become the sites of ecomuseums, be repopulated by tourists looking for rustic second homes, or even attract people who are desirous to settle in the mountains to escape from the cities and to make a living by reviving old local crafts (Crivelli, Petite and Rudaz, 2007). Yet it would be wrong to infer that tourist development has been everywhere a success story. While there is still widespread agreement that the timing of entry into the tourist economy is a critical factor in sustainable development, it has been

¹⁷ See Alpine Convention (2015, pp. 36–37) and, for a recent ethnographic study, Nöbauer (2022, p. 129).

argued that an even more decisive factor is represented by local control, the ability by local communities to direct, regulate or at least exert some meaningful influence on the processes set in motion by tourism (Hartley, 2006, pp. 11–14; Sibilla and Viazzo, 2009, pp. 223–227). This, however, immediately raises an issue of the utmost anthropological and political significance, namely: who are the locals?

For centuries Alpine communities have been accustomed to emigration. Less so, with the exception of mining districts, to immigration. Several studies had already noticed that this had changed with the advent of tourism: as Julie Hartley (2006, p. 9) has remarked, “when a village embraces tourism, its social structure must shift to accommodate the tourists and resident outsiders, who become part of village life”. Although this has been known for a while, the situation has now become far more complex and delicate. From the mid-nineteenth to the late-twentieth century the Alps suffered a severe and apparently irreversible demographic decline, but in the past few decades signs of recovery have surfaced and there is now mounting evidence of a reversal. Since the natural balance of births and deaths still remains negative or steady almost everywhere in the Alps, population growth, or even mere stability, is chiefly due to the immigration of new inhabitants, coming not only from lower Alpine reaches and cities on nearby plains but also from further afield. Such a population turnover has profound implications, particularly in the French and Italian Alps, where the numbers of permanent residents had mostly plunged to exceedingly low levels; the arrival of these “new highlanders”, even when modest in absolute terms, can potentially be highly significant within circumscribed local contexts (Bender and Kanitscheider, 2012; Löffler et al., 2014).

When talking about the Alps, politicians, planners and even social scientists often write about “local communities” as if there were monolithic populations inhabiting these valleys from time immemorial and exhibiting harmoniously shared views. The largely unexpected socio-demographic developments of the past few decades inescapably beg many questions which had been almost presciently posed twenty years ago by Enrico Camanni (2002): what should we mean by “local communities”? Who are their members? Or, to put it differently and more provocatively: who do the Alps belong to? Virtually everywhere in the Alps there used to be fairly clear-cut boundaries sep-

arating what in the German-speaking Swiss Alps is known as *Bürgergemeinde*, the “community of citizens”, from the more volatile and usually smaller population made up of those who lived or worked in a village but could not boast local family roots. In some sectors of the Alps these boundaries have dissolved in the course of lengthy processes of state formation; in others they have weakened but survive to the present day, and the control over communal resources they granted to the “community of citizens” has played a major role in moulding economic and tourist development. This pattern of differential access to material resources would seem, however, more and more difficult to defend in villages where descendants of the community’s “historical families” can account for just a modest percentage of the inhabitants.

Things are even more intricate when we turn to culture and intangible heritage. Ethnographic observation reveals that it is often the newcomers who are keenest to preserve and promote the culture of places where they have only recently settled (Membretti and Viazzo, 2019, pp. 27–28). Sometimes, this cultural activism is welcomed by an ageing “local” population; sometimes it is resented as an intrusion, a sort of misappropriation. This is a new situation which invites anthropologists to address classic and still topical questions: can one be a highlander only by descent or also by choice? Can newcomers legitimately be entitled to become the heirs and the keepers of local culture? Should local culture remain as much as possible the same lest it suffers further impoverishment, as some fear, or there is room for creativity and adaptation to a changing world, as others maintain?

It cannot be ignored that some eminent cultural geographers have indeed expressed fear that the arrival of new inhabitants in the Alps may prove a threat, especially to linguistic minority groups (Steinicke et al., 2011), but more generally to Alpine local cultures (Bender and Kanitscheider, 2012, p. 240). Steinicke and his associates, in particular, are worried by the emergence of what they call a “diffuse ethnicity”, grounded not so much in linguistic competence as in subjective assertions of belonging by new highlanders eager to claim the right to promote and enhance local culture: “We are witnessing”, they lament (Steinicke et al. 2011, p. 6), “the emergence of a new awareness, whereby standard language and language competency no longer constitute the most important elements for identifying ethnic groups. Instead,

ethnic identity is increasingly expressed through subjective factors (ethnic self-assessment)".

In anthropology, of course, Fredrik Barth's famous intimation that the critical focus of investigation should be "the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses" (Barth, 1969, p. 15) has implied a paradigm shift in the study of ethnicity, whereby critical importance is now attributed precisely to the actors' subjective views and to the strategies they adopt to establish group boundaries by pointing to specific markers that distinguish them from ethnic others (Wimmer, 2009, pp. 250–251). The anthropologists' task is thus to convince other Alpine scholars that "diffuse ethnicities" should not be seen as synonymous with cultural loss and destruction or mere usurpation, but rather as the outcome of interactions and delicate negotiations between locals and migrants, which must be studied in depth and with attention to local contexts.

Between Remoteness and a New Centrality: Whither Alpine Anthropology?

In his still inspiring paper on "remote areas", Edwin Ardener (1987, p. 41) noted that mountains are remote almost by definition, but he contended that while remoteness has necessarily a position in topographical space, it is crucially defined "within a topological space whose features are expressed in a cultural vocabulary". Remoteness is, therefore, not the same as physical distance: it is, rather, a perception from elsewhere, from an outside standpoint, and not all purely geographical peripheries are remote, only those that are "not properly linked to the dominant zone. They are perceptions from the dominant zone, not part of its codified experience" (Ardener, 1987, pp. 49–50). The Alps are a very good case in point. Although they lie in the very heart of Europe, they have long been perceived and represented by European centres as culturally distant – and, we may add, as inescapably "primitive", socially isolated and economically backward (Viazzo, 2021b).

From the middle of the nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century such a perception of cultural distance between contrasting ways of life was further underpinned by a process of modernisation which marginalised the

Alps, turning them into a depopulated periphery carrying decreasing economic, political as well as demographic weight. However, the recent reversal of this trend signalled by the arrival of “new highlanders” points to several significant and interrelated changes. The Swiss historian Jon Mathieu (2015, pp. 161–163) has hinted that if Alpine depopulation was ultimately the product of modernity, Alpine repopulation might well be emblematic of postmodernity. Although the mountains now appear to be particularly fragile spaces in the face of global phenomena like climate change or the outbreak of epidemic diseases, like other remote areas they are nevertheless looked at with growing interest as places of opportunities. As has been rightly noted (Dematteis, 2018, pp. 5–6), “the diversity of the mountain environment is now perceived as a set of economic, cultural, aesthetic, and existential values, not only complementary but also partly alternative to the urban values”. The Alps are thus attracting not only vacationers, but also new residents, multilocal residents who split their time between mountainous and urban locations (Elmi and Perlik, 2014), new farmers, and innovative entrepreneurs. A positive vision is replacing previously dominant, mainly negative images, and geographers, sociologists and territorial planners are increasingly talking of a “new centrality” of the Alps and more generally of the mountains (Dematteis, 2018; Bolognesi and Corrado, 2021).

We may wonder whether this “new centrality” of the Alps will help, or spur, Alpine anthropology to regain a more central position on the international anthropological scene. The time of potential tensions, but also of frequently fruitful exchanges, between “American” and “native” anthropologists is gone. The Alpine valleys are now mostly studied by researchers coming from nearby universities and the circulation of the results of these investigations often remain circumscribed within national or even regional boundaries. Only very few PhD students are today keen to cross the Atlantic (or the Channel) to flock to that upland region which Eric Wolf (1972, p. 201) had described as a “magnificent laboratory” for the anthropologist who was looking for experimental settings where the relative strength of ecology and ethnicity could be assessed. Yet, nearly twenty-five years ago two researchers from the French Research Institute for Agricultural and Environmental Engineering had already suggested that, owing to the socio-demographic changes they were experiencing, the mountains could prove an excellent “laboratory

of social and institutional innovation” (Brun and Perrin, 2001, p. 38). A laboratory for those who live in the mountains – people of local descent as well as new highlanders – variously trying to relaunch traditional activities in partly new forms or to graft business opportunities usually provided by urban surroundings onto radically different environments (Dematteis, 2018, pp. 5–6). But a laboratory, too, for sociologists, anthropologists and human geographers interested in observing and analysing these economic, micropolitical and socio-cultural processes.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Brun and Perrin’s article also indicated that mountain areas offered privileged and perhaps unique conditions to study phenomena which require a combined effort from the natural and the social sciences: changes due to climate dysregulation, sustainable development, environmental diversity (Brun and Perrin, 2001, pp. 33–37). These are some of the urgent issues towards which Alpine anthropology is almost bound to move progressively in the future. One can detect significant lines of continuity with the past: an ecological approach, as we have seen, was a trademark of Alpine anthropology in its very first days; and “ecology” and “change” are still its two key-words as they were in the early 1970s. Ecological anthropology itself has, however, changed considerably. In an article published just before the end of the last century, Conrad Kottak noticed that some of the fundamental tenets and goals of what he called “the old ecological anthropology” looked more and more questionable: “the new ecological anthropology”, he admonished, “must be careful not to remove local people and their specific social and cultural forms from the analytic framework” as the old ecological anthropology had done, and he believed that one major task of “the new, or environmental, anthropology” was to blend theory and analysis with political awareness and policy concerns (Kottak, 1999, 23–24, 31). Climate change has played a major role in accelerating the transition to a new environmental anthropology, with a research agenda that now ranges from political ecology to the study of indigenous environmental knowledge and multispecies ethnography (Crate, 2011; Orr, Lansing and Doves, 2015).

The melting of Alpine glaciers, one of the most visible and incontrovertible indicators of contemporary global warming, points symbolically and operationally the way forward for Alpine anthropological studies, as exemplarily demonstrated by recent studies on perceptions of and responses to

glacier retreat conducted by a research team led by the anthropologist Ben Orlove. These studies convincingly show that glacier retreat is differentially perceived by those who look at the mountains from afar and by those who live close to the melting glaciers: while the former draw of what Orlove and colleagues call a climate change frame, which focuses attention on global changes and the need for global solutions, the latter mostly draw on a community frame which “recognizes that societies in remote rural areas occupy a marginal position within national politics” and “emphasizes a ‘we’ of local societies”. A community frame identifies both negative challenges and positive opportunities and most residents appear to believe that they can “address challenges and take advantage of opportunities, drawing on core values of local society (the strength of local identity, the importance of local self-reliance) and mobilizing their social ties and local organizations” (Orlove et al., 2019, p. 1299).

The attitudes of highlanders to glacier retreat were explored mainly through ethnographic research in three sites located in as many glaciated regions of the world: the village of Sopa in the Peruvian Andes, two small towns in the North Cascades region of the United States and the municipality of Stilfs/Stelvio in the South Tyrol. A few years earlier, a group of anthropologists including Ben Orlove had claimed that especially anthropology’s in-depth fieldwork methodology yields valuable insights which can enrich and deepen our understanding of climate change, and lamented that the discipline’s voice in climate change debates had remained a relatively marginal one until then (Barnes et al., 2013). These investigations of perceptions, attitudes and emotions in three localities which have been directly affected by glacier retreat for over 40 years, and their intriguing results, vindicate the usefulness and potentialities of anthropological community studies and are likely to be corroborated by further ethnographic research.

The distinctive features and potentialities of ethnographic approaches in the study of climate change are clearly spelled out by Barnes, Orlove and colleagues in their 2013 article: addressing a non-anthropological readership, they underline that anthropologists “typically conduct research over extended periods of time in a single community or set of communities, gradually building relations of trust with research subjects, closely observing people’s everyday activities, interactions and conversations, and conducting in-

interviews". This enables them to recognize that the communities they have studied "are not homogenous, isolated, static or all-knowing", but also to argue that "local observations of changes in the climate and local mechanisms developed to deal with those changes can lead to contextualized understandings of climate change impacts and thereby inform adaptation policy" (Barnes et al., 2013, p. 541).

Although not yet as numerous as one might desire, ethnographic investigations are indeed providing valuable insights, as shown by two recent studies where a focus on tourism (or the lack of it) is instrumental in shedding light on some aspects of human-environment relations and their complexities. Herta Nöbauer (2022, p. 126) reports how, in the course of her fieldwork in a high-altitude glacier ski resort in Tyrol, she increasingly realized that ski areas are "highly moralized and politicized from diverging standpoints": while environmentalists accused ski resort companies of destroying nature, most of those who lived and worked in the resort retorted that environmentalists and environmental laws were jeopardising the very survival of economically and demographically threatened upland populations. Nöbauer's analysis of this blame game, and especially her sympathetic exploration of local people's attitudes toward tourism, work, nature, snow and the melting of glaciers allow a subtler understanding of the articulation of local and global views and of the ways in which this "frontline community" is adapting to changes in the landscape and the availability of snow.

No less revealing perspectives on local views of tourism and nature come from a study of two valleys in Italy's Trentino province where tourism is conspicuously absent. As Alessandro Rippa rightly notes, "while there are many studies of the effect of tourism development in the Alps, less attention has been paid to places in which tourism remains largely absent – yet in which the *narrative* of tourism development remains overwhelmingly present" (Rippa, 2024, p. 2; emphasis in original). The inhabitants of these valleys, whose landscape is undergoing a process of rewilding due to the abandonment of mountain agriculture, often confess that they feel "behind" compared to other places where tourism has become the backbone of local economies. However, most initiatives to foster tourism are met with scepticism and receive little support. The main reason, according to Rippa, resides in the sentiments the rewilding landscape generates in the locals: a sense of loss but also an

intimate and embodied tie with the land nourished by memories that would risk to be erased by the advent of tourism. Hence, a very ambiguous perception of tourism, “pointing at a hidden – and often not-explicit – resistance to ‘hosting’” (Rippa, 2024, p. 8). Significantly, the only successful tourism initiatives are those that aim at the celebration and valorisation of the cultural heritage of the valleys.

In-depth ethnographic investigations of this kind are all the more necessary in the Alps in view of the sizeable population turnover recorded over the past decades. Whether we are dealing with attitudes to climate change or, rather, with other delicate issues such as access to local resources or the costs and benefits of tourism development, we can scarcely avoid reflecting about what insiders, outsiders and anthropologists mean by local mountain communities. What is their social, economic and demographic composition? To what extent do the attitudes, and interests, of old and new highlanders converge? These are only few of the many questions that must be raised and addressed in order to go beyond hasty and deceptive generalizations.

The largely unexpected changes that have affected the Alps since the beginning of the twenty-first century – from the settlement of new inhabitants to the hastened melting of their glaciers and the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic – have given this mountainous region a new image and possibly a new centrality as a laboratory of social innovation and a space of cultural creativity. However, the Alps are also an arena where natives and newcomers negotiate their claims and may stage in various contexts their identities. And, no less importantly, they provide an invaluable vantage point from which the perceptions of environmental risk in “frontline communities” can be observed and compared to those of people who know and live the mountains from afar. Whose Alps are these? It is a thorny question faced by citizens and politicians as well as by scholars (Varotto and Castiglioni, 2012). Although they may not be able to provide definite answers, anthropological studies have an unparalleled potential to bring to light the subtle complexities of the entangled local situations where tensions, conflicts or, alternatively, cooperative endeavours arise. For Alpine anthropology, engaging with these situations is a duty and also an opportunity to bring back these remote lands to the centre of anthropological attention.

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Where Do the Alps End?

Reflections on Practices of Locality and Future-Making in the Italian Alpine Region

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Abstract

Where do the Alps end? This chapter locates the Southern Alps between the local and the global, the highlands and the lowlands, the rural and the urban. Through literature review and ethnography conducted in Lombardy, I reflect on the ecological, cultural, and economic dimensions of heritage, and of “working landscapes” as common resources for futurity.

Drawing on recent scholarship on the transformations of the Alpine landscape and on local discussions on the interplay between socio-economic forces and ecological change, the “alps” emerge as a node in a web of flows, a place of significance for its inhabitants and for the history of the dairy industry, increasingly regarded also for its microbiomic wealth.

This foregrounds an attention to practices of locality, their positioning in more-than-local flows, and their historicity. Central to the development of this argument is the history and ethnography of pasture-use, of dairy farming and cheese-making, and of transhumance and *alpeggio* (*alpage*) in particular. While the sedentarisation of transhumance led to the rich dairy industry in the Po lowlands, the tradition of summer grazing on the higher pastures has been “heritagised” to brand mountain cheese, as a revitalization of local ways of life. The language of typicity is key to this imagery, triangulating between local livelihoods, national and European policy, and global markets.

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Introduction: The Alps as a Node in a Web of Flows

In today's globalised scenario, the identity of the Alpine region seems to blur. Causal interrelations between ecological systems and cultural systems have been diffracted, complicated and reinvented, against the backdrop of global issues such as climate change, demographic challenges, and the vulnerability and inequality of global commodity chains. At the same time the Alps are a topos of various forms of escapes to the country including, for example, digital nomadism, ecotourism, neo-ruralism, and heritagization. This complex scenario warrants the question "Where do the Alps end?". Is there something that pertains to the Alpine region in its own right, warranting an "Alpine turn" for any of the mentioned topics, for example? Building on my research, I will refer in this text solely to the Southern Alps and mainly to the Italian part of it.

Ethnographers have maintained a broad interest in the Alps through various academic generations, albeit under different headings: alongside ethnographic monographs and anthropological fieldwork in and around the Alps there is a rich literature on oral history, material culture, and linguistic anthropology. For example LabiSAlp (Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi) joins the efforts of the international Association for the History of the Alps (AISA) at the Architecture Academy of the Italian Swiss University in Mendrisio, studying interdisciplinary aspects (economic, social, cultural, demographic and political) of the alpine region.² The Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina at San Michele all'Adige has carried out a commendable editorial activity, translating classics of alpine anthropology into Italian and holding a permanent seminar of alpine ethnology (SPEA) with published proceedings between 1991 and 2010.³

The Alpine regions have inspired historical and environmental research of contemporary relevance (see for example the works of Jon Mathieu, 2009, and Robert McNetting, 1981). Studies of material culture and local history continue to influence museum practice (see for example Merisi, 2011). Lin-

2 www.arc.usi.ch/labisalp. In 2009 LABiSAlp held a conference to identify new and ongoing lines of research 'between history and anthropology', to mark the twenty-year anniversary of the publication of Upland communities. Environment, population and social structure in the Alps since the sixteenth century (Viazzo, 1989).

3 See <http://www.museosanmichele.it/>

guistic anthropologists have rekindled an interest for dialect and mobility as forms of cultural heritage.⁴ In Italy, the principle of safeguarding historical minority languages was introduced with Law 482/1999, triggering the re-discovery of minority languages, and dialects in general, in relation to local identities.⁵

Mobility lies at the heart of the Italian Alps. According to Glauco Sanga (2001), its economy is historically characterized by a binary model, based on gendered labour division complementing (women's) pastoral economy with (men's) migration as seasonal labourers, which was highly structured, skilled, and economically rewarding. For example the Premanesi, inhabitants of Premana in the province of Lecco (Lombardy), migrated seasonally from Valsassina to Venice where they ran an artisan community of ironmongers (Sanga et al., 1979). As Pier Paolo Viazzo's classic *Upland Communities* shows (with particular reference to his study of Alagna at the head of Valsesia in Piedmont), from at least the late sixteenth century until World War II, seasonal migration has been both a structural factor in integrating local economic resource, and an efficient way to control birth rate, as mirrored in the seasonality of birth dates (1989, pp. 129–132). Winter migration would include salaried professions in city guilds of carpenters, lumberjacks, smithies, builders, decorators, stonemasons and carriers.

Similarly, until the 1950's in the lower pre-Alps of Lombardy, most of the male mountain villagers would spend a substantial amount of the year in France or Switzerland working as lumberjacks or builders. The end of seasonal migration as a working pattern (after World War II) led to the mushrooming of small and medium enterprises in the carpentry and building sectors. However, with the availability of factory employment in the nearby cities, and sometimes also in the lower reaches of one's own valley, an irreversible tendency to resettlement in the lowlands began. In the valley where I conducted fieldwork, Val Taleggio, this can be clearly traced in the registers of the municipalities. In Vedeseta alone, for example, between 1950 and 1955, 258

4 Jillian Cavanaugh for example has observed a dialect revival in the city of Bergamo (2009). For a thorough linguistic analysis of the Bergamasque dialect, see Glauco Sanga (1987, 3 vols.).

5 Law 15 December 1999, n. 482 'Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche', Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 297, 20 1999. See Porcellana (2007) on the Franco-Provençal linguistic koinè.

people “emigrated” (namely took up residence elsewhere). This number alone exceeds the number of current residents (193 in 2022).⁶

Strategies for and imaginaries of the Italian Alps diverge according to ways of thinking their relationship to the lowlands and to global commodity flows. For example, mountain cheese is celebrated as a form of heritage, using the language of *tipicità* (typicity or typicality, Ceccarelli et al. 2013).⁷ In what follows, I will reflect on what makes the alps a place, a topos, and a biome, in ways that trouble neat distinctions between the local and the global, the highlands and the lowlands, the rural and the urban. I offer the concept of practices of locality, which I envisage as nodes in more-than-local flows. In particular I will reflect on cheese as patrimony (heritage) and as commons (a working landscape), unsettling traditional notions of tradition as sedentary and bounded. I begin by focusing in the next section on the alps – namely the high pastures, traditionally used for seasonal grazing of cattle herds during the summer season (*alpeggio*). I will show how in this last decade, caring for the alps (grass, cows, and milk) has begun to mean also care for the microbiome and concern for future-making.

The Alps. A Place in the World?⁸

In my work on Val Taleggio I followed the transformation of dairy farming and cheese-making culminating in the bestowing of a PDO trademark for *Strachitunt* cheese, arguing that the logistics of all-year production and the stringent production protocol which anchors it to the boundaries of Val Taleg-

6 As per the online demographics available at www.comune.vedeseta.bg.it

7 See Bergamo as UNESCO Creative City (<https://www.bergamocittacreativa.it/>). This recent recognition as Creative City for gastronomy, on a par with Alba and Parma, was sought and obtained in 2019. UNESCO’s Creative Cities is a networking program aimed to support designated cities to develop existing economies based on their traditional strengths. In Italy there are another nine creative cities namely Bologna and Pesaro for music, Fabriano, Carrara, and Biella for crafts, Rome for cinema, Turin for design, Milan for literature. In the case of Bergamo, its “Cheese Valleys” were profiled as a keystone for UNESCO recognition, building on local production consortia of cheeses made exclusively in the Bergamasque mountains.

8 A Place in the World is the working title of an unpublished manuscript by Paola Filipucci which has greatly influenced my understanding of practices of locality. I am grateful to have been able to read it in the early years 2000 and to have rediscussed this topic more recently with the author.

gio alone, made of Strachítunt a sedentary reinvention of what was originally a “transhumant cheese” (Grasseni, 2009, 2017). Ageing cheese in mountain caves was a historical trade of Val Taleggio, where family firms still mature and export cheese (nowadays in climate-controlled refrigerated vaults). Transhumant trails to the Lombard plains were part of a broader network which used Alpine passes connecting for example Switzerland and Italy, and which could extend over hundreds of kilometres, walked in a seasonal itinerant cycle (Mathieu, 2001). In his 1882 agricultural survey of the Italian kingdom, Count Stefano Jacini stated that “the word *stracchino* derives from the small soft cheeses produced during the journey from the mountains to the lowland and vice versa. They make it swiftly in their resting stations, with milk from tired cows after their long journey” (1882, p. 25). The image he conjures is that the herders could not heat the milk and would curdle it at milking temperature, hastily. Transhumant herders were *necessarily* also cheese-makers. They would transform their milk in makeshift stations, while taking the cattle from the upper pastures of the Lombard Alps after summer grazing to the lower reaches of the rivers Ticino and Adda for the winter.

Up until World War II, transhumance was thus simply one of the many mobile professions that complemented income in the mountains of Bergamo. Despite contemporary stereotypes, the transhumant herders and cheese-makers known as Bergamini were not poor – as they owned their often numerous herds. However, they lived like “nomads” contrary to common social conventions (Jacini, 1882, p. 25) and for this reason they were equally scorned by the sedentary but cash-strapped sharecroppers of the lowlands, by waged agricultural workers, and by the resident population of mountain villages (Corti, 2006), who relied on subsistence agriculture (notably animal husbandry, as crops were scarce) and the remits of migrant labour. Unlike the guilds of ironmongers and similar crafts, the Bergamini were not organized into associations: they were individuals related to extended families, according to Jacini (1882, p. 25) owning up to a hundred productive heifers but reduced to herds as small as fifteen cows in living memory (Carminati and Locatelli, 2004, p. 414). Following recent local research on the Bergamini, their culture seems to have been conservative and patriarchal but freed from the bonds of the mountain villages from which they came. They could afford to live a “masculine” life at the borders of acceptable societal arrangements: oral

testimonies register comments about the fact that the Begamini, all male and heads of households, might live away from their families for months or did not bother to go to church (Corti, 2006).

This does not necessarily clash with the communitarian organization of summer grazing in the upper pastures, often entirely delegated to resident women (Sanga, 2001). Transhumance and high pasture grazing (*alpeggio* in Italian, *alpage* in French) are in fact two distinct but overlapping working routines. Transhumance was an all-year-round itinerant model of pasturing. (In the case of sheep flocks, this is partly still surviving, though very marginally.) The transhumance of cattle herds was associated with the travelling cheese-makers and the dairy industry. *Alpeggio* is a shorter displacement of cattle (and sometimes goats) to the higher grazing pastures from the residential mountain village, and continues to this day. In some cases, the *alpeggio* pastures constituted the highest station of longer transhumant trails, too. Both transhumance and *alpeggio* regarded cattle, but cattle transhumance has completely disappeared, also from the social imaginary, while *alpeggio* is safeguarded as traditional, mentioned in PDO cheese-making protocols, and subsidized with agricultural aid. One should think of *alpeggio* as a residual, contracted reminiscence of (cattle) transhumance (Corti, 2006).

Mobile, transhumant herders made cheese. But in his report of 1882, Count Jacini doubts their skills, as they would not be able to control or foretell the quality of the cheese they made. His criticism reminds us of how important but hard-sought the craft of cheese-making was, even at the dawn of industrial food manufacture:

Dairy farmers who make cheese themselves exist, but are few. Generally they sell their milk to dairy industries. But both in the first and in the second case, apt personnel is always lacking, namely, people with that special instruction that is indispensable for good manufacturing. In the year 1881, with so much progress in basic and applied chemistry in the dairy industry, a cheese-maker will talk about the cheese he is making as if it was a gamble. "Will it come out well?" he asks. And in fact some cheeses made in a certain period of the year are called "the gambles" (Jacini, 1882, p. 122, translated by author).⁹

9 Italian original: "I conduttori che fabbricano il formaggio per proprio conto esistono ma sono pochi. Generalmente invece essi vendono il latte ad appositi industriali che eser-

Those who could master the unfathomable art of cheese-making would eventually establish the Lombard dairy industry, which still bears the name of the original families (Arrigoni, Invernizzi, Locatelli, Galbani etc.). Most of these surnames originate in the valleys of Lecco and Bergamo – notably Valsassina, Val Taleggio and the neighbouring Valle Imagna – which together enjoyed access to rich pastures at a relatively low altitude, and to the market of Milan. Different branches of the same family set up, over time, large businesses and competing enterprises. In sum, transhumant herds and a diversified all-year cheese-making economy produced rich cheeses for maturing and stationing while in the high pastures, and fresh cheeses for quick consumption in the winter lowlands. This became the model of the Lombard dairy industry (Grasseni, 2017). With long-distance dairy transhumance gone, the families of cheese-makers eventually settled down in the plains, investing in large-scale dairy creameries, leaving the bothersome business of making upland cheese during the summer grazing season to the (other) mountain people.

Paradoxically, crafts that were historically a ticket for mobility, for connections, for comings and goings, are currently a symbolic device for marketing *locality*. For example, though claiming its pedigree from the practice of *alpeggio*, nowadays Strachitunt PDO is produced all year round and not just in upland pastures. In fact its PDO protocol prescribes that it can only be produced in four municipalities in and around Val Taleggio, which is a mid-mountain environment. Borders are created through the strictures of the protocol itself. Using non-reheated raw milk as per the production protocol guarantees the very short distances that milk can travel. It can move from a shed to a creamery, even from one village to another within the same valley, but it cannot travel far. This raw-milk cheese is sedentary by definition – an ironic result, which eventually sedentarizes its original transhumant tradition.

Several other studies have investigated heritage food production in alpine and near-alpine areas, for example in conjunction with the debate around processes of “heritagisation” of intangible cultural heritage (Bendix, 2009).

citano il caseificio. Ma tanto nel primo caso quanto nel secondo, manca sempre il personale adatto all'uopo, fornito cioè di quella istruzione speciale che è indispensabile per il buon andamento dell'industria. In pieno 1881, con tanti progressi della chimica generale e della chimica applicata al caseificio, un casaro vi parla di un formaggio che sta fabbricando come di una giuocata al lotto. 'Chi sa se riuscirà?' dice egli. Ed è perciò che determinate quantità di formaggi prodotti in un dato periodo si sogliono chiamare le sorti”.

The alpine territories and their diverse forms of mobile, seasonal and circular pastoral economy (such as transhumance and alpeggio) have harnessed market-oriented dynamics of value-addition (Aime, 2001; Allovio, 2001; Viazzo and Woolf, 2001), national and super-national certifications such as designations of origin and other types of geographical indications (Ledinek, 2021) as well as UNESCO recognitions (Valentinčič Furlan, 2015). However, upland terrains challenge economic models based on “scaling” and standardization (Porcellana and Corrado, 2010). Talking to socio-economic actors that are active in the animal husbandry and dairy sector in Italy, one will not fail to register that added costs due to difficult logistics and (lack of) infrastructure are high up on the list of complaints and concerns. My field interlocutors never fail to point out to city dwellers the effort this implies:

We have always made these cheeses. My father has made them all his life and my son goes with him to the *alpeggio*. Keep in mind that when we are at our winter station, we say *fondovalle*, bottom of the valley, but that means 1,000 meters above sea level. When we are in the high pastures we are at 2,000 meters. So life is pretty hard all year round. (Aronne, pseudonym. Salone del Gusto Slow Food, 21 October 2004, video recorded)

Taking altitude seriously means considering logistics (thus costs), infrastructure and mobility.¹⁰ This is true of any industry dealing with the specificities of mountain environments (for example lumberjacks). Next I will turn to novel ways in which the environmental and cultural specificities of the alps are being researched and theorized.

Alpine Summer Pastures as Microbiomic Topoi

Among the new theoretical approaches gaining traction also within Alpine research, are the multispecies and “microbial” turns (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010; Paxson and Helmreich, 2014, Raffaetà, 2021), which were preceded by environmental anthropological research of longer date (Breda, 2000;

¹⁰ See for example the work of the association Dislivelli (www.dislivelli.eu) and their several publications on challenges as well as opportunities of new ways of living in the Alps, for example neo-rural settlements (Corrado, 2010).

see Raffaetà, 2020, p. 33). This research takes into consideration the challenged environment, biodiversity, and microbial patrimony of the Alps. The microbiome co-defines natural and human-made environments, and their reciprocal significance for our own survival (Paxson and Helmreich, 2014). Roberta Raffaetà in particular analyzes the role of ferments in the production of *alpage* cheese, and their connection to broader “politics of space, heritage, and ownership in times of ecological, social, scientific, and economic transition” (2021, p. 323). Following Munn (1990), she sees cheese-making as a fermentation technology that negotiates “spacetimes” in ways that are relevant and instrumental to future-making. As she puts it, “discussing how fermentation is managed and perceived gives us the opportunity to reflect on who owns the Alps and leads to a debate on how to constitute sustainable and just futures” (2021, p. 323). Furthermore, building on long-term research in medical anthropology and on microbial cultures (Raffaetà, 2020), she states that “fermentation plays a key role in scientific innovation as well as in social innovation as to how the Alps will be assigned value and ownership.”

Raffaetà works with the notion of “spacetime” to express the multiple and sometimes conflictual worldviews associated with the *tipicità* (typicity) of mountain cheeses. She critically analyses a labelled certification introduced in 2016 by the Trento Chamber of Commerce, whose protocol prescribes using “a starter made of selected microbial strains found in *malga* cheeses” (*malga* indicating the cheese-making huts traditionally found on the high pastures). Raffaetà asks: “Is it possible to imagine and advance intellectual property as associated not just with the isolation, selection, purification invention, or manipulation of a biological entity but also with the skillful maintenance, repair, and variable reproduction of an entire ecosystem?” (2021, p. 331). This question is compatible with current cheese-makers’ claims, to be “keepers of raw milk” and “keepers of molds”.¹¹ Communities of practitioners and local stakeholders are beginning to understand the “alps” (including alpine slopes, grass, cows and milking and cheese-making practices) as a complex socio-ecological system, with which a deeper understanding of interactions and dependencies becomes relevant, not only to cheese-making techniques and industries, but also to marketing language and potential customers.

11 See for example www.casarrigoni.it

This conclusion can further be employed to explore choices of technologies, for example, regarding milking. Robotics is being embraced in intensive agriculture. For example, milking robots can tend to the cow 24/7, measuring yield and dispensing personalized rations, adapting it to the cow's lactating curve or degree of wellness, as detected through sensors and computed by algorithms. However, adapting this to the alpine terrain and to the smaller scale of family dairy farming is challenging. Mobile milking stations are perhaps more antiquate but sturdier and simpler to repair, and thus more apt to the *alpage* summer pastures. What the right technology might be, and what the right skills for the job are, is identified and deployed case by case, in very specific "practices of locality", which are defined not only by the local scale, but by how this is connected to a global system. A challenge scarcely represented in the language of heritage is the harsh global competition in which local economic actors have to operate. In the words of a cheese exporter from Val Taleggio:

What I do in my company is trying to understand if and how the breeders, the family, the valley, the economy can still survive in this present moment. Small and medium companies like mine have been bought by huge conglomerates from France, the Netherlands, Germany (I can think of five just in the last six months). So we need to find a marketable space and occupy it ... Otherwise not only we miss a good business opportunity, but I will also see my place die. (Adele Arrigoni, 13 October 2022, audio recorded)

The words of this contemporary mountain entrepreneur explain how important it is, not only in environmental and ecological terms, but also in terms of finding an economic edge, to safeguard the alps microbiome as a construct with consequences. Interdisciplinary and inter-regional research takes inspiration from the ecological expertise and knowledge of alpine communities, investigating the role of "the wild" as both an encroaching danger (woods taking over abandoned pastures for example) and its own endangerment (for example the diminishing biodiversity, the precarious state of mountainous slopes and terrains due to overgrowth, erosion, landslides, drought, fires, and lack of maintenance). Scientific research on traditional knowledge and skills calls for cooperation between natural and social scientists, on issues

such as the transformation of traditional dairy farming (Jurt et al., 2015), gender challenges in mountain family farming (Rossier, 2005), or the potential and challenges of transitions to organic farming (Reissing et al., 2015).

In the following section I will explore the implications of these specificities in terms of “practices of locality”. First I introduce the notion vis-à-vis relevant anthropological literature on heritage, locality and localism (which does not necessarily focus on the Alpine region), then I give some examples of possible collaborations between researchers and local stakeholders in the Italian Alpine region. Finally I connect this back to the reinvention of the countryside for urbanite uses.

Practices of Locality

Locality is a *locus* of identity and aesthetic formation (Meyer, 2009), shaped by practice as an everyday modality of dwelling (Ingold, 2022), a “life world” (Husserl, 1936) that co-produces places of work, play and learning. The language of heritage (*patrimonio, tipicità*) mediates between actual local practices of making a living on the one hand, and market and (local, national, european) policy on the other.

Meaning-making and future-making are enabled by a “working landscape”, namely a landscape that affords the sociality, mobility and economic activities necessary for a community to thrive. Heather Paxson (2012, p. 206) uses the term to describe contemporary Vermont’s “post-pastoral working landscape”, indicating the homestead architecture that continues to be lived in, despite the fact that the local economy no longer hinges on homesteading. This means paying attention to everyday practices (in their new connections to infrastructure and global flows), as they determine which resources are needed for social and physical reproduction (Appel et al., 2018, p. 2). They become lenses through which we mediate the Alpine landscape.

As Paola Filippucci notes, heritage has been convincingly redefined as a field concerned first and foremost with people. Scholars now theorise heritage as a diverse range of “social practices, processes and experiences through which people invest things, sites and practices with value and sentiment, and claim them in collective ownership or guardianship to affirm continuity, au-

thenticity and identity” (2009, p. 320). To invest certain practices and not others with an identity-value means connecting them to a *habitus* that is profoundly emotional as well as material, viscerally tied to place-making and meaning-making through material culture.

Jaro Stacul (2003), Patrick Heady (1999) and myself (2009) studied localism, regionalism and local identities in Trentino, Friuli and Lombardy, in relation to symbolic, ecologic and technological practices – including the self-stereotypization of mountain people as “hard people” and the notion of boundedness and boundaries as an important metaphor to understand local discourse on valued landscapes. This also relates to local aesthetic formations (Meyer, 2009) including conflicts and litigiousness among neighbouring localities (*campanilismo*) about, for example, the allocation of resources from European development funds, but also the prestige of local food and craft traditions.¹² Claims on the landscape itself, as belonging “to those born and raised in a specific locale, namely, those who have a long-standing working relationship with territory” (Stacul, 2010, p. 231) not only apply to place-based foods in the name of *tipicità*, but also to forestry or hunting (see Stacul, 2003, pp. 70–93).¹³ The notion of the rural landscape as a patrimony in need of valorisation (*valorizzazione*) was recorded by Jaro Stacul in Caoria and Ronco in Val Vanoi (Trentino). This register-change followed a shift in policy discourse from a mere agricultural policy to that of a multifunctional, tourist-oriented rural development policy (Stacul, 2010, p. 228).

Based on her fieldwork in Veneto on belonging and locality in and around Bassano del Grappa, Paola Filippucci, an anthropologist working in close conversation with archeology, argues that localism is a symbolic construct that elaborates reflections on temporality and change. She interpretes “practices of locality” as ways of weaving places with memory (Filippucci, 2004),¹⁴

12 On *campanilismo* in Central Italy see Pratt (1986, pp. 140–54). Pratt anticipates a link between the language of *campanilismo* and that of the typicality of local commodities (1986, p. 154).

13 *Tipicità* is variously translated as typicity or “tipicality” (Ceccarelli et al. 2013). It can be broadly understood as ‘heirloom’ but it does not only define food. It can also be extended for example to rural architecture as seen below.

14 Paola Filippucci, Patrizia Messina, Jaro Stacul and myself presented a joint paper (“Knowing the Territory: Territory, Identity, and Local Culture in Northern Italy”) in 1997 at the Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Modern Italy (London, November 21st) exploring the concept of practices of locality.

analysing the uses of memory to frame the present in Bassano del Grappa and in the valley of the river Brenta (1992), but also in the Argonnes (2004b). Using participant observation, visual analysis of primary sources and material culture (postcards for example, see 2004b) as well as life histories, she examines intergenerational dialogue in the narration and representation of place, and interrogates how they are used to express belonging and locality.

My own 2003 monograph *Lo Sguardo della Mano*, based on fieldwork conducted in *alpeggio*¹⁵ in 1996, 1997 and in the village of Vedeseta in 1998, was about the labour of connecting: through roads, networks of peers, municipal and regional public administrations. Experts, advisors, officers of trade unions and breeders associations were the protagonists of a “politics of agricultural advice” (Grasseni, 2009, pp. 106–116). Today, other tools such as community maps and ecomuseums (Grasseni, 2010) as well as participatory action research (Bonato and Zola, 2009; Povinelli et al., 2022) connect and position anthropologists in alpine communities. Strategies and funding opportunities relating to heritage (*patrimoine*, *patrimonio*) may involve local residents and socio-economic actors (such as farmers and breeders) but also local administrators and policy-makers, and often consult academics and local scholars. Alpine communities confront not only the peculiarities of their landscape but their positioning in history and geopolitics. At the end of the 1990s, the “practices of locality” I observed in Val Taleggio included diverse, self-conscious social actors (editors of the parish newsletters, local historians, amateur collectors) who interrogated themselves about local identity by cultural practice (through photographic exhibitions, archival research, setting up ethnographic collections, and an ecomuseum). I agree with Paola Filippucci that by reflecting upon temporality and history, people try to clarify to themselves what their being “here” entails, and to inform decisions about how to stay ‘in place’. In particular, in the Italian Alps demographic implosion necessitates a reflection on futuring as well as on the meanings of the past. The landscape changes with thinning settlements (for example with the rewilding of pastures and streams, and the associated damage to the “working landscape” through forestification, landslides, erosion, and wild fires). This, added to the extremes more and more frequently caused by climate change, spurs more

15 See above for an explanation of the term, of which, to my knowledge, no English translation exists.

than in other localities, a reflection on which practices of locality continue to be meaning-making and future-making.

Future-Making

Research action on local knowledges has led to the development of ecomuseums in several Italian alpine regions (for example in Piedmont, Lombardy, Trentino, Friuli). While the earlier examples, inspired by the work of Hughes de Varine and the French “new museology” (de Varine, 2005) are mostly to be found in Piedmont (De Biaggi and Testa, 2010), a 2007 regional law in Lombardy funded the establishment of a network of ecomuseums as a “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991), as part of the region’s “cultural infrastructure” (Garlandini, 2010). By 2020, the Lombard network of ecomuseums included thirty-four officially acknowledged ecomuseums, most of which are in mountainous areas.¹⁶ Ecomuseums build on the working landscape as a commons and as heritage, the result of a history of local industries, pasturing, specific forms of cultivation or ecological co-habitation.

The mountainous landscape has inspired several ecomuseums, across the southern Alpine arc, focusing for example on terracing (Murtas 2010), pastoralism (Ecomuseo Valle Stura), or natural resources such as water (Ecomuseo delle Acque del Gemonese, Gemona del Friuli). In other cases the source of inspiration is the identity of a tight-knit community with specific linguistic and material cultural heritage (see for example Porcellana, 2010 on the walser ecomuseum of the Comunità Montana Walser Alta Valle del Lys).¹⁷

16 See Rete degli Ecomusei della Lombardia, <https://sites.google.com/site/ecomuseidella-lombardia/home>. Of the thirty-four ecomuseums listed at this link, the following nineteen are in mountainous areas: Ecomuseo Valle Spluga, Ecomuseo della Valgerola, Ecomuseo della Valmalenco, Ecomuseo delle Terrazze Retiche di Bianzone, Ecomuseo Valli del Bitto di Albaredo, Ecomuseo centro storico- Borgo Rurale di Ornica, Ecomuseo di Valtorta, Ecomuseo delle Miniere di Gorno, Ecomuseo Val Borlezza, Ecomuseo Val Taleggio, Ecomuseo di Valle Trompia, Ecomuseo Valle del Caffaro, Ecomuseo della Val Sanagra, Ecomuseo della Valvarone, Ecomuseo delle Grigne, Ecomuseo Val San Martino, Ecomuseo della Valvestino, Ecomuseo della Resistenza, Ecomuseo Alta via dell’Oglio, Ecomuseo Concarena Montagna Di Luce.

17 On the adoption of the French model of ecomuseums in Italy, see Grasseni (2010), particularly the Introduction and the chapters by de Varine and De Biaggi and Testa.

While some ecomuseum projects have been able to mobilise intense participation, through local volunteer groups for example, in some other cases the administrative push to benefit from available funding has brought a certain degree of bureaucratization and a stop-and-go of participatory projects such as community maps. Oscar Biffi (2014) has comparatively studied two ecomuseums in Piedmont and Lombardy to assess their capacity to engender participation in transitions to sustainable economies. This doctoral research concluded that while in the Lombard case the participatory aspect proved cosmetic, and in fact grassroots associations for sustainable agriculture grew *outside* the ecomuseum's institutional space, in the Piedmont case a sustained conversation between local administration, mountain community technicians and ecomuseum promoters generated some economic return in the long run. The reintroduction of an autochthonous sheep breed (*pecora sambucana*) was however the result of personal synergies rather than of institutional infrastructuring, and the tourist economy generated by the ecomuseum would not suffice to keep the breeders in business.¹⁸

Some ecomuseums have been developed to favour tourism. A multisensorial experience of the working landscape is made available to visitors in such a way as to market local produce, for example through interactive workshops, enactments, or cultural events. This strategy unequivocally establishes the ecomuseum as a tool to attract tourism and to support local businesses. The interpretation of heritage that is offered, however, is strongly patrimonial rather than communal. As noted elsewhere, *patrimonio*, the Italian word for heritage, is something that is owned and can be handed down but also sold (or squandered). While it includes *priceless* resources such as natural, artistic and historical patrimony, combining natural and human-made features in one working landscape, with its indigenous knowledge and local practices, it is not envisaged as a *common* but rather as *owned* (Grasseni, 2017, p. 153).

"Defining landscape is tantamount to defining order", spells out Stacul (2010, p. 229), and certainly, for example, in the case of Val Taleggio, the ecomuseum project proposed a new symbolic, performative and eventually political order (Grasseni, 2015). The "practices of locality" that make a working environment viable for a community as discussed in the previous sec-

18 Cf. Stacul (2010, pp. 234–235) on a similar ecomuseum experiment in Val Vanoi (Trentino) and its discontents.

tion, and the reciprocal roles of residents and administrators, producers and consumer, visitors and settlers, are reconceptualized and performed within this framework. For example, the hundreds of abandoned stone huts dotting the valley were publicized as typical (*tipiche*) like the cheese that used to be made in them. But at the same time they were recast in novel terms. One *baita* (mountain abode) was done up and marketed as B&B complete with sauna, for tourists to experience living in a former cow-shed. A separate space would be devoted, not to a predictable ethnographic exhibition but to an interactive sensorial experience of the *Vaccanza* – a pun based on *vacca* (cow) + *vacanza* (holiday). The *Cowliday* is a video installation that reproduces the sounds of a real-life cowshed and invites the visitor to progressively uncover and smell, touch and watch significant samples of the sensorial experience of mountain dairy farming. Hidden in as many drawers of a treasure-hunt chest are hay to smell, wood to touch and a loop of photographs of the scenery, introduced and commented by the voice of a professional actor. Similarly, *Tu, casaro!* (You, cheese-maker!) is a video installation of the Val Taleggio ecomuseum designed to accompany a cheese-making workshop for tourists.

Conclusion

Alpine scholars have commented on the Alps transforming into a locus for urbanite entertainment, naming it “disney-fication” of the Alps (Crettaz, 2011), which (further) integrates them in a commodity chain to serve consumers. Following Igoe we could define this a “global economy of appearances” especially when nature is turned into a spectacle (Igoe, 2010). A globalized aesthetics frames the way in which policy discussion and international literature envision sustainable and green spaces, involving also alpine communities and terrains within what Michael Herzfeld defined a “global hierarchy of value” (Herzfeld, 2004). So for example future food imaginaries follow specific urbanite aesthetics and implicit models for urban consumption (Wiskerke and Verhoven, 2018). Contextualized within a global canon and design vocabulary, this planning imagination tends to overlook the web of local and grounded relations that inform (for example) the actual food logistics between city and countryside, mountain and lowland, thus erasing the specificities of local sociocultural actors (for example, the little surviving

transhumant pastoralism¹⁹ or the recent traces of transhumant cow-breeding, which some associations are attempting to resuscitate through revivals and folk festivals²⁰).

These global dynamics, rhetorics and discourse relativize the meaningfulness of posing the question of the Alps as a region per se. Contemporary social research on the Alpine region in fact has to engage in broader investigations into neoliberalism, global consumption, and gentrification. The dynamic and sometimes conflictual relationship between the Alps and their cities is a further dimension of past and future research which is worth developing under the heading of “practices of locality”. As we know, it is only at the beginning of the 18th century that the Alps became an object of aesthetic contemplation, of reinvention, discovery and conquest: a landscape – to paint from a distance or to go and visit as a tourist (De Rossi and Ferrero, 2004, p. 41). Commodification followed from this objectification: Sestriere, near Turin, for example was the first winter tourist station developed entirely for tourist purposes in the 1930s (ibid., p. 42). The city of Turin also styled itself as “city of the Alps” on the occasion of the Winter Olympic Games in 2006 and hosts several projects of urban museums and ecomuseums (Jallà, 2007, 2010). What is missing from these tourist industry’s attempts is a conscious effort to address the Alpine landscape as more than a scenic backdrop or a vintage backyard: the Alpine cities’ relationship with the valleys, rivers, reliefs and mountain passes which historically connected (rather than separate) contiguous regions in flows of merchandise, animals, pilgrims, merchants and armies.

What is still largely under-researched in these representations, is also that the Alps are living through important demographic transformations, which not only include depopulation and outmigration, but also return migration, newcomers migration (asylum seekers, carers for the elderly, and manual workers), and neo-rural settlements (Raffaetà and Duff, 2013, Porcellana et al., 2016).²¹

19 See Maria Vasile’s (2023) doctoral research on Mirafiori Sud and its disappearing transhumance pastures, encroached – ironically – by urban regeneration projects focused on sustainable food production.

20 See for example <https://festivalpastoralismo.org/>

21 In this complex context, research inspired by the “commoning” literature and by the “diverse economy” network (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) has developed an “Alpine commu-

Where do the Alps end? Diverse lines of investigation identify the Alpine region and its surroundings as a unique place in the world, tightly connected with the singularity of ecological strategies, linguistic and cultural identities, working environments and practices of locality. At the same time, contemporary global phenomena such as migrations, new mobilities and new concerns for sustainability and environmental 'values' contribute to redefine the alpine world. After the "peasant-ification" of mountain communities, the Alps are now beginning to look like a resource to explore rather than colonize. Nevertheless, they also risk being drawn into global flows and hierarchies of value that are defined on urban standards (as ecosystem services, heritage commodities, or a biodiversity basin). While the various disney-fications and heritage-izations of the Alps have also involved popular formulas for the re-invention of value in mountain communities (such as protected designations of origin for food heritage, and ecomuseums for participative planning and development), truly felt strategies of "emplacement", of finding one's place in the world, such as those identified in working landscapes and practices of locality, remain important points of reference for old and new upland communities. In sum, what keeps the Alps a good place "to think with", is their capacity to de-centre and unsettle models of livelihood and development, in the light of their diversity, and that of the research they inspire.

nity economy" project in the framework of action-research led by transformative design. See www.alpinecommunityeconomies.org and www.brave-new-alps.com (a Eurac/EU project 2019-2021).

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Doing Research in the French Alps. Spaces, Places and Politics

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Abstract

What does Alpine anthropology bring to the study of other mountain spaces, and vice versa? How does observing the Alps from the south of the Italian peninsula contribute to the anthropological analysis? In this article, the author explores the implications of taking a comparative look at two mountain areas that are not usually considered in comparative terms. Going back to her early fieldwork in the French Alps, which focused on the economic issues and conflicts that the production of “locality” generated, the author shows the construction of an analytical regard on space and places. Although there are certain elements of proximity between the Alps and the Apennines –such as their real or apparent marginality or the mobilities that have characterised them for centuries– a comparative view is constructed more through an ethnographic and analytical back-and-forth. Mountains are “good for thinking” about some political and economic processes, but it is the “expansion” of the ethnographic focus and the widening of the comparative perspective that allows us to capture continuities, ruptures and specificities.

Alpine Encounters

In 1998, I attended the Seminario permanente di etnografia alpina (Permanent Seminar on Alpine Ethnography) in San Michele all’Adige for the first time. The seminar had been initiated a few years earlier by Pier Paolo Viazzo and Giovanni Kezich as a space for debate among scholars doing research on the Alps from different approaches. Viazzo and Kezich had launched a collection of translations of classic works on Alpine anthropology. That year, Harriet G. Rosenberg attended the seminar for the presentation of the Italian edition of her book *Negotiated World: Three Centuries of Change in a French*

Alpine Community (1988). She had done her research in the Queyras, on the French side of the Alps, on the transformation of a rural microcosm, the village of Abriès. My interest in the Alps was twofold. At that time, I was still doing research in the Apennines, in San Marco dei Cavoti, a mountainous area in the South of Italy far removed from the Alps. My readings had followed the thread of the new historiography of the Mezzogiorno, the political economy and the anthropology of the Mediterranean. Within these theoretical and ethnographic frameworks, Alpine research was part of my references in a comparative way: studying the mountains of the South encouraged me to take into consideration also Alpine ethnographies. I am thinking, among others, of the works of Paolo Viazzo, *Upland Communities* (1989), Robert Netting, *Balancing on an Alp* (1981), Eric Wolf's work on peasantry, and in particular *The Hidden Frontier* (1974) written by Wolf with John Cole, books that the San Michele all'Adige group had translated into Italian only a few years earlier. But in my research on the Apennines, I had approached the Alps not only comparatively through reading. During spring 1998, I accompanied a group of friends from San Marco – some entrepreneurs and some members of the municipal administration – on a ten-day trip to Gap, the main town of the French *departement*¹ of Hautes-Alpes (Siniscalchi, 2002a), to participate in an exhibition of regional economic activities (as an extension of the participant observations I had carried out in San Marco since 1990). Alongside institutional meetings, we visited parts of the area, including the Queyras and the villages close to the one where Harriet G. Rosenberg had conducted her research twenty years earlier. Subsequently, I began to think about a possible future fieldwork in the area. And the chance to meet Harriet G. Rosenberg was a valuable opportunity for exchange, even though our research focus was quite different. The trip to Gap had made me feel more legitimate among the specialists of the Alps with whom I had begun to discuss and, along with my attendance of the seminar, which I continued to attend for several years, this was the beginning of an ethnographic, professional and life journey.

In this contribution, I return to this research itinerary from the Apennines to the Alps and to a part of the fieldwork carried out in the French Al-

1 In the organisation of the French State, the *departements* – created in 1789 – are both administrative districts and the area of responsibility of the State's decentralised services, administered by a *Prefet* (see Marx, 1977).

pine area in the early 2000s.² From an anthropological point of view, how did the research in Southern Italy benefit from the Alpine studies and vice versa? What did these two mountainous spaces, which differ in terms of history, ecology and economic organisation, have in common? How did observing the Alps from the south of the Italian peninsula affect the anthropological perspective?

It is possible to examine these areas comparatively through their real or apparent marginality, through the mobilities that have characterised them for centuries, or even by considering domination and the “external forces” Cole and Wolf referred to, which have left their mark on the ways of occupying space and organising local societies.³ Beyond these elements of proximity, these questions have to do with the specificities of anthropology, the role of fieldwork, and the ways in which the fieldwork is conducted. In questioning the specificity of the Alps and their relevance as a lens for the study of other mountain areas, I would like to interrogate the comparative dimension of the discipline.

The Political Economy of Alps and Apennines

Attending the San Michele all’Adige seminar helped me to cross the frontier, but my passage from the Apennines to the Alps was a gradual process. This displacement did not simply mark a change in the location of the fieldwork: it contributed to a change in my perspective, which had already been evolving through my previous fieldwork.

Throughout the 1990s, my research was centred in San Marco, a southern Italian town of 4,000 inhabitants, situated around 400 km south of Rome. For many years, San Marco had been a place of research (directed by Italo Si-

2 I take up some passages from a reflection on fieldwork evolution, published in the *Anuac* journal (Siniscalchi, 2018). In that article, I used the notion of “economic spaces” to rethink my approach to fieldwork. This chapter is in a way an extension of the reflections I had started then. I would like to thank Ben Boswell, Almut Schneider, Elisabeth Tauber, and the anonymous reviewers.

3 Cole and Wolf’s book (1974) studies the micro-context of two villages, on the border between the Trentino and South Tyrol regions, in order to understand diversities and convergences in the way space is occupied, resources are utilised and heritage is transmitted. The differences between the two communities and the practices of their inhabitants are analysed by the two authors in relation to the great historical changes and economic-political dynamics that have affected these Alpine areas over the last few centuries.

gnorini) for a succession of a dozen or so anthropologists studying the urban and agricultural spaces of the small town. Their research had contributed to its construction as an anthropological place.⁴ I had been the last in this series of anthropologists, and this had given me the freedom of prolonged fieldwork over a ten-year period. I had wanted to take up the challenge of producing a “true” work of economic anthropology in a context that had long been interpreted in terms of underdevelopment. My main references were the Mediterranean anthropology and the anthropological political economy. The “world system” of Wallerstein helped me take into consideration the overlaps between centres and peripheries, and the role of semi-periphery played by the regions of southern Italy at the time. Marxist economic anthropology – and more particularly the North American studies – underlined the relationship between human groups and their environment in terms of constraints and adaptation. Many of the researchers working in the area of Mediterranean anthropology have approached economic questions: tenant farming and financial relationships, social stratification, and pastoralism. Although I was inspired by the work of Mediterranean anthropology (Siniscalchi, 1993, 1995), this analytical framework was becoming too narrow for me. These studies already seemed outdated, although, from a chronological point of view, John Davis’s *People of the Mediterranean* (1977) was still very close at the time. In my view, this book marked the end of the collective enterprise and the abandonment of the comparative ambition within that historical and geographical area. Later on, the very creation of a more or less artificial entity of the notion of “the Mediterranean” – by scholars such as Anton Blok, John Campbell, Julian Pitt-Rivers, Jean Peristiany, Sydel Silverman, Jane and Peter Schneider, and John Davis himself – would be strongly questioned.⁵ The often uncritical

4 For a more detailed analysis, see Siniscalchi (2018) and Palumbo (2021). Bernardino Palumbo reflects on the role of ethnography, through his own ethnographies, in the progressive change of perspective in anthropology. He was the first, with Italo Signorini, to conduct research in San Marco, inaugurating the ethnological mission in the Sannio region, establishing the framework in which other young researchers, including myself, conducted their own fieldwork.

5 Mediterranean anthropology looked at the South of Italy and more generally to the South of Europe as a cultural area, essentializing it. Years later, the debate on whether the Mediterranean could continue to be considered as a field of study, without making it an object of study in itself, was reopened thanks to the book edited by Dionigi Albera, Anton Blok and Christian Bromberger (2001), and the colloquium from which the volume emerged, which aimed to rethink the anthropological work of the 1960s and 1970s in this area.

use of this notion by researchers from other disciplines, particularly in the Italian intellectual field, has reinforced my own distancing from the notion. I can take for example the way it was used in the works of Franco Cassano (1998) and Mario Alcaro (1999). Although they set out to overturn the stereotypes that characterise southern Italy and the South(s) in general,⁶ paradoxically, these works and the perspectives that underpinned them re-essentialised a presumed Mediterranean “culture”, “family” or even a hypothetical Mediterranean “man”.⁷

The approaches to the anthropological political economy suggest paying attention to the historical dimension of social phenomena and to power relations inside a broader process of expansion of capitalism. This literature allowed me to be more attentive to both the extended temporalities and the overlaps among different analytical scales (Roseberry, 1988; Wolf 1990, 2001; see also Steward et al., 1956, where the notion of scale was already used). One of the most interesting analyses was Eric Wolf’s work on peasantry, where he considered social, economic, and political institutions as well as exterior forces and the dimension of power. Studying the “hidden” frontier that separates the region of Trentino from that of South Tyrol, John Cole and Eric Wolf (1974) exposed the relationships between economy, ecology, and politics. They underlined the necessity to situate local practices (economy, residence, kinship, and inheritance) and ideologies into broader frameworks, incorporating a diachronic and spatial viewpoint from which they take their meanings. Notably, they also emphasized situating these practices in the long history of economic relationships, their links with the market, and the successive periods of political domination to which the region was submitted. Political economy and the research on the Alps strengthened my dialogue with the historiography of the Mezzogiorno (Delille, 1985) and the long history of the Apennines, necessary to understand what I observed in the present. While the dialogue with the work of historians allowed me to observe continuities, it also highlighted the distortions and misunderstandings produced by the projection of long-term history into the present, which left aside the ways in which so-

6 The plural of South underlines the fact that there are enormous differences between southern regions, but these disappear behind stereotypes.

7 This is a recurring problem in the history of anthropology: units of analysis often escape the will of researchers and, reified, migrate into other disciplinary fields, and then into public debate, to become commonplace, carrying stereotyped visions.

cial actors use and manipulate categories. For me, these appeared to be missing, even in the most recent research on the Alps (Siniscalchi, 1993). Over the years, my analyses had moved outside the boundaries of the municipality of San Marco to follow the trade networks and economic activities (agricultural and industrial) that extended over a much larger part of the province of Benevento. My approach to the economic dimension was now eminently political: I had not abandoned the study of “real people doing real things” (Ortner, 1984, pp. 144) in situated contexts – factories, artisanal workshops, fields and the relationship between them and the agricultural history of the Campania region – but I was also interested in the political uses of productive activities on the local and national scene.

From the Apennines to the Alps – The Heritage Thread

After ten years of working in Southern Italy, it was necessary to think about a new research project in a foreign country. My choice of a French terrain – the Hautes-Alpes – was initially inspired by a fortuitous event: the municipality of San Marco, with the help of local historians, was reconstructing the town’s past around an imaginary kinship with the town of Gap. The French town was considered to be the place of origin of San Marco’s first inhabitants. In the hope of establishing a “twin towns” arrangement, they invited the Hautes-Alpes representatives to some events organised around the economic and entrepreneurial future of the town. The French guests represented the historical roots necessary to imagine the future (Siniscalchi, 2002a). The municipality of Gap had returned this invitation, and my friends in San Marco – the mayor, some councillors and some entrepreneur – asked me to accompany them on the trip to France, that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. These two meetings, a year apart, had raised my interest in comparison. Beyond the declared motivations of the travel, what had intrigued me was the fact that the politicians of Gap had accepted, if not twin towns arrangement, at least the idea of an exchange with a town that was extremely different from their own, particularly in terms of size (Gap is a town of 38,000 inhabitants). The explanation and the possibility of thinking about the French and Italian contexts in comparative terms was made possible by the similar-

ities between the processes of place-making observable on either side. At the same time, in San Marco and Gap (and more generally in the Hautes-Alpes) local people were negotiating their political and economic existence based on their peripheral position within Europe. In the process, they were using each other. In some respects, these negotiations were in continuity with Rosenberg's analysis of the long history of Abriès and the Queyras and with what I had highlighted in the San Marco context: an ability to deal with the constraints and economic changes that were largely imposed from the outside. This capacity appeared also at the political level. This new ethnographic research required learning ways to conceive spaces and places and legal regimes that were different from those I had studied in Italy. It meant learning how a different country worked, one that was very different in institutional terms, despite its close physical proximity to Italy.

Going to the Hautes-Alpes, I was travelling in the opposite direction to the path that had led European (and American) anthropologists to Southern Europe, and to Italy in particular. My research project focused on "Cultural heritage, economies and local identities in an Alpine area in south-eastern France", and it increasingly dealt with the notion of "heritage" as it emerged from French scientific literature (Audrerie, 1997; Babelon and Chastel, 1994; Kalaora, 1997; Poulot, 1998, 2008) and began to attract the attention of researchers in Italy. One of the "passers" of this notion was Daniel Fabre, who was close to the intellectual milieu of Italian anthropology, especially in Rome where I lived and worked at the end of the 1990s. At the time, the toolbox provided by studies on heritage had enabled me to interpret the attention that local San Marco actors paid to local history or *terroir* products in terms of heritage interests. This focus on heritage was not about typical traces of the past. It concerned the historical continuity of current productive practices, and the whole range of local economic activities. Using heritage rhetoric similar to that of other case studies (Poulot, 1998; Bromberger and Chevallier, 1999; Rautenberg et al., 2000), the social actors in San Marco were trying to transform local entrepreneurship into a specific feature of the city. This kind of interpretation was relatively new in the approaches to heritage, and it differed from the interpretation of the patrimonialisation of products or economic practices as forms of revival of activities that were disappearing or losing their economic and social functions (see Bromberger and Chevallier 1999, Bromberger

et al., 2004). In reality, the phenomena I was observing were only partially related to heritage mechanisms, which quickly led me to distance myself from this concept in an attempt to gain a more detailed understanding of the political dynamics, conflicts, and processes of competition and legitimisation at work on the local scene. During the first steps of my fieldwork in France, I was even more surprised that the notion of heritage appeared (by then) almost as an irrefutable element, both for local actors and researchers. The interest in patrimonialisation processes did not really seem to challenge the notion of heritage itself. And furthermore, I had the impression that it was used as a pacifying element towards which local actors had to converge sooner or later. So, I began to handle it critically, with extreme caution, and it soon became a research object rather than an analytical tool: how did local actors use it? And for what purposes? I had the impression that the notion of heritage, while useful for understanding some practices, in San Marco as well as in the Hautes-Alpes, had the effect of obscuring the political mechanisms at work.

Spaces, Places and Politics

The Hautes-Alpes gave me the opportunity to consolidate a change in the focus and the mode of investigation I had already practiced. Even more than in my previous research, it meant crossing and varying scales of analysis since my fieldwork now covered a *departement* (province) rather than a municipality. Reflecting on developments in fieldwork (Siniscalchi, 2018), I already wondered how the construction of fieldwork changes when we expand beyond the “village” to investigate and assemble different scales of analysis.

At the very beginning of my research in the Hautes-Alpes, I noted the comments of my friends and colleagues who knew the area and were surprised by my ethnographic choice because they considered the region to be of no specific interest. Based on absence, on the lack of something, on marginality, these representations of the Hautes-Alpes comforted me even more in what I had chosen as my research theme: the forms of appropriation and construction of territory. At the beginning of the 2000s questions relative to “location”, “localities”, and the production of spaces and places animated the anthropological debate in Europe and across the Atlantic. Following the per-

spectives of Appadurai (1996), Gupta and Ferguson (1997a, 1997c), and Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003), I started my analysis of the dynamics of affiliation and construction of places by investigating the actions and discourses of local politicians and associations that were interested in the definition of the local space, image and history of the Hautes-Alpes. I explored the paths that my fieldwork in southern Italy had opened up to me by following the activities of members of the Pays Gavot folklore group, local historians from the Société d'études des Hautes-Alpes and members of heritage associations. I discovered a dense network of actors and groups involved in defining the territory. Gradually, my analysis included the staff and the heads of various municipality offices – architects, town planners, municipal employees – their interactions, their kinship ties and political affinities. From different, even conflicting, political and historiographical positions, these different actors helped to shape not only the history of the region, but also its social, economic and geographical specificities. By manipulating stereotypes produced from outside, members of associations, local historians, elected representatives, staff from local institutions, tourism managers and agricultural producers built the specificity of the Hautes-Alpes out of the apparent emptiness that seemed to characterise the department. As Michael Herzfeld points out, a stereotype “always marks the absence of some presumably desirable property in its object. It is therefore a discursive weapon of power. It does something, and something very insidious: it actively deprives the ‘other’ of a certain property” (Herzfeld, 1997, pp. 157). So, stereotypes are constantly re-appropriated by the individuals and groups to whom they refer: they “do represent a cruel way of ‘doing things with words’ (Austin [1962] 1975) and they have a material consequence” (Herzfeld, 1997, pp. 158). In this way, the stereotype of an empty, unknown territory, “split” and “shared” between the two historical regions of Provence and Dauphiné, was assumed by local actors, appropriated, manipulated and ultimately claimed. The notion of “frontier” is one of the elements in this inversion of meaning. It was not hidden or invisible – as in Cole and Wolf (1974) – on the contrary, it was exhibited. Based on the historical, administrative, fiscal and religious divisions that had crisscrossed the region over the years, the notion of a frontier made it possible to turn the department’s history and controversial position into a resource. I thus interpreted the expression “to be ‘between’ Provence and Dauphiné” as

a social rhetoric, as a way of talking about the identity of the *département* of the Hautes-Alpes and of oneself, and at the same time as a way of “making” belongingness (Siniscalchi 2003, 2004, 2016). The rhetoric of sharing, of “being between”, produces meaning and makes it possible to construct the local space itself as a frontier space and to situate oneself within it in a way that is always situational and relational, by favouring one or other of its components. Its boundaries are not simply blurred, they are mobile and constantly shifting: the frontier itself becomes an elastic space in which distance or (historical) belonging to one entity or another had a political character, constantly subject to changes in shape, tensions and conflicts. It is only by situating the practices of the various actors within the social, economic and political dynamics in which they take place that we can understand these phenomena in terms of processes, and analyse the conflicts that arise around the objectification and commodification of the “local”. What I want to emphasise here is the shift in research focus and perspective that I underwent at that time. Heritage objects have to do with our relationship with the past and with time; with the ways in which a group constructs and represents itself; and with the political dimension and the management of power. Through the space or absence of memory in the public arena, social actors construct their local belonging, establish hierarchies and create legitimacy. Places become symbolic and material operators of political and social conflict.

My analyses focused on economic issues and conflicts generated by the production of locality. The creation of *pays*, under the impulsion of the Voynet law and the Pasqua law,⁸ and then on the political agenda in the early 2000s, seemed to me to be a good entry into local dynamics: how would these spaces, neither historical nor administrative, which the legislative interventions promoted, be constituted? What administrative and political actors were involved locally in these dynamics? What were the advantages of adding a new territorial level to an already extremely saturated organisation of administrative spaces in the French territory? The meticulous work required to understand the complexity of the French institutional system, its political rules and its mechanisms of territorial division, carried out with comparative attention

8 Law 95-115 - February 4, 1995 (*Loi d'orientation pour l'aménagement et le développement du territoire*, [Land Use Planning and Development Act]) and law n. 99-553, June 25, 1999. The *pays* is a French category designating an area characterised by “geographical, economic, cultural or social coherence”, and allowing the realization of development projects.

to the Italian context, prompted me to go behind the scenes of associations and institutions. From a perspective close to the anthropology of policies (cf. Shore and Wright, 1997; Shore et al., 2011), I analysed them as political actors, focusing on the processes of constructing the legitimacy of policies, their economic dimension and the power dynamics they entail. I refer in particular to the creation of environmental protection mechanisms, to which institutions such as the Office National des Forêts (National Forests Office), regional parks and national parks have contributed. The establishment of *pays*, rather than connecting territories with a historical coherence, as indicated in legislation, seemed to reveal the weight of local and pre-existing political alliances.

Thinking Nature and Defining Space

Re-reading today the research carried out between 2000 and 2005 in the Hautes-Alpes, I was constantly widening or narrowing the focus, varying the scale of analysis. The part of the research on which I have most written (and published) concerns the Parc National des Écrins and its staff, which in some respects was the result of narrowing the focus to one of the actors active in the construction of the Hautes-Alpes territory. I was interested in the park's policy changes that occurred between 1980 and 2000. Looking at the evolution of the notions used within the institution, in particular those of nature, natural heritage, cultural heritage and then heritage, I explored the relationship between the changes in the park's language and policies in the framework of the transformations that these same notions were undergoing on a national scale (Siniscalchi 2002b). From the 1990s onwards, the notion of "heritage" was increasingly used in the park's documents and actions. Over the years, the park has become a key actor in the process of redefining the locality through the rhetoric of nature and heritage. I examined these dynamics in terms of their material effects on spaces, transforming them into places, and simultaneously constructing local subjects (see Hirsch and O'Hanlon, 1995; Appadurai, 1996; Low and Zuniga, 2003a).

The choice to analyse the Parc National des Écrins as one of the actors on the local scene, enabled me to avoid rigid dichotomies such as "local populations" versus "park managers". Indeed, in common discourse, and often in

scholars' works on protected areas, these reductive representations conceal the multiplicity of roles assumed by individuals by essentializing categories that are actually much more porous and malleable. I analysed the efforts of park managers to legitimise the presence of the park in the local context. The park's existence was highly conflictive and controversial from the beginning of its institution in the 1970s. When it was first conceived, the park was seen by many local actors as an obstacle to the economic development of the Hautes-Alpes. But by the 1990s and 2000s, its managers and staff were increasingly presenting the park as an economic tool. Collaborations and partnerships with the municipalities were established. The notion of heritage was the vector of this change, allowing the image of the park to move from opposition (nature versus economy) to convergence (heritage for economy) (Siniscalchi, 2010). In reality, these two apparently contradictory approaches arise from the same struggles on the management of resources and the definition of economically efficient actions. They express power dynamics and power relationships that change over time. The policies promoted by successive directors were different and the internal organisation chart of the park changed with the creation of different offices: communication, planning, scientific. The negotiations that accompanied the implementation of park policies revealed the process of legitimisation of the institution within the local space and the frictions that accompanied it (see also Tsing, 2005). Texts, maps and projects that emanate from the park seem to refer to stable entities; in reality, the spaces to which they refer become flexible elements used to construct places and belonging. First the notion of "massif" and then the very name of *Écrins* (*massif des Écrins*) became identity markers, symbols of the unity of the geographical area over which the park extends (Siniscalchi, 2007). While local politicians, historians and members of heritage associations manipulated the elements used by specialists from different disciplines to classify this region – thereby escaping the classifications and assignments produced by outsiders – the park staff aimed to shape this same territory, for which the park is both the common denominator and the unifying institution.

The approach I have adopted to analyse these dynamics considers rhetoric as having a performative value (i.e., a way of producing meaning and acting on social reality), and conversely, it considers practices as also having an expressive dimension (de Certeau, 1990). Changes in the notions used by

the park are matched by changes in the attitudes and actions of park managers, which in turn reveal the economic and political issues at work in the park (Siniscalchi, 2002b, 2007, 2010, 2013).⁹ By studying the dynamics of power in protected areas, I explored the relationships between the State, local institutions, and social groups in their processual dimension (Donnan, Wilson, 2003; Tsing 2005), using economy to define the territory. Within a global political and economic framework managed by the actions of States and national bodies, the territory, the environment and local culture have become issues around which levels of social and political identity can be defined and around which strategies can be devised to control economic and symbolic resources. Conflicts in protected areas do not simply reveal different visions and uses of nature. The management of financial resources, regulatory activities and decision-making on a territory are political issues. Protected areas are “contested” sites, “geographical locations where conflicts in the form of opposition, confrontation, subversion and/or resistance engage actors whose social positions are defined in terms of differential control of resources and access to power” (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003b, pp. 18). Using the notion of power as defined by Eric Wolf (1990, pp. 586), heritage can be interpreted as a complex field of power struggles, at once a hegemonic idiom that reinforces and extends the power of the State, and an instrument of resistance and agency used by local actors to defend their positions and rights of action on the territory (Marmol et al., 2016).

Alpine Literature and Economic Spaces

What do the processes of defining and constructing places and those of redefining protected spaces in economic terms have to do with Alpine anthropology, which was my entry point for rethinking the Apennines in comparison with the Alps and vice versa?

For a long time, because of the severe constraints imposed by the environmental context and by an isolation that was more imagined than real (see Burns, 1961), the Alps had been regarded as a “magnificent laboratory” (Vizzio 1989, p. 49) for studying the ways in which populations adapted to their

⁹ More recently, I have continued to follow the transformations of protected areas in the Hautes-Alpes, particularly in the wake of law 436/2006.

environment from a social and economic point of view. Other studies, such as Rosenberg (1988) have highlighted the dynamism of breeders and farmers in their search for a balance with their environment, while emphasising the importance of their exchanges with the outside world. Commercial migration and the networks of credit and debt have prompted anthropologists working on these regions, following in the footsteps of historians (Fontaine, 1993, 2003), to focus on the circulation of labour, wealth, and debt rather than on forms of production. Seasonal and temporary emigration was increasingly seen as the basis of European mountain economies (see Viazzo and Albera, 1986; Viazzo, 1989). History does not have the same role in these works that it has in the research of Cole and Wolf or for other political economy scholars who tried to explain modes of production in terms of power relations and the history of capitalism. It was the long history of social and economic interactions in the framework of an anthropology that based the comparative enterprise precisely on historical connections. Without denying the relevance of the Alpine area as a comparative space, in my view, the relevance of comparison in anthropology lies elsewhere.

To analyse the phenomena of territorial restructuring in a comparative way, particularly the processes of transforming objects, places and identities into commodities, I used Wallerstein's (1981) notion of "economic space", revisited in the light of an anthropology of localisation processes. Wallerstein's vision of the world in terms of economic power centres, peripheries and semi-peripheries made it possible to read localised social phenomena without falling back onto culturalist explanations, all the while paying attention to long-term economic and political processes and the interweaving of different scales of analysis. When I trained as an anthropologist in the 1980s, and when I conducted my fieldwork in southern Italy in the 1990s, interpretive frameworks such as Wallerstein's seemed to have lost their explanatory effectiveness. As Ortner (1984) reminded us in a text on theories that dominated anthropology from the 1960s onwards, the approaches of political economy had benefited anthropology by preventing it from imagining the contexts studied – often small-scale societies – as isolated; they had made it possible to shift the attention to the analysis of large-scale, regional economic and political systems and to study the effects of the penetration of capitalism over the long term, by reasserting the importance of the historical dimension. On the other hand, Ortner criticised the vision of history inherent in these ap-

proaches: a history that is imposed from outside on each micro-context. She proposed shifting the focus to the agency of the individuals studied, as subjects of their own history, by emphasising the importance of concepts such as agent, actor, person, subject and practice, which brought us closer to the experience of social actors. While I shared some of the positions summarised by Ortner, I was interested in the dimension of power, and in the long-term political and economic phenomena. The spatial transformations I observed in the early 2000s were part of (capitalist) dynamics of redefinition of local economies (see also Narotzky and Smith, 2006).

It was only later, at the end of my research in the Hautes-Alpes, that I began to experiment with the notion of “economic space” in a more systematic way, making a broader use of it from both a spatial and a temporal point of view. This notion helps to look at the economic and social transformations in shorter temporalities (than those considered by Wallerstein, 1974, 1981).¹⁰ It appears useful for analysing the construction of places or the spatiality of economic activities, but above all it can be an analytical instrument for defining the spaces of economic and political action. Then it becomes a useful tool for thinking about the interrelationships between different geographical areas and for identifying and understanding the connections and reconfigurations of the economy at different scales. It is a flexible analytical instrument that helps to understand diverse and localized phenomena by situating them in larger contexts. It makes it possible to grasp the links between productive spaces and political arenas in which networks of actors negotiate and fight to define, regulate, and circulate goods and merchandise.

Conclusions

Anthropology is a comparative discipline, often attempting to arrive at a closer understanding of what appears more distant and to keep a certain distance from what is apparently more familiar. In this attempt, one of the original

¹⁰ For an economic interpretation of the notion of economic space see Perroux (1950). According to Perroux, an economic space is defined by economic relations and, therefore, by balance of power. For a review of Perroux’s work and geographical uses of this notion, reintroducing the material dimension of space, see Couzon (2003).

aspects of anthropological work is the possibility of analysing one terrain through another: through our own ethnographies, which stratify over time, and the ethnographies of others. Moreover, fieldwork is a space-time, delimited by specific, historically and theoretically situated research practices: fieldwork only exists within the anthropologist's research practice, which circumscribes it, declares it, and constructs it over time, through her own presence and her gaze, as a specific place – or set of places – as “her” or “his” fieldwork. In the late 1990s, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson analysed the field as the site, method, and the specific location of the anthropologist (1997b, 1997c). Introducing the collective book *Anthropological Locations*, they pointed out the apparent contradiction within anthropology “that loudly rejects received ideas of ‘the local’, even while ever more firmly insisting on a method that takes it for granted” (1997d, pp. 4). Fieldwork, and the idea of “local” on which it is based, changes and evolves over time in an attempt to understand and follow as closely as possible the social life of the men and women that the researcher has decided to observe. That social life is also always changing, however imperceptibly. This means that anthropologists always observe a piece of social life in motion in a series of multiple and different locations. Reflecting on their joint fieldwork in Colombia, Gudeman and Rivera (1995, pp. 244) wrote that “fieldwork is a process, an education and a theory in action ... an encounter, and the anthropologist participates in making ethnography”. Gudeman and Rivera criticised the dichotomous view that locates the fieldwork in a separate space and time from analysis and writing, as if each produced a different kind of knowledge.

In our view, anthropology is done within a community of inquiry, and this collectivity is multiply defined: it is a community “at home” and “out there” at once. Sometimes the anthropologist is physically located “there” and sometimes “here”, but the two together locate her. Joint fieldwork makes manifest this multiple location and alters the experience. (1995, p. 245)

Gudeman and Rivera encourage us to rethink the role of the fieldwork as place precisely situated. Their critics can in turn be used as a critique of the all-purpose use of the expression “multi-sited” ethnography (Marcus, 1995). Anthropology is multi-sited by definition, although in some research the

multi-sited dimension takes a different form (e.g., when research follows value chains, circulations of goods). Fieldwork is constitutively situated in multiple places and these places are closer to or further from each other depending on the subject matter and the researcher's perspective. But fieldwork forces us to expand our gaze: it is an experience of life and research that modifies the researcher's way of observing. Beyond some elements of proximity between the Alps and the Apennines – such as their real or apparent marginality or mobilities that have characterised them for centuries– it is through an ethnographic and analytical back-and-forth that we can refine and build a comparative vision. Mountains are “good for thinking about” some political and economic processes, but it is the expansion of the ethnographic focus and the widening of the comparative perspective that allows us to capture continuities, ruptures and specificities.

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Landscapes and Agri-Cultures

Alpine Pasture in the Julian Alps (Slovenia): The Krstenica Alp Revisited

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Abstract

This chapter revisits the Krstenica alpine pasture in the Julian Alps, Slovenia, to explore its evolving role through long-term ethnographic observation. The study examines the transformation in alpine pasture management over the past decades, focusing on the changing dynamics between the local agrarian community, livestock owners, shepherds and cheese-makers. Through a blend of historical and contemporary ethnographic data, the research reflects on the latent conflicts and diverse perspectives surrounding the management of the Krstenica alp. The paper notes the tensions between traditional practices and modern agricultural challenges, especially considering urbanization and changing family structures, and in the context of these conflicts, it considers the concept of “uncommon worlds”, drawing on cosmopolitical theories to suggest new approaches for managing shared resources in alpine environments. The study illustrates how alpine pastures, once central to local economies, have become sites of cultural heritage and identity, facing pressures from both conservation efforts and tourism development.

Introduction¹

At the beginning of summer 2021, I returned to the Bohinj region (Slovenia) for a few days to collect documentation for comparative research on the role of alpine pastures in shaping the cultural landscape in Slovenia.² My task was to gather information and conduct semi-structured interviews with owners, managers and users of one of the still-active alpine pastures in the south-eastern part of the Julian Alps. For a while, I hesitated which alp to choose. However, since there are only a few active alps left in the Bohinj region, I decided to gather information on the Krstenica alp. I had spent an entire summer season on this alp more than two decades ago while writing my thesis and I knew there had been changes in its management and staff in recent years. In addition to carrying out semi-structured interviews with the president of the agrarian community and staff, I decided to spend a few more days on the mountain pasture to obtain further information.

When I returned to Bohinj, I first interviewed Anthony,³ the president of the Agrarian Community of Bohinjska Češnjica, Jereka, Podjelje, and Goreljek (AC). During the conversation we sat at a table in his courtyard above the village of Bohinjska Češnjica which afforded a fabulous view of the Lower Bohinj Mountains. Anthony's three children circled us, especially the smallest one. Anthony told me about his work at the municipality and about his livestock: the three dairy cows on the alpine pasture during the summer season and the four calves sold the day before. He also updated me on what had

1 This article is based on two months of participant observation on Krstenica alp during the 1998 grazing season and further sporadic visits and fieldwork in 1999, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2018, and 2019, as well as numerous visits to the other alpine pastures in the Bohinj region and the Julian Alps in general. I also interviewed various stakeholders and actors involved in the management of the respective alpine pasture and of alpine pastures in general at different levels: dairymen, shepherds, livestock owners, chairmen and shareholders of the Agricultural Community Bohinjska Češnjica, Jereka, Podjelje, Koprivnik, governmental agricultural advisors, as well as staff working at the Triglav National Park Public Institution and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. I am immensely grateful to everyone for sharing an insight into their worlds. I am also grateful to my colleague Saša Roškar for numerous joint visits in the Bohinj alps, as well as for reading the first version of this paper. The author acknowledges the financial support of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency: research core funding *Heritage on the Margins* (No. P5-0408) and project *Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia* (No. J6-4610).

2 The research focused on the differences and commonalities of the current role of mountain pastures in three parts of the Alps in Slovenia (see Urbanc et al., in press).

3 All personal names are anonymized.

happened with the alp's management and staff since my last field visit in 2013. We struggled to make it through my list of questions, as we kept recalling events and stories from the grazing season in 1998 and talked extensively about the current agricultural situation in Bohinj. But as I had a whole week of fieldwork ahead of me, this did not seem to matter, and I settled immediately into the laid-back atmosphere. In the meantime, Frances, Anthony's wife, had served us dinner, which caused me some embarrassment because she and the children did not join us to eat. However, this is how Anthony and Frances choose to live, and they are very kind. Frances organised my transport to the Krstenica alp, and instead of a two-hour walk from the car park, they took me up there in their off-road vehicle, which Anthony drove into the clearing just below the mountain pasture, where we left the car and walked towards the cheese dairy that had been my home for two months two decades ago.

The aim of the paper is to consider the recent transformations in the management of alpine pasture in general and the Krstenica alp in particular through long-term ethnography and the revisiting of the issues thrown up by this. This is revisiting in both meanings of the word: Firstly, to visit the site again and reflect on the possible differences between the initial immersion and participant observation and re-immersion after more than two decades had passed. Second, to go through past field notes and examine the topic anew, trying to look at historical developments from the perspective of recent developments, and to identify any latent and evident conflicts. This is not just from the different perspectives which exist on the alp, but, following Mario Blaser's (2016) observations on conflicts, differences and cosmopolitics, also from "uncommon worlds".

An ethnographic revisit occurs, following Burawoy's (2009) definition,

when an ethnographer undertakes participant observation, that is, studying others in their space and time, with a view to comparing his or her site with the same one studied at an earlier point in time, whether by this ethnographer or someone else. (p. 75)

It is compelling to observe the differences in ethnographic immersion. The first time, it took me a couple of weeks to become a visible member of the Krsntenica workforce and not just an observer; now, immersion in the daily chores was quicker. I was pushed (or at least taught) to participate more actively because there were a few accidents – a cow trampled the shepherd's leg, Anthony's son injured his knee, and a cow's torn udder had to be cut off, after which it was driven down into the valley because of the bleeding – that immediately disrupted my plans. This made it impossible to complete in-depth interviews, but on the other hand, it allowed me to share experiences and create a closeness with the others on the alp which provided insights into the current problems and challenges they face.

Alpine Pasture Farming

Pasture farming has a long history in the Alps. It shapes the region in economic, social-cultural and ecological ways (Bätzing, 2021, p. 124) and has produced a landscape consisting of a mixture of collectively and privately owned and managed land. In the Alps, a combination of cultivation and herding emerged known as alpine animal husbandry, the alpine agro-pastoral system or alpine pasture farming (French *économie alpestre*, *économie pastorale*; German *Alpwirtschaft*, *Almwirtschaft*; Italian *alpicoltura*, *economia alpestre*; Slovenian *planinsko gospodarstvo*, *planšarstvo*, *planinsko pašništvo*). This entails the movement of humans and their livestock between permanent winter settlements in the valleys and temporary summer settlements in the higher alpine and subalpine areas. There are two or more spatially segregated spheres of agriculture: arable farming and haymaking in the valleys, and (low or high-altitude) mountain pasturing in the uplands, i.e. on alps, with shelters where needed for animals, people, and the processing of milk. The summer grazing of animals has many advantages, the most evident of which is additional (up to one-third more) animal fodder than would be available in the valley (Kirchengast, 2008). This leaves the scarce land in the lower narrow valleys for the cultivation of crops and haymaking. Together with the harvest from arable farming, the yield from summer grazing enables farmers to produce enough fodder to get through the winter and make the best possible

use of the contrasting levels of altitude and their different growing seasons (Bätzing, 2021; Ledinek Lozej, 2022).

Archaeological excavations have provided evidence of the existence of alpine farming in different parts of the Alps during the Bronze Age (2200–800 BCE). Palynological studies have found even earlier indicators⁴ for high-altitude pastures, but they only show the presence of pasture.⁵ Proof in the form of written sources only exists from the Middle Ages onwards,⁶ but linguistic analyses of place names and terms associated with alpine farming suggest it was taking place before the Middle Ages and perhaps before the time of the Roman Empire (Gilck and Poschlod, 2019; Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018; Ledinek Lozej, 2022). Alpine pastures gained more importance in the 18th century when physiocratic ideas and a focus on market-oriented agriculture beyond subsistence farming led to an intensification of the dairy industry (Tschofen, 2017). In the second half of the 19th century, after the decline of mining, ironworking and the connected woodcutting, charcoal burning, and transportation industries, various governments invested heavily in education in and subsidies for alpine pasture farming.⁷ After an economic peak at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, alpine pasture farming declined throughout the 20th century, and especially from the 1970s onwards. This was largely due to the intensification of agriculture in the lowlands, as well as an increase in urbanisation, and industrialisation, leading to a marginalisation of the inner alpine areas and a transformation in their farming (Krauß and Olwig, 2018; Ledinek Lozej, 2022).⁸ Nevertheless, under the framework of the “new rural paradigm” and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union (EU) which promotes rural development as a multilevel, multi-actor, and multifaceted process (Van der Ploeg et al. 2000, Van der Ploeg

4 From early 4500 BCE.

5 Hence it is not possible to distinguish between nomadism, transhumance and alpine farming.

6 In the Julian Alps the Pečana mountain pasture is mentioned in historical sources from 973 and the Kašina mountain pasture is mentioned in 1338 (Kos, 1975, p. 422).

7 For example, in 1868 the Austrian Imperial-Royal Ministry of Agriculture offered support and awards for improvement of the mountain pasture economy and promotion of dairying (Valenčič, 1990).

8 For example, there were drastic reductions in the number and type of livestock and staff, and in the expansion of land and dependence on subsidies and complementary economic activities (Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018; Krauß and Olwig, 2018).

and Roep, 2003), alpine pasture farming triggered the interest of (regional) governments and experts from the field of agronomy and rural development. Alpine pasture farming was subject to either intensification (in terms of forage or dairy production) or the extensification of agriculture in favour of tourism (catering, accommodation) and occasional educational programmes. However, past (subsistence) practices still survive, and new (transformative) forms of cooperation and solidarity-based agriculture are emerging (Krauß and Olwig, 2018; Ledinek Lozej, 2022).



Figure 1 – The Krstenica alp, 1998.

The Krstenica Alp in the Julian Alps

The Julian Alps are a range of the Southern Limestone Alps that stretches from northeastern Italy to Slovenia, where they rise to their highest point at Mount Triglav (2,864 m). A wide variety of alpine pastures and management structures emerged in this region, due to differences in environment (morphology, climate) and historical and socio-political circumstances, i.e. the inclusion of the territory in different and changing political, economic, cultural

and linguistic frameworks with dynamic borders and boundaries. Mountain pastures differ in their topographical location and altitude, which determines the type of pasture (high meadows, low- or high-mountain pastures) and livestock grazed on them. They also differ regarding ownership and management, and how they have transformed over in the last few decades. These transformations have helped them to overcome current challenges such as abandonment, overuse, overgrowth, the return of wolves and bears, tourism, and pressures from nature conservation and the rewilding of the area.⁹

The Krstenican alpine pasture (1,672 m) is the second-highest active alp in the whole (present-day Slovenian and Italian) Julian Alps. Despite its location at the heart of the Julian Alps, in the Triglav National Park,¹⁰ it lies off the beaten track. It is owned by the Agrarian Community of Bohinjska Češnjica, Jereka, Podjelje, and Goreljek (AC) and comprises 34 ha of registered pastureland.¹¹ In addition to the dairy plant, which is used by a cheese maker and shepherds, there are also four private stalls and six huts. Two of the stalls are used for livestock, in one of which the owners have recently established a dwelling, while another has been converted into a hut. The owners of these stalls still drive livestock to pasture. Two huts are occasionally used by the owners, their relatives and friends as holiday homes, three are rented on a long-term basis, and one hut is available for short-term tourist rental via a long-term tenant.¹² In the immediate vicinity, there are two other huts, one is used by hunters, and the other belongs to the Triglav National Park and is used by rangers or is occasionally rented out.

Krstenica's pastures have been used by the people of Češnjica since the end of the Middle Ages.¹³ After the emancipation of the serfs in 1848, the peasants of Češnjica redeemed and controlled the rights to the land. Each

9 For a more detailed overview of the past state of alpine pastures in the Julian Alps see Melik (1950), for some recent issues see Ledinek Lozej and Roškar (2018).

10 The only national park in Slovenia, named after the highest point Mount Triglav.

11 Grassland areas have decreased over the last century due to declining importance of agriculture and less livestock: from 403 ha in 1923 to 38 ha between 1963 and 1982 (in the years when the alpine pasture was almost abandoned), to 80 ha in 1995 and 70 ha in 2014 (Jovič, 2016, p. 13).

12 Although this is against the Triglav National Park Act (2010), it is rented out to tourists by a long-term tenant. On the abuses of the TNP Act see Ledinek Lozej (2013).

13 Since the village of Češnjica did not have any high-alpine pasture rights or commons, it was given the right to use the Krstenica mountain pastures by their owner, the Bled dominion (Kos, 1960, pp. 133–134; Ceklin, 1977, pp. 67–74).

shareholder had the right to an area of pasture in relation to the number of cattle they owned, to build a hut, to use the wood, and had the duty of maintaining, for example, the pastures, paths and water sources. On the alp, each shareholder had a herder: This was a member of the (extended) family, or a hired member of staff, who looked after the cattle and processed the milk. In the 1870s, when cooperative dairying by professional cheesemakers was introduced by the agricultural societies and other actors, such as local priests,¹⁴ the herders were supposed to help in the dairy and provide wood as fuel to the cheesemaker according to strict rules of alternation based on the number of cattle. The products were distributed according to the quantity of milk per herd of each shareholder (Novak, 1995; 2024; Ledinek Lozej, 1999; Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018).

After World War I, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes introduced agrarian communities (AC) that replaced the previous local communities. Hence, the shareholders at Krstenica reorganised their pasture management and dairying as part of an AC. In the 1930s, the new dairy¹⁵ and the majority of existing huts were built at their present locations.¹⁶ After World War II, the ACs were abolished, and their lands and other properties were nationalised, transferred to the municipalities, and to the management of state cooperatives, the Peasant Work Cooperatives.¹⁷ In the 1960s, the Peasant Work Cooperative in Srednja Vas, which took over management of the property of the AC Bohinjska Češnjica (including the alpine pastures and dairy plants), started to centralise milk processing at the industrial dairy plant in the valley. This was the beginning of the decline of alpine cheesemaking and the pastures: The Krstenica pasture was abandoned for a few years, and members

14 The same process of the intensification of dairying has been identified for the Swiss Alps from the late 18th century onwards, and in neighbouring Austrian and Italian regions from the second half of the 19th century (Tschofen, 2017). For more information on the introduction of common dairying in the Julian Alps see Valenčič (1990) and Ledinek Lozej (2013).

15 It was designed by the architect Alfonz Pirc, who worked on many similar plants in the Bohinj alps (Ledinek Lozej, 1999).

16 According to archaeological sources, the previous location of the Krstenica mountain pastures was higher, at the location of the present pasture of Jezerca. Later there were two alps operating simultaneously, one at Jezerca and the second at the present location of Krstenica. The latter moved to the lower present location due to the vicinity of the forest (used as fuel), a water source, and construction of a new common dairy plant (Ledinek Lozej, 1999).

17 For more information on the impacts of land expropriation and the abolishing of the ACs on alpine pasture farming after World War II see Petek and Urbanc (2007).

of the former AC feared that the state-run Peasant Work Cooperative would sell the alpine dairy, as had been the case for some other alps in the Bohinj region.¹⁸ Thanks to the efforts of some individual breeders and herders, who persisted in grazing the alp during the most challenging times of the 1970s and 1980s, alpine pasture farming recovered. Because of this, grazing and dairying have been preserved on the Krstenica pasture, and it has remained an active alp until the present day.¹⁹ However, at present only five of the more than 150 shareholders²⁰ are using the alp for grazing, and none of these depend on the alpine pasture economically. The economic importance of the alp, Netting's (1981) "balancing on an alp", has been replaced by its symbolic importance and an unarticulated potentiality: for eventual tourism development,²¹ landscape conservation, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and, for example, "nature conservation" (Bätzing, 2021). It also has potential for the preservation of "local traditions", for heritage-making and identity-building, for use by both local and non-local actors.

18 For example, on the Jezero alp the dairy was transformed into a mountain lodge for mountaineers.

19 For more details about the Krstenica alpine pasture see Ledinek Lozej (1999; 2002), Ledinek Lozej and Rožkar (2018), and Urbanc et al. (in press).

20 The number of shareholders has increased because following the Denationalization Act (1991) and the Act on the Reestablishment of Agrarian Communities and Restitution of Their Property and Rights (1994) that re-established the ACs, the inheritance of each owner was processed according to customary inheritance law and was not tied to the house or farm. That led to a fragmentation of rights and an increased number of shareholders.

21 That means additional income from tourists and hikers which the AC and managers of the alp have only partially exploited, e.g. selling dairy produce and drinks to hikers. For example, they do not rent out the huts for short stays to tourists as this is not allowed following the Triglav National Park Act (2010), nevertheless one of the long-term tenants managed to overcome the issue and advertised his hut officially on his website (cf. footnote n. 2). Also, the Triglav National Park Public Institution rents out a hut in the immediate vicinity.



Figure 2 – The Krstenica alp, 2021.

Forty Summers on the Krstenica Alp

Cecily was born in 1935 and spent forty summers on the Krstenica alp between 1975 and 2015, taking care of and milking the cattle of her relatives, neighbours, and other breeders. In 1998, when I spent the summer on the alp, there were 28 dairy cows and 18 heifers from eleven owners.²² They drove the animals up to the alp – depending on the weather – around the feast of Saints Peter and Paul (29 June) and stayed until the Sunday after the feast of the Nativity of Mary (8 September). However, before and after this time on the high mountain alp, Cecily worked on the lower alpine pasture of Zajamniki, but there she took care only of cattle of her brother and nephews.²³

22 The number of cattle has declined since the 1940s and 1950s when there were more than 100 dairy cows. Oxen, heifers, and calves grazed other mountain pastures.

23 While the Krstenica alp was – before nationalisation and after de-nationalisation – in the ownership of the members of the AC, the lower mountain pastures comprised meadows in private property and commonly owned pastures.

As I flip through the 1998 fieldwork diary, a scene unfolds before my eyes. When I first dialled the phone number of Cecily's family in Češnjica, her sister told me that I could not talk to her now because she was in Germany, and she did not know when Cecily would return. She gave me the phone number of her apartment in Ljubljana, which I should try in about a month's time. A milkmaid who was in Germany for the winter and with an apartment in Ljubljana, this was far from what I expected.

A good month later I called Cecily, asking her whether I could come to Krstenica for the summer season. Her answer was clear: "Yes, sure. You can come... I will first go to Zajamniki [the lower alp] for two weeks and only at the end of the month to Krstenica... But do not come at the weekend because I have enough people." I arrived on the Krstenica alp a few days after the cattle drive, accompanied by a friend who helped me carry one of the two backpacks loaded with all the (un)necessary field equipment I thought I needed for the next two months. When I came to a flat, grassy slope below the dairy and saw the first huts, I was excited because of the beautiful scenery and at the same time afraid that I would not be able to cope with this situation and last two months here. "I could just stay for a fortnight at first," I reassured myself. But these gloomy thoughts were dispelled by the clarity of the blazing afternoon sun and the soft, fresh breeze from the mountains of Triglav and Tosc. I was immediately captivated by the view of the mountain range. When we reached the dairy, I hesitantly knocked on the door, entered, and greeted those inside somewhat shyly. "I told you not to come over the weekend!" came the reply. And immediately after, a more conciliatory question, "Would you like some tea?"

This first contact became a blueprint for our relationship, straightforward and full of care, that was formed through everyday experiences: getting up at half-past five, milking the cows, which I began to recognise by their different teats, weighing and curdling the milk, churning the cream, driving the cattle to pasture, cleaning the stalls and searching for lost cows and calves, getting Cecily used to the voice recorder and camera, having fun with the youngsters who helped Cecily, or admiring a slightly different scene in the sky above Mount Ogradi every evening, from the fiery glowing sunset to the flashes of lightning accompanied by hollow thunder. And, of course, there was the writing of diaries and notes in the evenings in the hut owned by Cecily's fam-

ily, where she had put me up so I could have some quiet time for my work. This lasted until I put my recording equipment and camera away in a corner for a while because I was needed for other tasks, or so I thought.



Figure 3 – Removing the curd from the cauldron, 1998.

Cecily learned herding as a child, when she spent all her vacations helping her older sister on the Krstenica alp in the 1940s.²⁴ After her older sister's marriage, Cecily took up the work on the alp as she was "the one who patched the holes in the house" in the family of eleven siblings.²⁵ But when the Peasant Cooperative was formed to take care of the management of alpine dairying by centralising production in the valley, the Krstenica mountain pastures were abandoned for a couple of years in the late 1960s.²⁶ Hence, Cecily spent the entire summer season on the easily accessible lower alpine pasture of Zajamniki, which suited her, because, besides tending the cattle, she also took

24 Her family built the hut and started to spend the summer on the Krstenica alp in 1946.

25 Even though she had a job as a nurse in Ljubljana.

26 Cecily said that in some places the cheese dairy had been empty since 1965 or 1969.

care of her young nephews and elderly brother-in-law. However, because of crowds of visitors and vacationers on the Zajamniki pasture, as well as a fear of losing the dairy on the Krstenica alp (there had been several examples in the neighbouring mountains where the Peasant Cooperatives had sold or transformed a former dairy into a mountain lodge), at the beginning of the 1970s Cecily returned to the Krstenica alp during the summer. At first, she tended only the cattle of family members and close relatives, but she gradually extended the circle of breeders interested in bringing cattle to the alp, expanding this to almost all the former members of the AC, and occasionally beyond. Their interest was grounded being able to reclaim the former or traditional rights to mountain pasture.²⁷ Thanks to the efforts of Cecily, cattle herders from Češnjica and Jereka managed to reorganise themselves into an unofficial form of an alpine-pasture cooperative. This was based on Cecily's willingness to spend the entire summer on the mountain pasture, tending and milking the animals and turning the milk into cheese, ricotta, and butter. She grazed the cattle of extended family and relatives for free; the other owners paid a certain amount per animal.²⁸ Livestock owners, family members included, were required to deliver a weekly food supply to Cecily and to contribute to additional costs (oil for the generator, salt for the animals) and other tasks (such as preparing firewood or helping with the housework). At the end of the season, the cattle owners received dairy products depending on the amount of milk which had come from their herd, or, if they preferred, the equivalent in money.

Cecily had no children of her own, but she worked as a babysitter in Ljubljana and took care of her nephews and great-nephews during the summer, first on the lower mountain pasture of Zajamniki and then also on the high alp of Krstenica. Taking care of the children meant that they worked together with her, so she also taught them how to milk and handle livestock, as well as to process the milk. They slowly proved to be excellent helpers in milking, driving cattle, mixing curds and making butter. Cecily was also helped by

27 When Krstenica was abandoned they either kept their animals on lower mountain pastures during the summer or at home.

28 In 1998, the amount was 5,000 SIT (around 20 euros) per dairy cow and less than half for heifers and calves for the whole season. In 2015, the amount was 50 euros per dairy cow and 25 euros per heifer or calf. During the last three grazing seasons (2013–2015), she also received a payment from the AC, which she shared with those who helped her on the alp.

cattle owners, who sent their children to the mountain pasture for a couple of days, as well as young people from all over the Bohinj Valley who occasionally turned up; sometimes there were fifteen of them from the ages of two to twenty-two. The older ones took care of the younger ones and trained them in the various skills and tasks that were needed on the alp. As they grew up, the younger ones took over. Over the years, some of them were able to work independently, first in the daily cattle drive, then in the milking, and finally in processing of the milk. Cecily explained that she found it easier to work with children than adults because she knew the former would obey if necessary: “The kids have their responsibilities, they help when they need to, and then they have free time. And they get along well.” Whereas at the end of the 20th century several alps had become places of the elderly or unemployed marginalised individuals, the Krstenica alp was full of young people.²⁹ This created bonds among the children, as well as between them and the alpine pasture, its life, work and traditions (Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018).

Decades of work with young people have paid off. Cecily trained four generations to work on the alp. When she retired in 2016, her nineteen-year-old great niece took her place. Vania, a secondary school graduate, took over the management of the alp with the help of her younger brother Jeremy. The decision that Vania should work during the summer on the Krstenica alp was made by Vania and her parents, because “she had time, she had graduated and was free until October”. Media, from the national television to the local newspapers, seized on the fact that young people had taken over management of the alp.³⁰ However, Vania’s and her brother’s work in the alp was presented as an autonomous and romanticised decision, without insights into the complex relationships, tensions and changes in the alp, village and AC, that had taken place since the 1990s.

29 Children played an important role in alpine pastoralism in the Julian Alps and in other Alpine regions until the 1960s, and in some places into the 1970s. In the region of Bohinj some children became independent shepherds as early as the age of twelve or fourteen (Novak, 1989; 2024).

30 See, for example the reports on national television (Braniselj, 2016), national radio (Jocič, 2016), and newspapers (Mlakar, 2018; Medvešek, 2018) and regional newspapers (Sodja, 2016). There was also an international report by Alps–Danube–Adria TV (Bevčič, 2018).

The Agricultural Community Takes Command

The restitution of property and rights to the members of the AC, which took place in 1994, did not initially have a significant impact on the management model introduced by Cecily. However, after denationalisation in 1991, several breeders who were still driving cattle to Krstenica (and other alps) formed an organisation which demonstrated their ambition to manage the alp. Until then, most of the investment and improvements had been carried out by Cecily, her family, and eventually by other users of the alpine pastures (e.g. long-term tenants).³¹ Since 1994, the reconstituted AC³² has begun to participate more intensively in the work on the alp, for example in the renovation of the wooden roof of the dairy and the installation of a solar power plant. Its members started to take over the decision-making process, based on the fact that this was collective property, and they were carrying out projects of common benefit to all. The AC's ambitions increased especially after Slovenia's accession to the EU in 2004 and the introduction of the European Union's CAP subsidies for the preservation of alpine pastures and the alpine landscape. This led to tensions, intensified by the personal agendas of the individuals involved.³³

When I visited Cecily in 2016 on the lower alp of Zajamniki, for the first time in forty years she was not spending the summer in Krstenica. She told me that she was pleased with the takeover by Vania and said it was about time. In Zajamniki she only took care of her family's cattle, and there was not much milk from the three cows. I was a little surprised that she was no longer processing the milk in the shared dairy, but in her own hut. How was it possible – I wondered – that someone who had taken care of the village's cattle for four decades now had no access to the alp's shared infrastructure? It seemed

31 For example, solving the problem of water supply solution with running spring water, improvements in the dairy, installation of a generator for electricity, maintaining the road.

32 The Češnjica, Jereka, Podjelje and Koprivnik AC was formed under the 1991 Act on Denationalisation and the 1994 Act on the Reestablishment of Agrarian Communities and Restitution of their Property and Rights. However, they have not succeeded in reorganising themselves under the 2015 Law on Agrarian Communities, which gives ACs more autonomy. The reason is that they do not know at least half of the shareholders because the inheritance issues between the shareholders have not been resolved, therefore, they cannot convene a general meeting at which a decision on registration under the new law could be made.

33 For more information on the different agendas of those involved see Ledinek Lozej (2002; 2013) and Urbanc et al. (in press).

to me that Cecily somehow had, intentionally or unintentionally, been cut off from Krstenica, even though she could, and would probably still want to, have a supervisory role there. Cecily reassured me that she was in constant contact with her great-niece Vania and talked to her on the phone almost daily. She had taught her how to heat and cool the brine for cheese, when to change it, how to churn butter, and above all, how to keep the dairy and cheesemaking equipment clean and tidy and be careful about hygiene. Cecily was also aware that it was thanks to her that Vania had taken over work on the alp confidently and independently. Despite the unpleasantness around the use of the shared dairy, Cecily is actually doing well in Zajamniki; she is enjoying a well-deserved rest and taking care of only a few heads of cattle.

Vania and Jeremy managed the Krstenica alp for three grazing seasons between 2016 and 2018, organising a team of workers that consisted of friends and relatives, with their parents supplying them with food and drinks to be sold to tourists. The dynamic in the alp changed as they have a different style of management; a lot of people who had been there previously missed working on the alp. Why Vania and Jeremy stopped working at Krstenica after 2018 is not entirely clear, but Vania told me that it was too tiring and exhausting to do all the work alone: "It's too much to be tied up for two months... And at the end, the payment was not what they had agreed." But there were probably other reasons, from the fact that a two-month stay on the alp without social contact with friends was too exhausting, for personal and family reasons, and disagreements with the AC about the distribution of the additional income related to the sale of drinks to visitors. Since 2019, the AC has hired a professional cheesemaker and an additional shepherd to manage the alp, and Vania has been employed as a cheesemaker in the dairy in the valley. During the summer, she occasionally helps in the alpine dairy on the Zajavniki alp, which belongs to the neighbouring AC of Gorjuše-Nomenj. In the summer of 2021, she visited Cecily several times in Zajamniki, and she also went to Krstenica, where the cattle of her family were spending the summer, to look for a cow that the shepherds had told her had kicked. She admitted that she misses Krstenica. It is hard to imagine the feeling of coming to the pasture where you grew up, helped and worked independently, and then see that someone else is in charge.

When I arrived at the Krstenica dairy with Anthony and his children in early July 2021, Michael and Sean, hired to do the herding and milking, were waiting for us at the big kitchen table. The table is new but somehow empty compared to the table in the 1990s when children crowded the space. The general atmosphere is different, uncomfortable, and full of more masculine banter than in the 1990s.

Michael had already spent the previous summer season as a shepherd in Krstenica, where he had helped the cheesemaker. Since the cheesemaker had had some health problems, and because numerous disagreements between the cheesemakers and shepherds, Michael had taken over the cheesemaking at the end of the season. He was paid for this supplementary work by AC and in 2021 the AC hired him again to take over the dairy. To help out, Michael invited his colleagues, Sean and Mark, to work as shepherds. They all come from another Slovenian region, Carinthia, and are considered outsiders by local breeders.

The shepherds have their own agendas, ranging from economic interests to gaining experience and credentials in cheesemaking. They also want to make life and work on the alp as smooth as possible: they asked for a portable shower; they have their own preferences for the food and drink that is delivered to them by the owners of the cattle; they do not want, or do not know, how to milk cows that are kicking because of injuries; and, they do not know how to repair things. Some members of the AC considered them to be unaccustomed to working and living on a mountain pasture and not proactive enough in solving problems. Above all, they feel that they are more interested in communicating with visitors than in taking care of the cattle, cleaning the stalls and making cheese. Thus, the agendas of the shepherds collide with the unarticulated interests of the AC. At the end of the season, it seemed to me that everyone – employers and employees – was dissatisfied. I was also told the AC did not want to deal with hired staff anymore because they are, as they put it, “different from the locals”. For the AC, this difference is, “that there is no connection”. The complaints of breeders appeared to lie in the perception that they did not care enough for the animals and were too attentive to visitors.



Figure 4 – Removing the curd from the cauldron, 2021.

Members of the AC complain that the former rules that governed alpine life are no longer followed nowadays. But I had heard the same complaints before, during the period when Cecily took over the alp. The only difference is that Cecily managed to cushion and soften conflicts and to establish a new way of operating with years of dedicated work. Vania and Jeremy were somehow still too young to make autonomous decisions, still followed the visions of their parents, and remained on the alp for only three years, which from a long-term perspective is too short a period of time in which to establish their authority. For Michael it was an extremely challenging environment in which to introduce a different form of management that would, as he explained, include renovation and a turn towards providing hospitality. The previous cheesemaker had built his position of authority on his skills, but, lacking this, Michael's desire for innovation on the alp and autonomy was doomed to failure. However, even though the representatives of the AC did not want to hire non-local staff anymore, they still employed Mark as the cheesemaker and herder-in-chief and his team of co-workers for the summer season of 2022. It is evident that members of the AC no longer depend on the pasture economically, hence their role is based solely on ownership and hobbled by

the decreasing importance of agricultural production, the unsettled ownership of shares among the members and resulting limitations as a legal entity, and the lack of both former and new ways of acting.

Conclusion

At the end of the 1990s, an agricultural advisor had seen the future of Krstenica as very bright and promising. This looked like it might come true when Vania and Jeremy took over in 2016, especially given the media exposure.³⁴ A few years later, when alpine pastures and dairying are now labelled as intangible cultural heritage³⁵ and local food chains are seen as increasingly important,³⁶ Krstenica is facing challenges and tensions. These problems are articulated differently by different actors, but can be categorised as follows:

1. Tensions between the particular interests of different actors. Whereas in the past tensions were mainly external (e.g. conflicts between different villages over pastures, and between the interests of the TNP, tourism and the agriculturalists), today these are more internal, between the AC (the owners of the land), the breeders (the owners of the livestock), and the labour force (the personnel on the alp). In recent years, this was most evident through a general dissatisfaction of the AC with hired labour because they are “different from the locals”. Nevertheless, the roles and interests of the owners and personnel may overlap, coexist, collide, or even change over time, forming different alliances due to purely personal circumstances peculiar to all small communities.
2. These tensions are primarily the result of general social change associated with urbanisation and changes in family structure. In the past, and as was the case for Cecily, the extended family provided labour (Cole and Wolf, 1974; Netting, 1981; Viazzo, 1989). Herding was done by older members of the family, unmarried uncles or aunts, or girls before marriage (Novak, 1985, 1995).

34 See footnote n. 30.

35 Mountain pasturing and dairying was inscribed in the national Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage on 7 April 2020 (Jerin and Ledinek Lozej, 2020).

36 This was especially so in 2021 when Slovenia was the European Region of Gastronomy.

3. The past is often idealised and seen as a golden age, and changes are usually hard to accept. While the hired herders want to impose new rules on the alp, the cattle owners complain, for example, that the herders do not get up early enough, that the work is not done on time, that the cows are not rotated daily, in short, that there are no rules. Michael complained that the owners of the cattle were always referring to how Cecily did things and how things were organised then. But I can clearly remember that in the 1990s, they also complained about Cecily's new form of management with the use of children, her dairying, and the production of smaller wheels of cheese.
4. The rules that regulated several aspects of alpine life before nationalisation in 1947 are no longer followed, and new ones have not yet been introduced. The AC, which is not a legal entity, has neither the legitimacy nor the potency to mediate in imagining and shaping Krstenica's future (despite the efforts of its president and some members). According to several interviewees, the key reason for the weakness of the AC is that shareholders are no longer dependent economically on the alpine pasture and agriculture in general. In this context, it is significant that in the search for a competent and willing cheesemaker, some suggested organizing the work on the alp so that each owner of dairy cattle would take over the management for part of the summer.³⁷ In this way, the work would be divided, and at least one family member would learn the skills necessary for looking after the animals and land (together with cheesemaking) and could eventually transfer these to their children. However, this proposal was turned down by the cattle owners.

A solution to the differences in the agendas of the actors on the Krstenica alp – the AC, the hired shepherds and cheesemakers, and the livestock owners³⁸ – might be found in cosmopolitics and the work of Mario Blaser (2016) and his ethnographic material on a conflict around caribou in Labrador, Canada. The

³⁷ Such an organisation exists for some alpine pastures in the southern part of the Julian Alps near Tolmin and Kobarid (see Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018).

³⁸ Other actors and stakeholders involved at various levels of government include the TNP, Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Slovenian Forest Service, Tourism Bohinj, and different ministries, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, and also – following Latour's (2005) actor-network theory – non-human entities that form the Krstenica assembly.

concept of cosmopolitics, as developed by Isabelle Stengers (2005) and Bruno Latour (2004), keeps open who and what might compose a common world.

In this way, cosmopolitics offers a way to avoid the pitfalls of reasonable politics, a politics that, defining in advance that the differences at stake in a disagreement are between perspectives on a single reality. Figuring the common world as its possible result, rather than as a starting point, cosmopolitics disrupts the quick recourse to ruling our concerns on the basis of their ostensible lack of reality. (Blaser, 2016, p. 566)

Given Blaser's description of how the conflicts (class conflict over the control of a resource, cultural conflict involving the competing knowledges) and differences "might constitute the political in a given situation" (Blaser, 2016, p. 551), we can question, whether there is a conflict of perspectives on the Krstenica alp among the actors or whether the alp is actually an "uncommon world" (Blaser, 2016, p. 562). It might be better to see it as a pluriverse and a shared setting, not among but between the AC, hired cheesemakers and shepherds, cattle owners, long-term tenants, the Triglav National Park, its rangers, hikers, hunters, and cows and other creatures. In this sense, the differences between cattle owners and hired shepherds are not concerned with the local versus non-local, but different worlds. In this regards, Mario Blaser (2016) treats certain conflicts as ontological rather than epistemological frictions,³⁹ and instead of reasonable politics and its exclusionary operations (for example, excluding someone for "being different") proposes adopting the idea of cosmopolitics. This would be a cosmopolitics that articulates common goals for those who want to live with the land and animals on the Krstenica alp. Using an examination of its historical development and ethnographic observations of recent developments, this could lead to a just calibration of investment in work, money, time, care⁴⁰ and revenues from milk and meat production, subsidies, and additional income from tourism, and ecosystem services.

In 2021 the Krstenica alp's future was not as promising as it had been in

39 He also points out, that the specification of ontological differences is fundamentally an a posteriori proposition (Blaser, 2016)

40 For example, each breeder decides whether they still want to drive dairy cows to the alp, which requires daily oversight, prefer to send only non-dairy cattle which demand only occasional supervision.

the 1990s, and it formed a contrast with the neighbouring Laz alp. When I was there for the first time in the 1990s, two elderly female herders were taking care of a small number of animals, one of them making cheese from goat's milk. The atmosphere was not as lively as in Krstenica, populated as it was by young people from the whole Bohinj valley. Since 1990s many changes have taken place in Laz: The dairy on the property of the AC Studor-Stara Fužina was rented by a farmer and skilled cheesemaker from Studor, who combined farming, cheesemaking and tourism in the valley with summer grazing on the mountain pasture, and also involved other family members.⁴¹ In 2021 he and one of the elderly herders passed away, but the pasture was taken over by his daughter Lucy, who is in her thirties and who decided to be a farmer instead of working in the local tourism organisation. She has engaged young people from the whole Bohinj valley as helpers in the daily drives to and from the pastures, milking and dairying. The atmosphere reminded me of that in Krstenica in the 1990s.

These developments and changes are only possible because of new beginnings. Beginning, as explained by Michael Lambeck in his insightful article on sacrifice and the problem of beginning, is an activity that implies return and repetition, involves the designation of a consequent intention, and is the first step in the intentional production of meaning (Lambeck, 2007, p. 22). I dedicate this article to Cecily and Lucy, and all those shepherds and cheesemakers from Bohinj (and elsewhere) who were and are courageous enough to embark on new beginnings, new meanings and alternative futures.

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41 For more, see the ethnographic film *V Lazu* (Peče, 2018).

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“The Woodland Must Be Cultivated as a Field” – Conversations About the Changing Natural Environment in Vinigo di Cadore (Belluno, Italy)

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how the Vinighesi (inhabitants of Vinigo di Cadore) perceive and engage with their changing environment. Their primary focus is on the woodland and its management, highlighting the contribution of human activities that made the forest a vibrant living space in the past. However, they also acknowledge that today it is in a state of neglect and no longer a resource for the Vinigo people. Instead, it has become a source of anxiety as the forest encroaches upon the village. They point to changes that are mainly due to human activities, such as depopulation, changing livelihood practices and a different approach to forest management that has led to a lack of care for their environment. The combination of these elements has created a discontinuity in what they perceive as a strong past relationship between people and their territory – particularly the forest – which once allowed the environment to be maintained in a healthy state. Vinighesi assert that this relationship must be restored.

Introduction

In the last days of January 2014 Vinigo di Cadore (Belluno, Italy) woke up under a thick blanket of snow. A major unexpected storm had brought a heavy snow, blocking not only the two roads embracing the village but also the paved road with its steep slope and sharp turns connecting the villages of Vinigo and of Peaio with the rest of the region of Cadore. The village remained in the dark, without electricity for 48 hours and it was impossible to use mobile phones. In short, the snow blocked all communications, isolating the village. Among the causes of the blackout was the falling of several trees onto the power lines due to an exceptionally heavy load of snowfall.

The weather emergency had affected all of the Belluno Dolomites and the adjoining villages of the Belluno province. "Record snowfall, the black-out returns" ("*Neve da record, torna il black out*") headlined the front page of the daily local newspaper *Corriere delle Alpi* on February 1st and *Il Gazzettino* on the same day titled its front page "Northeast, snow and water bomb" ("*Nordest, bomba di neve e acqua*"). One had to go back to the 1970s to find any such quantities of snow.

It may seem unusual to begin this contribution, centred on the theme of woodlands with this vignette, but it is precisely by extrapolating such exceptional events from the "post-card" imagery we often associate with these high lands, that we can understand how extreme weather events are today experienced in this Alpine area. What struck me at that time was to realize that prior to those days in early 2014, when snow had overwhelmed us with its colour and depth, monopolizing our conversations, the narratives shared by the men and women interviewed had concentrated on other aspects of the natural world, particularly the woodland and the uncultivated fields. Vinigo's previously prevailing green-oriented perspective had, albeit temporarily, shifted to white.

During the period of fieldwork in Vinigo (2013–2016) people spoke in general of an increase in the temperature which has made these extreme winter events something associated only to the past.¹ Many interlocutors recalled family memories of very cold and snowy winters, experienced during the first part of the last century when some hamlets suffered true isolation as they were blocked by layers of snow a few meters high, lasting sometimes even for weeks. However, some elderly men mentioned the year 1940, when on Christmas Eve a section of Vinigo was destroyed by fire, a reminder that, as it was a snowless Christmas, it was even more difficult to extinguish the fire.

Going back to 2014 and the powerful images of those first days of intense snowfall, when men shovelled snow off the rooftops because it was wet and very heavy, and would have jeopardized the tightness of the roofs. Further, it was difficult to shovel the snow around the houses because people did not know where to pile it. Most inhabitants stayed at home, and those houses not equipped with wood-burning fireplace became very cold places.

1 I want to thank the people of Vinigo for sharing their knowledge and experience about their past and present-day life. Many thanks go to Stefano, Maria, Lino, and especially to Giuliana and Marilena with whom the conversation continues to stay alive through the years.

A couple of days later, the thick white blanket of snow covering the two main streets was interrupted only by some traces of wild animals coming out of the woods in search of food during the night, mixed with a few tracks of snow tires. The snowfall kept all of us in some kind of isolation and thus it proved to be an opportunity to get closer to the daily life of the people who dwell in this village, numbering just a little over a hundred.²

Vinigo was indeed isolated, but it was an exceptional occasion. This vignette further highlights the long-standing issue of the management of woodlands and the infrastructure "maintenance" of the mountains. It also allows me to introduce the perspective adopted in this contribution by tuning into several scholars' plea for greater critical attention to the Alps and to narratives surrounding their "remoteness". I am referring to the reflection proposed by, among others, Pier Paolo Viazzo some twenty years ago, in which he revisits Edward Ardener's concept of remoteness, a concept that extends beyond the actual geographic distance of a location; a location, in fact, can be geographically close yet constructed as "distant". In his 1980s essays Ardener employs this concept when discussing the locations chosen by anthropologists to carry out their research. Their remoteness legitimizes these sites as field locations or, in the words of Gupta and Ferguson, makes them fields "more equal than others"(1997, p. 13), referring to what the two anthropologists call the "hierarchy of purity of field sites" (p. 12). Returning to the mountains, they are "almost by convention remote areas" (in Viazzo, 2003).

I aim to critically examine not just the concept of isolation and remoteness itself, but primarily the perspective that treats it as a backward projection, thereby overlooking historical, demographic, social, and economic transformations that have impacted mountain regions, which in turn risk to solidify the stereotypes of both mountain and plain. In this context, I find Mondher Kilani's case study of the Lower Valais particularly relevant. While the literature from the eighteenth century helps prevent external observers from becoming trapped into a narrative that portrays these lands and their inhabitants as victims of a harsh and hostile environment, the narrative shifts from the mid-nineteenth century onward. This shift is marked by a deterministic view of nature and progress, which leads to the interpretation of these areas

2 The residents of Vinigo at the time of the research were 115 evenly divided between males (58) and females (57).

as inhabited by a “primitive” humanity, resulting in a perspective that has been altered into “a *long durée* backwardness” (Viazzo, 2003, p. 176)³.

I find that a critical analysis of the concept of remoteness lends itself well in the case of Vinigo. For people living in neighboring villages and small towns Vinigo conjures images of an isolated place. However, for the Vinigo people, though they are aware of the demographic decline that has affected their place, the presence of an increasingly elderly population and the slow closure of all the economic activities that in the past attracted people from outside, other images are associated with their place. Thus, the notion of remoteness as perceived from the outside does not correspond to the Vinighesi’s view of themselves and their place, even if they, like so many others mountain areas, complain of being left alone by “the State”. For example, in December 2013 the grocery store in the village closed, an activity that also functioned as a meeting place, where people went to chat, where they could leave small things to return to other locals. Maria, who had come back to Vinigo after years spent with her family in Germany, her two children grown up, continued to keep the store open in a space owned by her family, complaining that the state did not give any help to these small businesses in mountainous places, but on the contrary it continued to tighten taxes and burden bureaucratic paperwork, and so she made the decision to close the business at the end of 2013, leaving the village devoid of shared spaces, except for the church.

Contrary to the current stereotyped view of Vinigo as a remote area, its inhabitants are proudly aware of the high level of literacy in the village, as in the rest of Cadore, since the second half of the XIX century. Both boys and girls went to primary school which, as a woman commented, was “ahead of the school of the plain” (see also Piseri, 2012). The fact that both boys and girls attended primary school, and that the local education system was considered advanced compared to that of the plains challenges the notion of re-

3 Lorenzo Migliorati in his contribution to the volume *Mountains and Hybrid Territories between Urbanity and Rurality* (2022) also asks whether “it is possible to look at the Alpine space beyond the clichés with which it is often accompanied?” (2022, p. 220), and one of the two stereotypes he refers to is that of the “isolated, distant, inaccessible Highlands” (p. 221). In the introduction to the same volume, Luigi Lorenzetti and Roberto Leggero (2022) emphasize the interconnection between urban and rural contexts, a phenomenon that also affects mountain contexts, and in this framework, they reflect on the concepts of permeability and contamination.

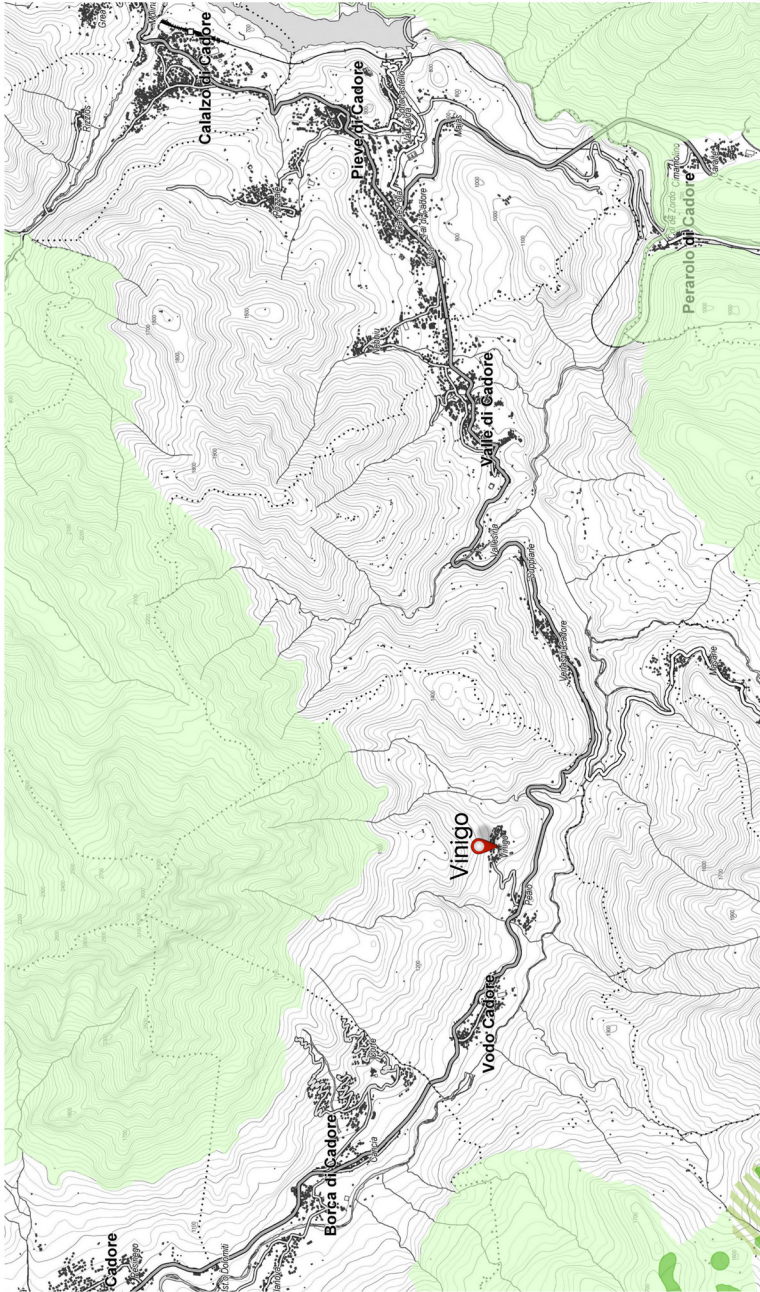


Figure 1 – Map of Vinigo and surroundings. webGIS of the Province of Belluno. Piano Territoriale di Coordinamento Provinciale, adapted, [www. https://webgis.provincia.belluno.it/index.php/view/map?repository=mappe&project=ptcp_app](https://webgis.provincia.belluno.it/index.php/view/map?repository=mappe&project=ptcp_app) Italian Open Data License Scale: 1:50,000

moteness by showcasing the area's proactive approach to literacy.⁴ The elementary school opened in Vinigo in the second half of the XIX century with 60 students. From 1928/29 a new building hosted the school; the number of children attending it – around fifty – remained fairly constant from the 1930s to the 1950s, then numbers started to decline: from 35 enrolled in 1956 to only five in 1975, the school's last year of operation. (Marchioni and Pivarotto, 2022).⁵ The presence of *colonie di vacanza* holiday camps in Vinigo in the summer time during the 1950s and 1960s also challenges the perception of the community as isolated and remote.⁶ The arrival of young people from Veneto and beyond, often from the cities, not only provided a source of income for hosting families but also fostered interaction between the residents and the guests ("Parents came to visit their children and then they used to come back bringing their friends" recalls one of the interviewees) (see also Bonato and Viazzo, 2013).

Vinighesi, as local people are called, though they present depopulation as one of their main problems, assert their distinctiveness when they recount their ancient history while at the same time joking about their geographical location. They foreground their old and rich past when they owned distant pastures (see below) and point out the nickname used by nearby villages, who call them "dogs from Vinigo" (*i ciànes de Vinigo*), which refers to the role of guardians of the territory historically played by them (De Ghetto, 2009, p. 48). At the same time, they point out that until the 1970s/1980s those who relied on the bus to reach larger villages had to walk down to Peaio to catch it on the state road of Alemagna, the only road connecting with the rest of Cadore;⁷ on the return trip they recalled the bus driver announcing the upcoming stop for those who needed to reach Vinigo by foot, "For Vinigo. You

4 This echoes what Viazzo (1990) has discussed concerning literacy in the Alpine societies (pp. 184–188). The higher level of literacy may have been linked to the importance of seasonal migration; it was a skill needed by both men who migrated and women who remained in Vinigo to take care of all the agro-pastoral and domestic activities.

5 For a more general overview, see Piseri (2012).

6 In Vinigo it is a shared memory, yet no one can say exactly who organized these colonies. Later in the 1970s they remember a summer camp organized for several years by a priest.

7 Until 1964 had operated the Dolomites train, which was inaugurated in 1921 and had a station in Peaio. First the train and later the bus were used daily by students to travel to school, both middle and high school, as well as by workers.

change here: Eagle service”, an ironic way to refer to the steep slope of the road reaching Vinigo.

Keeping in mind also the risk of highlighting the remoteness of a place to make it more exotic, in this essay I aim to move away from this externally perceived imagery in considering the material collected in Vinigo, because only in this way can the notion of “negligence” of the environment around the village expressed by Vinighesi be read not as a nostalgic way of anchoring oneself in the past, but instead as a way to give voice to a more balanced way of relating to the environment, one that leverages a living sociality and shared handed-down knowledge, and which fosters a more sustainable coexistence between humans and the environment, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable future. Ingold’s perspective on how human beings relate to their environment (Ingold, 2000) and the call from Lorenzetto and Leggero (2022) to address the intricate connections with places by activating a “greater ability to read the complex relationships between the territory and who populates it” (p. 13) allow for a deeper understanding of how Vinighesi engage with their surroundings.

The metaphors used by people from Vinigo to speak of the area around Vinigo in the past – woodlands and meadows – are quite revealing. The sense of a place cared for looms large. This involves considering the notion of “care” (Tronto, 1993) with an emphasis on interconnection and interdependency (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

From this perspective, I will refer back to the conversations engaged in while in Vinigo to present the stories behind the vivid images local people relate about their natural environment, how they prioritize and express their concerns for the perceived changes in the landscape.⁸ In doing so, although they speak of the changes in the landscape they do not view the natural en-

8 The main ethnographic research in Vinigo was conducted between October 2013 and July 2015 as part of a larger project “Cultural Models of Nature Across Cultures: Space, Causality, and Primary Food Producers” funded by NSF (National Science Foundation). Nine scholars participating in the project presented and discussed their research during a workshop at the University of Verona in March 2015 (the written contributions in: Bennardo ed., 2019). Data were collected by Elisa Bellato and me while Iolanda Da Deppo transcribed the recorded (Ladin) material and Miro Marchi worked on data visualization. The analysis of the data owes much to long conversations I had with Giovanni Bennardo while he was a visiting scholar at the University of Verona. My last short fieldwork in Vinigo was in May 2016 before the Vaia storm of October 2018 which strongly affected parts of the Eastern Alps.

vironment as threatening per se, changes are instead perceived as being brought about by a different engagement between people and their environment. Older Vinighesi state that people must tend the woodland to keep it healthy, and that a healthy woodland benefits people.

Before addressing these issues, I introduce the research area by presenting some hallmarks to better contextualize it; first I focus on past mobility as outmigration is one of the most recurring challenges faced by Vinigo, then I deal with an important institution of Cadore: *the Rules [le Regole]*.

The Field Site: Vinego Paés Laden in the Belluno Mountain Province

“Belluno represents the exciting crossroads between Alpine and Mediterranean cultures. The only entirely mountainous province in the Veneto region, Belluno is launching major initiatives throughout Italy to preserve Alpine its identity and traditions. Through new ideas and initiatives, Belluno – ‘Alpine City of the Year 1999’ – wants to develop, as a city and province, sustainable projects to stop depopulation and increase the survivability of mountain provinces in Italy and Europe.”⁹ With this motivation Belluno was chosen as “Alpine City” in 1999 (<https://www.cittaalpina.org/town/belluno/>).¹⁰

The province of Belluno is one of the Italian provinces which are home to the Dolomitic Ladin. “Ladin” is a conventional label dating back to the 19th century, which became more widely used during the course of the 20th century, embracing the dialects spoken in the area and later the people who spoke them (Guglielmi, 2003). In the Province of Belluno, thanks to the legislation on historical linguistic minorities (Law 482/1999), several municipalities (Cadore, Comelico, Agordino, upper Val Cordevole and Val di Zoldo) have been

9 “Belluno rappresenta l’emozionante crocevia tra la cultura alpina e quella mediterranea. Unica provincia montana del Veneto, Belluno sta avviando importanti iniziative in tutta Italia per preservare l’identità e le tradizioni alpine. Attraverso nuove idee e iniziative, Belluno - ‘Città alpina dell’anno 1999’ - desidera sviluppare, come città e provincia, progetti sostenibili per fermare lo spopolamento e aumentare la capacità di sopravvivenza delle province montane in Italia e in Europa.”

10 This decision was taken by an international jury chosen within the framework of the Alpine Town of the Year Association, a membership body that pursues the goals of the Alpine Convention (<https://www.cittaalpina.org/associazione/>).

recognized as Ladin. Among the different groups composing Dolomite Ladin, one is represented by Cadore Ladin.

Vinigo not only is one of the oldest settlements in the Cadore area at an elevation of 1,025 m (3,363 feet), but it is also one of the oldest ladin settlements in the area (Vinego Paés Laden),¹¹ with its origins going back to the 11th century (Collodo, 1987, p. 363). Both Vinigo and Peaio belong to the municipality of Vodo di Cadore, in the Boite Valley. The village lies between two creeks – to the west the Rudàn and to the east the Ruiniàn – both originating in the Antelao (the second highest peak in the Dolomites, 3,234 m.), north of the village. Contrary to the Ruiniàn, the former is perceived by local people as a water way that causes damage; for example, in August 2015 after heavy rain the stream caused a landslide. It is a tributary of the Boite, a tributary of the Piave river, flowing entirely in the Veneto Region. Though less elevated than the Antelao, the other imposing mountain, (to the west) is the Pelmo, 3,168 m., locally named “the throne of God” (*el caregon del Padreterno*), which, as several inhabitants point out, can be seen in all its “majesty and beauty” from Vinigo.



Figure 2 – Mount Pelmo (3,168m) seen from Vinigo, November 2014. Copyright 2014 by A. Paini.

11 For a description of the village of Vinigo and its central cultivated area, see Paini (2019).

Gelatieri (ice-cream makers), not *Gelatai* (ice-cream sellers)

As most of the mountain area of the province of Belluno, Vinigo experienced different forms of emigration in the 20th century. In some cases, the emigration was due to seasonal movements, in others – particularly between the two world wars and afterwards – migration became permanent, directed to other European countries (in particular to Germany, Holland and the former Czechoslovakia), to the United States and to Argentina. Migrants left in search of work and a better life, they worked in factories, in mines and as *gelatieri*. In February, often on the 11th, they were remembered in a special feast celebrated in Vinigo (Marchioni and Pivrotto 2002, p. 151).

Today, people in Vinigo eagerly emphasize the difference between ice-cream makers (*gelatieri*) and ice-cream sellers (*gelatai*), the latter a common name in Italy for people selling ice-cream. They did not leave to make a living by selling ice cream, but they were ice cream makers and made their living out of this expertise. The complex issue of emigration is recounted not only in terms of despair, hunger, and leaving one's homeland in search of a better future, but by foregrounding the skills they brought with them. They thus express pride in their ability to contribute specific competence to their migration project. They moved in search of a better life not only to improve their economic situation, but as they were keen to underline, they were also taking their skills to the host country. This narrative is inscribed in the groove traced by Viazzo (1989/1990) in his reinterpretation of Alpine societies, which challenges certain established preconceptions of these societies as closed and backward.

Furthermore, those who had moved to live in a European country, in time starting their own ice cream shop, would return home during the winter closure of the ice cream business between October and February/March, keeping alive their ties with Vinigo.

The archival data I consulted in the town hall in Vodo di Cadore shows that in the early 1900s Vinigo had 177 heads of families.¹² The situation in Vinigo with its current population of 115 residents and the decline to below 100 during wintertime highlights the significant impact of depopulation.

12 *Registro della popolazione 1896–1902.*

Unlike other areas of the Italian Alps that are experiencing a resurgence or stagnation, Vinigo at the time of the research appeared to be facing a unique challenge. The absence of a 'return to the mountains' suggests that the village was not benefiting from the trends observed in some western Alpine localities. (Porcellana, Fassio, Viazzo e Zanini, 2016).

Other forms of seasonal movements were the itinerant economic activities such as coppersmiths (*calderai*) and glaziers (*vetrai*), an essential source of income until the 1960s and 1970s, though the main source of livelihood in those years still came from agriculture, breeding and the sale of timber. These itinerant crafts meant that on the one hand young and adult men were often away from the village for long periods of time. On the other hand, they were exposed to new ideas, crops and other items which they brought back to Vinigo. I take care to consider together both temporary migrations that will become permanent ones and these seasonal movements because in both cases Vinighesi speaking about them emphasize the relevance of taking one's professional expertise elsewhere and the more or less prolonged absence from home.

From the late 1960s manufacturers of eyewear (*occhialerie*) opened in Cadore,¹³ providing a stable source of income for many families in Vinigo. However, this new economic activity failed to reverse the depopulation trend. Of the three taverns and one family restaurant operating in Vinigo in the 1960s, none survive.¹⁴ Eyewear factories were a breath of fresh air for the local economy; they were located mainly in Venas, Pieve, and Calalzo, places at a short distance from Vinigo that allowed its inhabitants working there to commute.¹⁵ But within twenty years or so, companies began moving to Longarone, which was too far away for daily commuting. And the people of Vinigo chose to move to live in other areas of Cadore or further away and young people after obtaining their high school or University degree decided not to return to live as there were no economic attractions. Even being a ski instructor in Cortina d'Ampezzo started to lose its appeal, as Mario, one of the in-

13 Still today, the main production facilities are in the Belluno area, the so-called Italian "eyewear district" (*distretto dell'occhialeria*).

14 La Locanda dal Gobbo and the family restaurant operated from 1957 till 1985 (Riccarda, July 3rd, 2015).

15 In the 1960s the eyewear factories even offered people the possibility to work from home, assembling glasses, as Giuliana and her sister Angelina recalled.

terlocutors from Vinigo,¹⁶ explains. “Those who are local have a job all year round and also have the license of ski instructor, yet no longer do it because it is no longer affordable.” He explains that in the past the ski instructors were carpenters, plumbers who alternated this work with that of the winter ski instructor. And this alternation “guaranteed a comfortable life,” adding “the ski instructors were professionals who had to know the environment. Nowadays there are more people who do it, even young people who come from outside and only stay for the season.”

Land-use Management

“If there were no *Regole*, the environment in Cadore would have been devastated” said Mario, a *regoliere* himself, to open our conversation on the subject of land-use management.¹⁷ In fact, the *Regola* (the Rule) is a very important local institution, a traditional communal way of ruling community life and of managing land, woodland and the natural resources which goes back to the 13th and 14th centuries. For centuries the people of Cadore have operated in strict compliance with both private and collective property rules. In the past, there were two rules in which Vinigo participated: the Big Rule (*La Regola Grande*) which included Vinigo, Peaio, Vodo and Cancia, and the Small Rule (*La Regola Piccola*) of Vinigo and Peaio. According to Belli (2007), during the centuries of its existence only two *Regole*, one of which was that of Peaio-Vinigo, dissolved the communal property by dividing it per capita (p. 21). None of the inhabitants of Vinigo can remember when this reorganization of land management took place, though Belli dates the breakup to the time of the Lombard Venetian (1816–1866).

Historians Giuseppe Richebuono (1962), Silvana Collodo (1987) and Giandomenico Zanderigo Rosolo (2012) report on a document of 1226 which relates

16 I negotiated the terms of confidentiality with the research interlocutors. Several of them are happy to find themselves named (first name) in the written pages after several years passed since the field research.

17 As a contemporary example of the importance of land management capacity by the Rules, it was pointed out the rejection by the majority of San Vito Regolieri of the ski resort project on Mount Pelmo proposed by the municipal administration (Mario, January, 30th, 2014); for a more detailed analysis, see Corrado and Porcella (2012).

that the *regolieri* of Vinigo, members of the *regole*, who at the time owned the high-altitude pastureland of Lerosa, had donated a parcel of this land for building a small church dedicated to wayfarers. On the occasion of the church consecration, the *regolieri* made it clear to both religious and civil authorities who had come to participate in the ceremony, that they should stay within and not cross the well-defined boundaries of the donated pasture. In another document dated 1289, the *regolieri* of Vinigo made a list of the people who had the right to access the mountain specifying that “only these, and not others, can access the mountains” (“*isti sunt consortes munti et alii non*”) (Zanderigo Rosolo, 2012, p. 34) *consortes* (literally share-holders) referring to the people who had rights to access the mountains as distinguished from mere residents.

As early as in 1338 the area called Cadore was administratively divided in 27 *Regole* and politically in ten constituencies, called *Centenari* that made up the *Magnifica Comunità* (Magnificent Community) of Cadore.¹⁸ At the time its territory was roughly divided and managed into three parts: a private one that included the houses, vegetable gardens and meadow plots close to the dwellings; a second part which included high-altitude grazing estates (*le monti*) used for sheep grazing; and the third and largest part of forests, “exclusive and undivided property of the people of Cadore” (Belli, 2007, p. 20). Today, these communal properties are characterized by being inalienable, but it was not always the case. In the early 1400s the *Regola* of Vinigo-Peaiò was forced to sell the high-altitude pastures of Lerosa as well as other pastures¹⁹ in order to pay back the money needed to free villagers who had been made prisoners while defending (along with other men from nearby villages) the castle of Botestagno under attack by the soldiers of the Archduke of Austria. The soldiers had to retreat, but their captain managed to take some of Vinigo’s men as prisoners to Brunico. The money needed to free them was granted by the Ampezzo people of the Rule of Larieto, whose high-altitude pastures bordered those of the Vinigo people. To repay this debt, a few years later (1415) the Vinighesi sold them these pastures. Although the loss of pas-

18 Vinigo was part of the Centenaro of Venas.

19 In July 2015, an exhibition on the 600th anniversary of the passage of these lands from Vinigo to Ampezzo was inaugurated at Ciasa de ra Regoles, Cortina d’Ampezzo (mail July 23rd, 2015, secretary Regole d’Ampezzo).

tures was bitterly criticized, nevertheless it was ratified by the Cadore parliament, which later adopted an absolute ban on the alienation of high-altitude pastures valid for all of Cadore (Giacomel, 2008).

In 1420 Cadore was incorporated by Venice and this led to an increase in the value of the forests, as timber was in great demand in Venice. From this loomed the danger of indiscriminate exploitation of the forest resource, and so it was decided to transfer the ownership of the forests hitherto belonging to all the males of Cadore to the *Regole*, to prevent single individuals from plundering the forest resource. “The formula used was that of *vizzazione*, understood as the imposition of a conservation bond on a given forest [*vizza*], requested by the *regola* closest to that forest and authorized by the Pieve parliament [*maggior consiglio*]” (Belli, 2007, p. 23).

Belli explains that the *vizza* (a term connected to the Longobard practices of prohibiting, for example, cutting forest protecting a landslide escarpment) was a ban imposed on grazing and on cutting down of woodlands for conservation purposes. It permitted putting something off-limits in order to preserve the natural resource. In this practice, I found echoes of the concept of *tapu* as practiced by various indigenous people in Oceania. *Tapu* encompasses both sacredness and prohibition, reflecting a profound respect for certain places and practices (Keesing, 1985) but has also an “ecological meaning” (Favole, 2015, p. 97). In many indigenous cultures, *tapu* can dictate the use of natural resources, ensuring that certain areas are preserved, and that species are not overexploited. By recognizing and adhering to *tapu*, communities can foster sustainable practices. This ecological aspect emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance within ecosystems.

The *Regole* had the capacity to manage the natural resources of Cadore in a sustainable way, to use a contemporary expression. To limit the exploitation of a given natural resource to maintain or improve its availability, the forests of Cadore had passed into the patrimony of the *Regole*, removed from speculation and entrusted to their responsible management.

The assembly of *regolieri* defined the boundaries of the area to which the restrictions applied, the time frame (five, ten or more years), and delimited it with clearly visible signs. They drew up a notarized document to present to the *maggior consiglio*. By the end of the 15th century, there were almost no free forests in Cadore, where a citizen could harvest wood at will (Belli 2007).

Management of the territory by the *Regole* continued until the Napoleonic period, when the *Regole* were suppressed and their assets passed to the new municipalities, which were mapped on these old constituencies. However, in the 20th century, the *Regole* management system was revived. With the transfer of administrative functions regarding civic uses from the State to the Regions, the Veneto Region enacted the regional law on civic uses in July 1994, which includes the recognition of the *Regole*.²⁰ In contrast to the *Regola Piccola* Peaio-Vinigo, the *Regola Grande dei Monti di Vodo* was acknowledged in 2007 and was able to recover 95% of its pre-Napoleonic pastures and forests, with the remainder retained by the municipality. It is important to differentiate between civic use lands and *Regole*. On the one hand, the former consists of “land for agro-sylvo-pastoral use, inalienable, indivisible and non-usucaptable, on which essential rights of enjoyment are exercised (grazing, herbage, woodland, etc.) by the entire community residing in the reference territory. This collectivity is defined as open, in that individuals who establish their own residence in a municipality or hamlet, in which there are civic-use lands become by right part of the collectivity entitled to exercise the particular rights of enjoyment over the same lands” (Regione del Veneto, Direzione Turismo, 2016, p. 6; translation by the author). On the other hand, “the ancient *regolieri* heritages are configured as collective lands for agro-sylvo-pastoral use, inalienable, indivisible and non-usucaptable, owned by a closed collectivity. This closed collectivity is identifiable with the family nuclei or family-foci descending from the ancient families originally settled in the territory of reference.” (ibid., translation by the author).

The *regolieri* used to be only men. Nowadays, if there are no male descendants, a woman originating from a *regolieri* family, and married to a *regoliere*, can also become a member according to the Rules of Ampezzo, the example always referred to in Vinigo. In April 2016, 416 members of the Rules' Assembly voted yes, 18 votes less than the required quorum, on the proposition that a woman could become and remain a *regoliere* also if married to a non *regoliere*. Concerning this issue, the *Ciasa de ra Regoles* (the *Regole d'Ampezzo's* Newsletter) in May 2023 reported on the case of a *regoliere* who had asked to be removed from the *Regole* land registries (*catasto*) in which he was included,

20 *Norme in materia di usi civici*, Veneto Regional Law n.31, 22 July 1994.

justifying his choice by gender discrimination in the transmission of land registry rights to male children only. Interestingly, the *Regola* responded that it was not possible to de-list a *regoliere* by his request since this would preclude the transmission of rights to the next generation (Ciasa de ra Regoles, 2023, p. 5).



Figure 3 – Vinigo surrounded by woodlands, May 2016. Copyright 2016 by A. Paini.

Talking About the Woodlands and the Fields

In the first half of the 20th century Vinigo was entirely surrounded by meadows. Cultivated plots dotted a landscape that is still very much alive in both men and women's narratives and to which photos of the time attest. They show a settlement surrounded by plots of various shades, ordered, recognizable; wheat, rye, corn, potatoes, barley, and hemp were grown in the fields bordering the village while those further away were used for pasture. People from Vinigo emphasized that every family had animals – cows, goats

and pigs – though only a few families, “the wealthier ones”, owned one or two horses, as Mario points out. The local activities which shaped the livelihood of Vinighesi were well synthesized by another man, *stalla e bosco* (stable and woodland). The daily lives of adults and children (after school) revolved around these activities. While acknowledging the loss of cultivated land, Vinighesi underscore that the woodland is encroaching on the village, pressing into their living space. Not only is the woodland expanding but it has also become denser – “so thick”, as Riccarda and others underline. “Woodlands were historically important as a very valuable resource: they provided woods for building houses, heating kitchens making tools and sleds; they were used for hunting, for collecting produce from the *sottobosco* (undergrowth).” (Paini, 2019, p. 184)

Daniela Perco (2002) points out that literature concerning the Italian Alps emphasizes the salience of woodland in this region. The anthropologist examines how local communities in the Dolomite areas “experience the gradual encroachment of woodlands, a phenomenon that has arisen following the decline of agro-sylvo-pastoral activities.” (2002, p. 319). Particularly relevant to this essay are Perco’s insights into the pertinent contrast in perceptions of the woodland: for urban citizens, it represents “uncontaminated nature”, where the concept of wildness “is valued”. In contrast, for woodsmen or farmers the encroachment of the woodland signifies “a loss of value”, thus the “dichotomy between cultivated/domesticated woodland and abandoned/wild woodland assumes diametrically opposite meanings.” (ibid., p. 322). Ethnographic research conducted in Vinigo reveals similar attitudes toward the woodland, illustrating how the local community navigate and interpret its relationship with the natural environment. These differing perspectives underscore the complex interplay between cultural values, economic realities and environmental changes in shaping human interactions with the woodland.

Also, Mauro Varotto’s discussion on “spontaneous reforestation” and the transformations linked to the loss of agricultural activities in high lands, stress the risk of “uncritically capturing the return to wilderness scenarios” (2000, p. 511) without recognizing the relevance of the integration between woodlands and dwelling. He emphasizes the importance of critically evaluating the return to wilderness scenarios, cautioning against an uncritical acceptance of these transformations. Varotto points out that while reforesta-

tion can be beneficial, it is essential to consider the significance of integrating forest ecosystems with human habitation. This integration is crucial for sustainable land management, ensuring that both natural and human communities can thrive together. His insights encourage a balanced approach that considers ecological, social, and economic factors in the context of land-use management. And indeed when local people say that the “woodland must be cultivated like a field” they are referring to an idea of human intervention which domesticated the woodland, but not in a detrimental way for the environment, but which instead gives shape to a landscape which is natural and cultural at the same time, where people recognize themselves and the work of their ancestors, while at the same time they feel being positively acknowledged by the different components of the woodlands. We can speak of an awareness of co-agency between humans and non-humans (Descola, 2013), of forms of being in tune with the woodlands that today seem lost.

Today, fields are no longer cultivated in Vinigo, and stables are empty. The loss of agricultural land also represents a loss of collective memory, of sociability and shared knowledge about their environment, as local people kept telling us, referring to their experience and to the oral memory passed down from one generation to the next. Most people no longer have a memory of the boundaries between plots. The knowledge of boundaries was transmitted orally by older people to the younger one. Ettore recalls, “When you were cutting the grass you also knew where the boundaries were; now we no longer know where the boundaries are”. As a set of functions and marks imprinted on the environment was lost, such as wooden stakes and the furrows, “The boundaries between one meadow and the other, you just saw them” (Marilena), so too it is the empirical knowledge that went along with it. Only Lino claims that he knows “quite well everything about this area because I was the last one who mowed the meadows, even up in Sadorno in summer. I know the small pieces of land, so the borders ... I remember them and even when someone must go to find a place, they come to ask me.”

Vinighesi associate these different spaces (meadows, hayfields and so on)²¹ with memories of their personal experiences as well, which on the contrary are still much alive. Their ways of telling stories bring to the fore the

21 Locally called *ciampe*, *pràs*, *vàres*, *bosche* (cultivated fields, meadows, hayfields, woodlands).

relevance for them of feelings and of the sense of smell. Marilena explains that “the hay has a memory for me that the cultivated fields do not.” The scent of hay brings back memories of her mother who carried the hay, and as she puts it the “going back and forth from the barn to the lawns with the sled was something she took in her stride.” These sensations have been evocative of the past, summoning memories. A few, like Lino, acknowledge it still being a part of his present-day life, “If I am in the middle of the woodland, I sense the air, the smell of things”. A connection between memory and the scents of the elements of their landscape which has been pointed out by Perco: “What is crystallized in the memory is the smell of berries, herbs, mushrooms that is largely similar to the flavor (the scent of strawberries is also the flavor of strawberries)” (2013, p. 241). And this shows the emotional involvement and attachment of local people with their territory. As well as it reminds us of In-gold’s discussions on skills as “the capabilities of action and perception” of humans “situated in a rich structured environment” (2000, p. 5).

This loss of cultivated land around Vinigo contrasts with the central area of the village – locally called *pias* – which is traditionally divided in privately owned plots for the cultivation of a variety of cabbage (*capùze*)²² which seems to have found here favourable soil and weather conditions and is considered in Vinigo as its most prestigious product.²³ This area situated in the centre of the village, is still cultivated and lately the individual parcels have been fenced to keep out wild animals, mainly deer, searching for food. In the past, people from Vinigo kept these cabbages for consumption at home and exchanged some of them with people from other communities. Though today some of them sell the cabbages to friends, others still donate them. As one of our female interlocutors explains, they are “too precious” (“*troppo preziosi*”) to be sold. While acknowledging the loss of cultivated land, Vinighesi underscore that the woodland is encroaching upon the village. Not only is the woodland expanding but it has become denser, “so thick”, as several interlocutors underline.

22 *Brassica oleracea L. varietà capitata* (Turrin, 2009; Sanson, 2013, pp. 210–213). For a more detailed description of this central area, see Paini (2019).

23 “In the mountains of Belluno, the cultivation of cabbage and leafy vegetables in general compared to other crops such as cereals, legumes or potatoes has always been marginal, despite their considerable dietary importance, although still always present ... Only in certain areas, for a variety of socio-cultural and pedo-climatic reasons, has cabbage been able to establish itself as a leading crop.” (Sanson, 2013).



Figure 4 – Cabbages ready to be collected in the central area of Vinigo, October 2014.
Copyright 2014 by A. Painsi.

The loss of cultivated land around Vinigo is often portrayed by local people stressing that the woodland is “eating up everything”. The ever-increasing wild woodland is not only encroaching on the village but is also changing the micro-climate and raising the level of humidity. Though the woodland is increasing, Lino details that “some traditional salient species such as the larch, are disappearing” (Painsi, 2019, p. 178)²⁴. Today, in fact, the woods are managed by the Forestry Corps (*Forestale*),²⁵ and to cut down a plant, one must first obtain permission. He comments very critically: “they [the *Forestale*] do not authorize you to cut the fir trees down.” Lino provides an explanation: the fir trees have taken over and are always full of needles and, unlike larches that allow water and light to pass and grow a little underneath grass, “the rain

24 This change in the composition of woodland around Vinigo makes one think about the alarm raised recently about the bark beetle afflicting and killing forests in the Eastern Alps, affecting mostly fir trees (<https://www.montagna.tv/> consulted 14 October 2022; see also Nardi, Finozzi, and Battisti (2022).

25 The Forest Corps was reorganized nationally in 2019.

struggles to arrive because it is like a roof and it falls out and underneath the trees everything turns red. ... Nothing grows. And if you go and cut a fir tree, you get a fine. Because we should cut these mountains of fir trees to give the possibility to the wood to regenerate.” Lino harshly criticizes the *Forestale* or their lack of awareness of the changes taking place, in contrast to his experience and that of other Vinighesi.

The main effects of environmental changes on and for the inhabitants of Vinigo can be seen in the loss of what local people call “mixed woodland” (another way of naming biodiversity), the increased risk of hydrogeological disruption in as much as fields are no longer cultivated and their essential role in stabilizing and consolidating the slopes is lost,²⁶ not to mention the danger of fires; all these are acknowledged consequences of these management practices. Vinighesi rarely name biodiversity, although when they underline the importance of a mixed woodland (*bosco misto*) made up of different types of vegetation and of different species of trees, bushes, and grass – which they consider the best woodland because only in this way is the forest alive and healthy and can provide different kinds of livelihood resources – they are indirectly referring to biodiversity²⁷.

Although people and their environment are perceived by Vinighesi as two distinct forms of agency, still they are strongly interconnected. A common underlying thread running through most of the interviews, that people must tend to the woodland to keep it healthy, because a healthy woodland benefits them. People from Vinigo therefore consider that social wrongs (in this case loss of care) are registered in the environment. During a nature walk, Flavio stated, “A woodland must be cleaned up; otherwise, the following year there will be no firewood.” He maintained that a neglected woodland can have devastating effects.²⁸ As Maria puts it, “the woodland eats everything” (“*il bosco si mangia tutto*”), meaning that the woodland will take over, a concern that

26 For sure this can also be said of woodland.

27 For the great biodiversity of the Alps compared to the rest of the European continent, see Varotto and Castiglione (2012). Very interesting studies on Eastern Alpine areas have been carried out after the storm Vaia, a catastrophic event that has affected parts of this Alpine territory in 2018, and they point out the failure of the mainstream practices of woodland management. For the Val di Femme, see Martellozzo (2022).

28 I recall that woodland, which used to belong to the *Regola Piccola*, thus common property, has been divided into private properties, so everyone today collects firewood in his/her own places.

also reveals some level of anxiety about the future. Similar forms of anxiety are found in all those areas of Veneto where the woodland is taking over because the fields are no longer cultivated, the grass is no longer mowed, and the woods no longer maintained. I am thinking, for example, to an ongoing ethnographic research in Val Borago (Verona), where the inhabitants are advocating for better woodland maintenance through targeted but necessary cutting operations. They argue that the excessive growth of the woodland is not a healthy form of ecology, rather, they point out that this has harmful effects on the territory and fails to protect it. The concept of safeguarding is always associated with maintenance. Residents recall that when the land was actively cultivated, there was daily interaction with it. However, now that this significant interaction has diminished, the woods are creating disorder and imbalance. As Ingold highlights: "Ways of acting in the environment are also ways of perceiving it" (2000, p. 9). Environmental but also relational imbalances also show us ways of relating between humans and non-humans that collide with institutional planning interventions.

People in Vinigo strongly believe that woodland should be kept in order and not left to go wild. Woodland – which includes trees, bushes, animals, human activities and weather (see Paini, 2019) – emerges as a highly valued multifaceted element of their environment. Thus its neglect is associated with a loss of value on the part of the Vinighesi themselves.

Vinighesi claim that the phenomenon of woodland encroachment of formerly grassland areas, that is often viewed positively by scientists asserting that it can help balance the phenomenon of deforestation, has only negative consequence locally. Woodland is expanding but losing quality, which causes a loss of biodiversity and results in increased moisture; moreover, its thickness has led to a significant increase in the deer population, as they inhabit the dense forest and have replaced roes who instead prefer clearings. Deer tends to come closer to the village and, at night, enter the central area cultivated with cabbages in search of food. To protect their crops, residents have recently resorted to fencing individual plots in this area.

The Importance of Taking Care

The idea of a landscape that has not been taken care of, that has been neglected, looms large in the narratives collected. In recalling how in the past local people related to the resources of the forest, Rino presented a very dense metaphor, by referring to the woodland being treated as a kitchen. "The kitchen refers both to a place that was kept clean and where nothing went to waste. A place that required looking after." (Paini, 2019, p. 179). I recall that in the past the kitchen was the only room of the house heated in winter, thus a central living space. The relevant role of the heated kitchen in Vinighesi past daily life is something well attested to in several interviews collected during the field research. As Lino foregrounds, "If you had little food in the kitchen you could survive, but if you could not heat the kitchen you would die".

The sense of a well-kept place is also associated by some female interlocutors with the aesthetics of the place, of "spectacular" fields as Gianna says, "The fields were spectacular. Flowers everywhere. The flowers disappeared when they stopped cutting the grass". She continues by stressing that "In some places where they started cutting [the grass] again, the flowers came back." If some components of the environment are not present anymore, nevertheless their disappearance is considered reversible if what they consider positive action is taken by humans. The image of an orderly and pleasant landscape in these narratives is associated with the image of a cultivated land and of an orderly woodland, which in the past was an essential livelihood resource for the people.

Some of my interlocutors point to the importance of a viewpoint ("the fields were spectacular") others instead stress a different sensibility, an "ear-point" (Feld, 1996, p. 95) as Fantino who points out that in the woodlands there was once "more noise" compared to today. Lino instead foregrounds the smell: "If I am in the middle of the woods. I sense the air, the smell of things, I feel ... I feel at home." The sense of a place cared for looms large. This involves exploring the notion of *care* with an emphasis on interconnection and interdependency, following Puig de la Bellacasa's analysis (2017). She considers that "care is not about fusion; it can be about the right distance", care is "a concrete work of maintenance, with ethical and affective implications" (2017, p. 5). Care for the people of Vinigo relates to "everything

that we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Tronto 1993, p.103).

Sandro Piermattei in his research on the Sibillini Mountains reports similar considerations by elderly shepherds and farmers, who recognize a loss in cultivated land and thus a loss in biodiversity. His interlocutors reflect on their youth by emphasizing an image of greater harmony which "tends to correspond to a similarly pleasant and orderly landscape." (2012, p. 111). As he puts it, "the mountains were cultivated and worked by everyone as if they were an artifact" (Piermattei, 2012, p. 116).

In both cases the image of a well-tended and pleasant landscape in the past run through the ethnographic material; in the case of Vinigo I prefer to emphasize the different metaphors that elderly local people used to account for their relationship with the territory. These metaphors are very effective and quite revealing, though feelings connected to these memories are not the same for everyone. "Woodlands have an emotional significance for the human community, which cannot be ignored ... each interviewee remembered a meadow, a footpath, or a grove to which she/he was particularly attached." (Martellozzo, 2022, p. 149).

For some Vinighesi the memory of the landscape of the past brings back the memory of tactile feelings as fields were perceived as textiles, as Gianna recalls, "everything was well-kept, the woodlands were well-kept. We, the children, went around in our home-made soft-soled shoes". And, she adds, "The meadows were like velvet". Another strong metaphor that points to a tactile sensation in perceiving the environment by associating the land to the feel of a fine textile. Corrado and Porcellana, dealing with how inhabitants of Cadore perceive "their mountain", state "it is also and above all through emotional ties and passion for a place that one realizes the care and development of the place itself" (2012, p. 79).

Conclusion: Feelings, Scents, and Interactions

This chapter wants to draw an image of a dynamic Alpine place, where people situated themselves in their rich ancient history. The reading that has long accompanied the imaginary of the mountain (Breda, 2013) does not correspond to the vision that the people of Vinigo have and express of their place. They have found memories of their past, yet these memories do not convey nostalgia for a lost past, neither are they painful memories, but they condense a rich experience made of sociability and a dense relationship with the environment, of a "place of life" (Breda, 2013, p. 55). Vinighesi's perception of the past daily life of the village brings back memories of long hours of hard work for the women and the men, though mitigated by images of softness, care, good tastes, closeness, and solidarity among people. In recovering images from the past interaction with the environment, all five senses are activated: sight (the fields were wonderful), taste (flavours), smell (the scent of hay, feeling the air), hearing (sound/silence), touch (the meadows were like velvet).

By shifting the focus from a nostalgic view of neglect to a more nuanced understanding of the community's relationship with its environments, I want to highlight the importance of sociality and shared knowledge in fostering a sustainable coexistence. My interlocutors consider that in the past people and the environment had a crucial relationship. In regard to the environment, what emerges is that the long-held sense of caring, of responsibility has increasingly waned, and that the resulting neglect of the land has produced an unbalanced relationship with the environment, particularly the woodlands, which are now taking over. So, what had been seen as a positive relationship between the woodland and humans now tends to change towards one in which anxiety about the future perceives the woodland as becoming somewhat more hostile toward the inhabitants of Vinigo, bringing into question the habitability of the territory of Vinigo.

While the current management of the woodlands around Vinigo does not fall under the Rules, this institution has regulated forest management for centuries.²⁹ The *Regole's* approach to managing forest heritage continues to be presented as a method of management attentive to the health of the forest in contrast to the current contested management practices. In fact, the current forest model has favoured the development of conifers with high trunks

²⁹ On the re-articulations of the forest heritage and on the forestry models that have been put on place through time in Val di Fiemme, see Martellozzo (2020).

of the same age, driven by economic value, which has led to a more fragile woodland, as evidenced by the devastation caused by the storm Vaia in 2018. This highlighted the vulnerabilities inherent in monoculture forestry practice. In the aftermath of Vaia, there is a growing debate around rethinking the imposed silvicultural model, leaning towards one that aligns more closely with the viable “mixed woodland” proposed by the people of Vinigo.

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What Does a High-Altitude Farmer Do? Different Perspectives on Mountain Practices

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Abstract

This chapter explores the challenges currently faced by high altitude farmers in South Tyrol (Italy) who maintain their farms at altitudes between 1,300 m and 1,900 m. It examines the transformation that these workplaces have undergone in recent decades, from subsistence-based multi-generational family farms to specialised monoculture dairy operations. A development caught up in the contradictory relationship between resilient notions of rural life and urban condescension, and in the modern hybrids of “nature” and “culture”. A brief historical review of the medieval and early modern periods shows that such changes in agricultural intensification are not the exception but the rule, and are often, as in the case of the most recent changes, politically driven. Two case studies illustrate the impact of these changes on individual farmers and the variability in their implementation. The most recent transformation, while initially successful in preventing vertical out-migration and preserving the cultural landscape, is currently facing challenges due to increasing regulatory demands in relation to various subsidies on which farmers rely, and due to fluctuations in grain and milk prices. This shows the low resilience of the industrialised system but contrasts intriguingly with the century-long tenacity with which high altitude farmers still insist on remaining on their hard-to-operate mountain farms.

The farmstead of Michael (54 years, unmarried) is situated 1,620 m above sea level and looks towards the impressive massif of the Ortler glacier. The hay-fields and woods belonging to the farm are steep and remote. Summarising his work, he says: “my twelve cows are my boss”. A chat group informs his brothers, sisters and cousins, all living in the villages of the valley bottom, which days they should join him for haymaking. At harvest time, he makes fine discriminations between one day and the other regarding the effect on

the quality of his hay, influencing ultimately the quality of the milk he delivers. In the months when he has no hay work, he has a job with the forestry department to be able to maintain the farm, which has been in his family for several generations.¹

What keeps Michael going? Is it rural nostalgia? Why is he still up there? The ethnographic vignette, which represents a typical situation of certain mountain farms in South Tyrol, raises some questions and issues that will be discussed in this contribution.

During the last decade, anthropologists have increasingly studied industrialized farming, be it against the background of food production, the Anthropocene, climate change, human-animal relationships or ecology. There are two recurring themes in these works, which are discussed here against the background of fieldwork with high altitude farmers in South Tyrol (Italy) who maintain isolated farmsteads on steep mountain slopes at altitudes above 1,300 m.² The first issue concerns the resilient imaginaries of rural life, the second the confused and tense relationship between “nature” and “culture”. Together, they shape the modern farming industry and food production. Insofar as they are directed towards the countryside (Jenkins, 2011, p. 56), industrial societies throughout north-western Europe and elsewhere seem to be built on a contradictory relationship between rural nostalgia and urban condescension.

Concerning the northernmost limit of commercial apple production in Western Norway, and the ambiguities behind a seemingly smooth progressive commercialization and industrialization of these fruits, we find producers and vendors constantly struggling to keep both, the idea of a natural product and a liveable environment alive (Hastrup, 2018). Hansen reports of a similar ambiguity in the context of industrial dairy farming in Japan (2014a and 2014b). Hardly any ambiguity seems even left in Ofstehage’s example of huge scale soybean production in Bahia, Brazil, where North American farmers practice transnational “flexible farming” (2018 and 2020). They push

1 The first names used in this text are pseudonyms.

2 This research was made possible by a three-year research project, led by Elisabeth Tauber: ‘Naturally’ relating to land. Mountain farming in the Alps - an ethnographic study (2019-2022). I thank the Free University of Bolzano for generous funding. See also Schneider and Tauber (2020). I am very grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers for their pertinent and insightful comments on this chapter.

the boundaries of family farming and manage to find new forms of engaging with land in agrarian communities, regarded as “out of place”, alienated from customary social and physical relations.

It is interesting that when it comes to Danish pig farms, Anneberg et al. (2013) take their cue for investigating references to nature from an analysis of the advertisement strategy of the Europe-wide operating dairy plant for organic milk, Arla. Apropos Norwegian apples, Hastrup (2018) describes how, in their advertising campaigns, apple farmers manage to present the charms and potentials of fruit production so that highly cultural practices such as grafting, fertilizing, implanting, preserving, and pesticide-spraying, in fact play into “naturalizing” these apples. A pronounced instance is similarly the vibrant advertising activity in South Tyrol. Here the tourist industry, the farmer’s association, agricultural manufacturers and dairy plants likewise make use of images of traditionally built farmsteads, green meadows and placid, picturesque cows. Advertisement in agrobusiness or tourism reveals, it seems, the nature-culture paradox in a particularly striking way.

An exoticizing view of the European mountain agricultural landscape, including its significant role in art history, contributes to the romantic gaze of urban people on an area they experience as a rural idyll (Norbye, 2018, p. 441). More importantly, relations existing between farming, landscape, nation-building and thus national identity are assumed to be intrinsic (Norbye, 2018 and Anneberg et al.; for Denmark), a connection that is also clearly emphasized in South Tyrol as well as in the neighbouring Alpine countries of Austria and Switzerland. Here, most sectors and actors – be they consumers of organic and sustainable or conventional food, tourists, farmers, agricultural businesses, and consultants or, indeed, the advertising industry – are deeply intertwined in “hybrids of nature and culture”, in what is widely understood as a paradox of modernity (Latour, 1993, p. 11 and 30ff.). Industrialized food production offers a classic example of the paradoxical interaction of “translation” and “purification” (ibid.). But the paradox does not cover everything, or rather it is not the whole story. The kind of paradox dealt with, the particular expression it takes, depends on which actor is being considered. This contribution will therefore focus specifically on mountain farmers in South Tyrol, and we might ask where in their perspective such views appear and where they do not; this particular example might provide a reveal-

ing glimpse into the paradox of resilient rural imaginaries and the confused contemporary relationship between nature and culture. The question of why the farmers stay up there in the first place may have something to do with it.

High Altitude Farms as Part of Industrialized Farming

Beginning this account with reflections from anthropological works on industrialized farming was deliberate: I argue that vertically operating high-altitude farms in some parts of the Alps are indeed part of this industry. Even though the single farmsteads, with their often centuries old buildings, hanging on steep mountain slopes, in the middle of verdant meadows, which are often cut by hiking paths, do not give that appearance at all. During fieldwork in South Tyrol, I lived and worked on several such high-altitude farms which average less than 10 ha (25 ac).



Figure 1 – View into a side valley in South-Tyrol (2022); mountain farms at heights between 1,600 m and 1,800 m.

Until the 1940s, these farms were regularly inhabited and managed by multi-generational families and, depending on their size, several maids and farmhands. The economic model of the time was mainly based on subsistence production and aimed at maximum autonomy. In contrast to the lower-lying agricultural areas, regional market integration remained limited for high-altitude farms due to the previous orientation towards subsistence farming on the surrounding land and with their own labour (Cole and Wolf, 1999, p. 84ff.). Only a few products (e.g. cheese, eggs, cow or sheep meat), if there was a surplus, were marketed in the nearby village and generated some income.

Agriculture and forestry have always predominantly shaped the South Tyrolean altitudinal landscape, and in the early 1960s, the province of Bolzano was still one of the most heavily agricultural areas of the Italian and Austrian Alps. By the early 1970s, rapid modernisation, industrialization and increase in prosperity started to show among the urban and village population (see Cole and Wolf, 1999, p. 92ff.). This made it even more obvious that the farmers in the high altitudes had fallen far behind. For a quite comparable situation in Switzerland, Weiss wrote in 1962 of the external (economic and political) and internal (mental) crisis of the mountain farmers; he spoke of proletariats and slums which are not to be found in cities but in the mountain valleys (1962, p. 236). And he went as far as referring to "sick valleys", threatened by permanent or seasonal "flight from the heights" by their despondent population (241). At the beginning of the 1960s, Weiss considered the high mountain area facing a phase of rapid and confusing upheaval (249). In their book *Heirs of Loneliness* (2003[1975]), journalist Aldo Gorfer and photographer Flavio Faganello describe very similar conditions. In the early 1970s, they hiked to isolated high altitude farms in several mountain valleys in South Tyrol to document the living circumstances and speak with the residents, more and more of whom were about to seek seasonal work in the valleys which led to neglect of the farms. With the same motive, participating in the economic upswing, many farmers entertained or realized the idea of giving up their farms and moving further down, where they expected easier, less risky work and better education and prospects for the next generation.

The provincial government recognised that the presence and survival of these farms was under immediate threat, while the cultural landscape creat-

ed by centuries of agricultural activity was crucial to the development of the tourism sector on which much of the emerging prosperity in the valleys depended. Therefore, the government put into place a comprehensive program to support to high-altitude farmers who attended to this landscape, crucial to the rural imaginary on which the tourism sector is heavily focused. In the late 1970s, government policy supported a significant expansion of the infrastructure serving these remote farms (to date), and strongly encouraged farmers to change their mixed crop-livestock subsistence farms into monoculture dairying farms. Bätzing (2005, p. 132f.) rightly points out that South Tyrol started this structural change towards market-oriented dairy farming relatively late compared to Austria and Switzerland. This was due to its particular historical situation. For centuries, German-speaking South Tyrol was part of the County of Tyrol and belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. After WWI and the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, Tyrol was divided by the Treaty of St. Germain (1919) and South Tyrol became part of Italy. In the early 1920s, Italian Fascism implemented a violent Italianisation policy, which the Italian state continued in a more moderate form until the 1950s. After WWII, South Tyrol tried to re-integrate into Austria, an attempt that was unsuccessful but laid the foundations for its statute as an autonomous province of Italy, which would be realised 25 years later.³ Until the mid-1970s, South Tyrol was thus preoccupied with its struggle for political autonomy within Italy, which it obtained in 1972 and which laid the foundations for a strongly developed South Tyrolean “national” identity.

In the late 1970s, it was hoped that with a strong focus on dairy farming several problems would be addressed at the same time: enabling the mountain farmers to generate sufficient income on their land to support a nuclear family, maintaining and developing the farms, stopping vertical migration and preserving the cultural landscape.⁴ The smaller local dairy cooperatives in the valleys, which had, at the beginning of the 20th century been organized

3 See for a more detailed version Steiniger 1997

4 In the lower-lying, flatter areas in the eastern districts of the region (Eisack Valley, Bozen Unterland, Burggrafenamt and Vinschgau Valley), a corresponding transformation to very profitable intensive apple monoculture had been taking place since the late 1960s. In the western Puster Valley, where the climate is less favourable to fruit-farming, the mixed crop-livestock subsistence farms were converted into correspondingly larger monoculture dairying farms.

by farmers around the needs of processing and selling the products of their farms, began to merge into larger units during the 1970s to professionalize the collection of milk and its marketing. They have by now grown into very large companies, by and large independent of the farmers, that focus on optimizing their own business operations. Today, four very large dairy cooperatives (with 500 to 2,000 members) dominate the South Tyrolean market.

In order to support the conversion to pure dairy farming 50 years ago, the construction of larger barns, cowsheds, milking machines, refrigeration systems and cable cars (to transport milk to roads accessible to refrigerated lorries) was heavily subsidised over a number of years. Farmers were advised to switch to non-local breeds of high-yielding cows. Where arable farming had previously been practised, the land was levelled and reseeded with non-local grass and clover mixtures to allow the use of modern machinery, thus guaranteeing a larger hay crop, sufficient to feed the increased number of cattle, which now spend considerably more time indoors than out in the fields. The logic and rationale of farming practices changed significantly, and new technology was not the only area in which agribusiness came to the fore. Farmers were trained in the use of grain-based concentrates to increase milk production, and as a result of this new feeding practice, barns had to be equipped with slurry pits and connected hoses to spread the slurry over the hay fields. Farmers had to familiarise themselves with the rules governing the use of medicines in cows and the collection of milk samples, which they send weekly to the provincial dairy association's laboratory for analysis of the milk's constituents. They had to familiarise themselves with the hygiene standards in the new "dairy kitchens", inevitable adjuncts of the new barns. Within a few years, the transition to industrial dairy farming was complete.

While in the Italian or German lowlands the comparable transformation reached its epitome in large-scale establishments that comprise several hundred head of cattle, in the Alpine highlands the same processes shaped small-scale enterprises that had to provide a living from 10–20 cows per farm. Making these farms thus viable was recognized as an achievement. It ensured the supply of local dairy products to the growing urban population of South Tyrol but, more importantly, it was a successful reaction to counter the impending vertical migration that loomed in the 1960s. At the same time, it "kept open" the cultural landscape for which these small structures are de-

cisive. The intensification of agriculture in geographically more favourable, i.e. flatter, locations, which has been globally transformative since the 1950s, has generally been achieved by an increase in the size of farms and agricultural land, being based on the logic of economies of scale. On the contrary, these small mountain enterprises present us with an example where the geographical constraint in keeping a moderate size is linked with the possibility of a profitable livelihood. The combination of conservation and commercialisation seems to be another variant of the paradox mentioned above (Latour, 1993): to maintain the outward appearance of picturesque individual farms in the high mountains, surrounded by green pastures, while at the same time transforming the inside into a modern dairy monoculture.

For a time, these changes were welcomed by many high-altitude farmers, and indeed the measures have been effective in that South Tyrol has been spared the extreme emigration from high altitudes that has severely affected other regions of the Italian (and French) Alps.⁵ However, enthusiasm about this transformation to what are now called 'economically viable farms' has been significantly dampened for at least a decade. Milk prices no longer meet farmers' expectations, while animal welfare requirements and growing safety and ecological standards demand ever more – and considerable -- investments from them.

The development towards an intensified industrialized farming that these mountain farmers experienced in the last third of the 20th century is, contrary to what one might think, not "modern" at all. It is far from being the first introduction of agricultural intensification in this area. In the high and late Middle Ages, so-called *Schwaigen* (Alpine dairy farms) were established by landlords at high altitudes, especially in the Tyrol. At this altitude, where cereals are no longer grown, dairy farming was the only form of agriculture, and the tenants paid their land rent in cheese. This way of farming was, at the time, a new attempt to use the higher altitudes more intensively and with greater economic gain than before (Bätzing, 2005, p. 64f.). The heyday of intensive dairy farming on the *Schwaigen* farms came to an end with the

5 The problem of vertical out-migration (leaving the higher places of residence for the valley bottoms and urban centres) is well known for other provinces of the Italian Alps (Bätzing, 2003, p. 271–283).

outbreak of the plague in 1348 and the deterioration of the climate (cooling down). Many farms at very high altitudes were abandoned. Self-sufficiency became more important again. But then the same occurrence happened again. The historian Mathieu shows that between the 16th and 18th centuries, a very marked process of agricultural intensification can be traced throughout the Alpine region. Small livestock declined significantly in favour of a considerable increase in the number of dairy cattle. Farmers specialized in the production of long-life cheese that was exported far beyond the Alps. They thus responded not only to the rising demand of the urban population in Southern Germany, Eastern France and Northern Italy but also to the demand from travellers by land and by sea whose number had increased significantly during these centuries and who had great need of durable food (Mathieu, 2001, p. 56ff.).

Both waves of intensification receded, for various historical reasons, over the following centuries. The most recent intensification of high-altitude farming in South Tyrol, from the 1970s onwards – once more encouraging specialization in dairying – has possibly already passed its peak after half a century. Neither the market situation nor environmental requirements are likely to be able to cope with its impact. Thanks to successful communication strategies, starting at the EU level and down to the local branches of the South Tyrolean agricultural advisory centres, however, this recent development is presented neither as a step backwards nor as a necessary correction. It is rather considered a further development and adaptation to changed market conditions and as yet another strategy to ensure the continuity of small-scale high-altitude farming. National and EU-subsidies are now increasingly linked to agricultural diversification, and the provincial agricultural office (*Landwirtschaftsamt*), the Farmers' Association (*Südtiroler Bauernbund*) and the consulting cooperative Advisory Ring on Mountain Farming (*BRING*) are steering with a great deal of effort in this new direction.

Subsidy, Regulation, Conservation, and Image

The rapid conversion to a kind of industrial farming in this region, where the rough terrain still demanded the preservation of small-scale structures,

could only be maintained and further developed thanks to two actors. On the one hand are the state agencies, that need to continuously adapt the conditions for funding to changes in policies, to the market situation and to technological changes, and on the other there are the mountain farmers, who need to constantly be on their toes and cooperate in this game.

At the time when the provincial government encouraged mountain farmers to switch to dairy production, extensive infrastructure improvements had been made. In just a few years, the road network was extended to connect to nearly every individual resident in often remote farmsteads, and regular snow clearance was put into place (both measures not least to ensure the daily collection of milk). School buses were set up to provide transport for all pupils coming from the remote farms, while the construction of cable cars was encouraged for the transportation of milk and hay. Agricultural schools were established or expanded, and the provincial agricultural office developed a complex system of consultancy to ensure the further development and continuing success of what was in effect monoculture dairy farming in this mountainous region.

The economic viability of the high-altitude farms that was enabled by all these measures has had its price. For several decades now, farmers regularly need to apply for subsidies and premiums (*Beiträge*) to be obtained from the South Tyrolean provincial government and the Italian national government as well as from EU funding schemes. This not only turns them into administrators, but also obliges them to run their farms according to the rules set by the respective funders. Without this funding, most of the high-altitude farms would not survive, despite having turned to monoculture dairying, or more to the point, because of it. While a few decades ago subsidies pushed them towards plain modernisation, high-yield cows, slurry pits and levelling of high-yield meadows, nowadays they receive grants for keeping certain local cattle breeds, for feeding mainly self-grown hay, for keeping the meadows in the conditions in which they currently appear (i.e. by keeping the old fruit trees and dry stone walls), for renovating ancient living quarters and farm buildings, often listed monuments.⁶

6 Despite all the modernisation, the exterior of these listed buildings should remain unchanged, especially in view of the tourists for whom these buildings are part of the characteristic landscape and one of the main reasons to visit the area. The construction measures that are often necessary for such “monument-friendly” conversion can bring farms to their knees economically, despite the subsidies, as the case study below will show.

One of the most important provincial subsidy schemes was introduced by the end of the 1970s, the so called “hardship points” (*Erschwernispunkte*), which were meant to compensate high-altitude farmers for the difficult production conditions they endured. These points were determined for each farm according to its altitude, the steepness of the meadows, the connection to the infrastructure and its distance to the next supply centre. The calculation of these points was revised in 2008, and it may be worthwhile to have a look at the preface of the brochure published by the provincial agricultural authority, explaining this revision. Some of the perceptions of farming in this region, at least but perhaps not only from the point of view of the farmers’ lobby, become quite clear here. The South Tyrolean Farmers’ Association, with its 300 employees and almost 1,200 honorary functionaries, vigorously defends the interests of the province’s primary sector. A powerful political and economic player and networker, it is the largest professional association in the country, representing over 20,000 farmers.



Figure 2 – Entrance to the extensive offices of the South Tyrolean Farmers' Association in Bolzano, 2024. Photo by Stefan Festini Cucco.

Mountain farming plays a central role in South Tyrol. However, a mountain farming family can only live off and on the farm in the long term if the economic conditions are right. The possibilities for adaptation are extremely limited, as production cannot be significantly increased or expanded due to the topographical conditions. The steepness of the meadows, which requires the use of expensive special machinery, and the high altitude, which shortens the vegetation period, play a decisive role [... and] are key factors for the cultivation or abandonment of mountain farms. For some time now, attempts have been made to mitigate these disadvantages by means of compensation payments. So far, this strategy has been quite successful and to be able to use the compensation payments in an even more targeted manner, the hardship points have been revised. The result of this revision is hopefully a sufficiently fair and flexible instrument to ensure the sustainable protection of our mountain farms and cultural landscape. (...) The experience of the past decades has shown that, in view of global price pressure, support for mountain farmers is indispensable if we want to preserve mountain farms and the cultural landscape in the long term. This requires, on the one hand, broad social recognition of the services provided by mountain farming and sufficient financial support to meet the challenges on the mountain again and again. (Danninger, 2009, p. 3; my translation)

Given that this citation comes from a publication of the South Tyrolean agriculture department, it obviously originates in one of the very institutions that have driven the most recent transformation of mountain agriculture, sketched out in the previous section. One wonders whether the authors see in fact the “challenges of the mountains” against the situation in the plains, which seem to be taken as the “yardstick” and therefore orient agricultural practices on exactly these, regardless of the very different conditions in the mountains. What is the subtext of this presentation concerning the situation of high-altitude farmers and those who try to support them?

South Tyrolean tax money is used to contribute to the support of mountain farmers, who are increasingly gaining a questionable reputation among the rest of the population, especially since they are largely exempt from tax payments (Weißensteiner, 2021; Pfeifer, 2022). In the public discourse of the province, agriculture has a strong presence, partly in terms of the public money that supports it (see the quote above), partly in terms of the formative

role that agriculture plays in the “sub-national identity”, but also increasingly in terms of the dramatic environmental consequences of agricultural activities over the last fifty years. The urban and valley populations have begun to react to this contradictory situation with prejudice and hostility towards farmers. In particular, apple and grape growers in the lower valleys have been criticised for decades for their heavy use of water and pesticides, while mountain farmers have been treated more leniently. But since the daily press has increasingly reported on the spreading of liquid manure on high mountain pastures or in forests, public opinion has also become more critical. Among the valley population, mountain farmers also have the reputation of “living on subsidies”, an assessment which, taken out of context, is rather inaccurate (as in Bacher, 2020; Pfeifer, 2022). As a result, they feel marginalised and misunderstood. The “broad social recognition” that Danninger considers necessary seems a long way off.

The monoculture approach to dairy farming is also showing its limitations – while the landscape looks well preserved to the untrained eye, the ecological consequences of the new land management have proved problematic. Over-fertilisation with manure, including waste from industrial feeds, depletes the soil and leads to a significant loss of biodiversity on the meadows that have been turned into hay fields. Due to the pressure to daily produce as much milk as possible, alps (high-altitude pastures above the treeline) are abandoned and overgrown, as cows spend the summer months indoors instead of on the alpine pastures (Tauber, 2024).⁷ The pressure to deliver not only every day but also as much milk as possible with a high fat content demands too much from the cows; they often get sick, require numerous visits from the vet and die early.

The situation presents a curious disjunction. The cows stand in the barn as pure milk producers, while the meadows are fuelled by artificial irrigation, fertilization and the sowing of high-yield grass to achieve the greatest possible return. These practices are taught by most agricultural colleges, ad-

⁷ As the high alpine pastures for dairy cattle (often, but not always, commons) are currently of very little importance in South Tyrol, I will not discuss them in this article. The dairy plants do not include these grasslands, which were historically so valuable for the farmers, in their economic model.

visory agencies and funders, partly financed through tax money and given for just such an approach. The farmers who spend a lot of time with the animals every day are in a dilemma that they hardly express; they are not entirely sure whether the cows and the land are doing well under these conditions, but they are far too intertwined with the arrangement to supply local milk and landscape care in exchange for subsidies to admit to it. As we have seen in the text above (Department of Agriculture, Danninger, 2009), policymakers see themselves as “protectors” of the landscape and of mountain farmers, whom they want to compensate for their geographical disadvantage – although it is not entirely clear what is taken as the standard against which mountain farmers are to be considered disadvantaged. In return, they expect compliance with a type of agriculture that demands a lot from the ecosystem, animals and people alike. Since high mountain agriculture is indeed inextricably linked to the South Tyrolean identity (Schneider, 2022), in this “monstrous” (Latour, 1993, p. 42) connection, both policy makers and farmers pursue the same goal of preserving a cultural landscape “as it has always been” with industrial farming methods that could eliminate it in the long run.

At a global level, the intensification of agriculture has gone hand in hand with the distribution of subsidies, whether at a provincial, national or supra-national level. In return for this financial support, farmers have to comply with frequently changing but standardised regulations and production conditions, which are rarely adapted to different geographical or country-specific working and production conditions. Criticism of the various negative effects of subsidies (termed “perverse subsidies” by Myers and Kent, 2001) refers to socio-economic effects that lead to a widening gap between farms that grow larger thanks to subsidies and small farms that cannot withstand the economic pressure. But it also increasingly refers to environmental degradation – resource depletion, pollution, landscape loss, misuse and overexploitation of resources – which are seen as consequences of subsidies (most recently in FAO, UNDP and UNEP, 2021).⁸

8 The subsidy machinery has already adjusted to this “new situation” by introducing the idea of agriculture as “land stewardship”, the key concept in transforming the EU agricultural subsidy program in 2005. It shifts the program’s focus from specific crops to achieving sustainability goals through subsidising the management and conservation of the environment (Sabaté, 2013 and Bieling and Plieninger, 2017).

Without exception, all the farmers I worked with during my research complained about the funders imposing too many restrictions on their ways of farming. At the same time, they felt compelled to resort to every bit of financial assistance available to them to be able to keep their farms and to be able to provide for their families and successors. Only very few of the farmers I encountered forego particular types of subsidies to avoid restrictions and be able to work as they see fit. Only two out of the sixty-three farms of the valley where I did fieldwork do without subsidies and membership in the farmers' association altogether. They are envied for their courage and "freedom" by the other farmers, who therefore eye them suspiciously and consider their way of cultivating their land rather dubious.

The majority of farmers seems to have internalized the new role of keepers of the cultural landscape, which politicians and farmer lobbyists have promoted and attributed to them for several decades, so that they also see the subsidies as a "compensation" to which they are entitled (Schneider, 2022). It is as though the subsidies themselves became part of the land and its yield. And indeed, much of the underlying rationale for support, whether from the provincial government or from EU programmes, relates to the land, its size and condition; it is in relation to parameters associated to farmland and to what farmers grow on it and subsidies are paid accordingly. It is therefore not surprising that, in the eyes of farmers, it is their land, the land they work on, that brings in these subsidies.

Agricultural intensification and the conservation of a type of agricultural practices on occasion go hand in hand yet at other times seem to diverge in their effects on farmers' livelihood. If farmers are negotiating this situation, what else in their circumstances might throw light on the ensuing accomplishments and predicaments? But if we are to learn anything from a farmers' perspective, it is also necessary to change the scale and attend to specific details that have not yet entered the picture.

Circumstances for Farmers

How do the fortunes of particular families weave through the agricultural history briefly sketched above? Any one set of individual circumstances also speaks to what was and was not shared in the lives of others in the vicinity. I came to know of several farms where the previous generation(s) did not manage to realize the ameliorations that would have been necessary to bring them up to date. The reasons attributed by farmers were various: cases of illness and death, other strokes of fate, inability to manage the farm (financial miscalculations, disinterest in farm work, drinking) or lack of family support.

Such was the situation on one of the farmsteads with which I became well acquainted. In the 1940s, this farm seemed to have been one of the richer ones in the area, holding relatively more land than its neighbours. It had been owned by the same family for over 500 years.⁹ Shortly after the birth of her 14th child, in the early 1950s, the farmer's wife died. The husband, who according to my informants was not an overly talented farmer himself, was overwhelmed with the numerous underage children, drank too much and increasingly lost his focus. The older children took over some of the work, but there was no stringent planning or management of the enterprise, and guidance and orientation on the part of the heir was missing. In the early 1970s, the farm was handed on to the eldest son Hubert, who then was in his early 40s and single. Some younger, unmarried siblings were still on the farm, helping out. But, as my interlocutors conveyed, Hubert was a loner and had little contact with neighbours; before taking over the farm, he had worked for a few years as an unskilled labourer in the valley, but he did not complete any training. It soon turned out that his sense of the land and the animals was inadequate, and that he was unable to cope with the challenges of managing the farm. But the prestige of heading a farmstead, locally still considerable, was high and Hubert was unable to admit his failure, even when the farm

9 Parts of the farm building date back to the 14th century, making it one of the first farms on this mountain. Historical documents testify that it was a locally influential, wealthy farmstead for a long time. The present farmer's wife, who married into the farm, is extremely interested in the farmstead's past. Whenever time permits, she learns to read old manuscripts. Numerous times we have visited different archives to complete the farm archives and understand its history.

was facing bankruptcy a decade after he had taken over. The older siblings threw together all the available money to avert this situation and in the mid-1980s asked the youngest brother, Kurt, who had a wife and two young sons, to take over.

This was the time when many farms of the valley had already converted to exclusive dairy farming. Kurt could just about manage to join this phase: He gradually bought more high-yielding cows, converted fields into meadows, and installed an irrigation system to improve the hay harvest. He also began renovation works in the large farmhouse, by now only occupied by himself and his family. To create an additional source of income, he had planned with his wife to set up two holiday flats that she would take care of.¹⁰ These plans were shattered when his wife suddenly died a couple of years after he had taken over the holding. As a widower with two young sons and no additional help on the farm, he only just managed to maintain the current situation; the renovation work was to come to a standstill for some twenty-five years.

As soon as his sons were strong enough, they helped with the daily work. The younger one went down to the valley for an apprenticeship and was to stay there. In the beginning of the 2000s, the elder one completed an agricultural apprenticeship and returned to the farm. For more than 10 years, the farm was run by father and son, the milk yield and quality gradually increased and the two slowly managed to improve some meadows and bring the farm's machinery up to date. Finally, Kurt handed over to his farmer son, Stefan, and the neighbourhood paid tribute to the two of them for their success in steering the historically significant farm out of crisis. However, the fact that the new farmer was still unmarried in his mid-thirties was viewed with misgivings. Without the prospect of continuing the farm, it would be difficult for him to push ahead with the changes that had become necessary. However, in 2014, Stefan married a woman from a village of another valley, without farming background. Like her husband, she only had one sibling, who (like her) also married into a farm and was too preoccupied to offer

¹⁰ With tourism flourishing in South Tyrol in the 1970s, when the mountain farms came under the political spotlight, the main measure to save their existence was the conversion to dairy farming, but this was immediately followed by the encouragement, especially of the women on the farms, to seek an additional income in tourism. So, there were subsidies and counselling for setting up guest rooms or holiday flats on the farms. An economic model that is still extremely successful today.

much help. Family members, as we will see even more clearly in the next case, even though they are not living on the farm, are a crucial workforce especially in the busy summer months. Nevertheless, Stefan's new wife immediately began to press ahead with the many tasks that needed to be done in and around the neglected farmhouse. In the meantime, the couple had several children, the conversion of the house to accommodate guests – interrupted twenty-five years ago – was gradually completed and father and son continue to work the farm with some success. Today, one renovation measure that has been pending for a decade, and which the farmer feels is urgently needed, is the construction of a new cowshed and barn. Both have been too old and too small for many years, and thus extremely labour-intensive, especially in view of the increasing conversion to business-oriented dairy farming in recent decades. The barn and cow shed were built 350 years ago and were intended for less than half the animals that are in it today and were indeed meant for smaller animals than the high-performance breeds common today. This makes the daily barn work of about 5 hours difficult; transporting the hay from the overfilled barn to the animals requires acrobatics, the ceiling is too low for installing a milking system, so the milk must be carried bucket by bucket to the milk kitchen. The low ceiling and few windows leave the workplace rather dark and prevent the air circulation necessary for animals and people alike. "I myself am just about coming to terms with these working conditions – whoever of my children will take over, will certainly not be able, nor willing to do so anymore".

The planning of this conversion was tough, especially since the cowshed and the barn, as the entire farm, are listed buildings and the regulations imposed by the Monuments' office hardly fit with the increasingly binding requirements on animal welfare and hygiene imposed by the agricultural office. Two of the architects involved in the planning had already given up when the Covid crisis (2020 onwards) led to an increase in prices for building materials and manpower and brought the planning to a halt. The war against Ukraine (2022 onwards) then brought about radical rises in the prices of concentrated feed and fuel, while the milk price remained the same. Now, suddenly, it seems possible that the farm may again be faced with the risk of bankruptcy due to the necessity to run into debts. The conversion plan for barn and cowshed is presently postponed until further notice. Most neighbouring farms rebuilt or at least converted their farm buildings between the

1970s and the 1990s. They are now busy with building improvement measures to bring them up to the standard that is currently required in order to obtain national and EU subsidies. For the farmer in our case study, this innovation gap is huge.

I add quite a different example that might clarify the situation of these small-scale farmers in recent generations. This farmstead has smaller land holdings but has, contrary to the first case, a geographical orientation on the valley's sunny side, which is very advantageous for good growth on the meadows. Several hectares of the nearby forest and an alpine pasture 1,000 m above the farmstead also belong to the holding. In the 1970s, a son took over the management of the farm. His wife comes from a farm further down the valley. Both spouses have several siblings who regularly came to help with the hay harvest in summer and with the structural and mechanical renovations soon to be undertaken to convert to dairy farming. Since they tackled this in the early 1980s, at the height of the conversions, that were encouraged and subsidised by the provincial government, they benefited from the maximum support offered at the time.

A second project was carried out at the end of the 1990s: the couple renovated the dilapidated cowshed and residential building on the high mountain pasture to be able to cater for and accommodate hiking tourists. Since then, the management of this building has been more or less successfully leased out to various hosts during the summer months.

In the mid-2000s, they handed the farm over to one of their daughters; her husband comes from a neighbouring farm. At that time, the holding was economically sufficiently viable to start converting to organic milk. The farmer woman's parents continue to live on the farm and are spry enough to help with the work in the cowshed, on the meadows and with raising the children. About 10 years ago, the husband started his own timber company, invested in machinery, and now cuts timber in his own forest as well as carrying out orders for other forest owners (heavy damage caused by a hurricane in 2018 in parts of the valley that needs cleaning up has meant a good order situation for him for years). The eldest son, 15, already participates in the forest works.

In recent years, the woman farmer had been able to lease additional land and to completely discontinue the previously necessary purchase of additional hay. In this generation, too, both spouses have numerous siblings who,

together with their children are ready to help with the hay harvest in summer. The good economic situation of the farm, also thanks to the timber business, has made it possible to bring the barn, the milking machine, and the dairy kitchen up to the currently necessary standard. The latest EU requirements in this respect mean major investments for many farmers, and only very few farms in the area have already succeeded in this conversion.

In comparison to the first case, it becomes strikingly clear that farmers relate their present activities to the past and the future at the same time, and that both situations are highly interdependent. The constant pressure to innovate is very evident here, as is the speed and sequence with which changes need to be implemented to have a lasting effect. But the feasibility of such investments into the future also very much depends on the situation the farm is in due to the activities of the predecessors. It seems that it would become almost impossible for Stefan's successor to catch up with the innovation gap; it is very hard for one generation to keep up with changes that should have been done over two. On the one hand, the technological changes of the last five decades, but above all their impact on the frequently changing impulses of agricultural policy, force farmers to repeatedly change the way they operate. On the other hand, their own wishes and interests in improving their working environment and that of their successors mean that most farms are always a construction site in one form or another. In the decades immediately following the policies of the 1970s (see previous section), the pressure for transformation stemmed from the policy of converting self-sufficient farms into quasi-industrial dairying. Today's impetus comes also from farmer's projects of re-diversification of sources of livelihood and local self-marketing.

Temporal Horizons of Innovation

Farmers constantly deploy temporal reasoning in such matters, whether by referring to the past, reasons why they struggle or succeed, or to the future, reasons why they do something now (such as make an investment) because they want their successors to be able to cope. All this may condense into one very powerful preoccupation: the question of farm takeover. When I asked

one farmer what his relationship with land meant to him, he said without hesitation, “when I look at my meadows, I think of my children and what they will make out of them one day”. Our subsequent conversation made it clear that my question also made him remember his own past. The potential he had seen as a young farmer in this land (whose meadows, in his opinion, needed renewal), and the obligation he had felt towards the land and thus towards his predecessors, all helped him in his decision to take over the struggling farm from his father.

High altitude farmers understand the current situations of their farms as a direct consequence of what their predecessors did and speak of their own actions on the farm or on the land as something they do for their successors. When they consider the farm’s past, they do so in terms of what innovations their predecessors undertook or failed to realize. And what they see as a necessary or possible project today can only be thought and planned in direct relationship to past projects - or the lack of them. The same applies for the time ahead. If farmers plan for an investment in making some areas around the farmstead or on their land more workable, they talk of themselves as profiting from these ameliorations, but dwell even more on their successors, preferably their children, who will be dependent of these alterations having been made. It is they, and their successors, who benefit in the end.

The former times that South Tyrolean farmers focus on is sometimes imagined through a nostalgic lens, but their focus on the past is also (quite literally) crucial to the way they think about their own current working practices. To be able to continue their work means making constant advances in innovation, which has always to be measured against what has been done before and what the present state of the farm is in. This could be the conditions of the meadows, the ease of looking after the animals or milking them as a result of the layout of the farm buildings, the adequacy of storage for hay and machinery, and so on. The point is that, on a small-scale farm, every one of these matters is the evident result of the farmer’s own or a predecessor’s actions. So, the past is generally seen as the measure to identify the kind of forthcoming transformations necessary to ensure a future for the farmstead. This applies to the past prior to the 1970s, the more self-sufficient, diversified mountain farms that were hardly oriented toward the market, as well as the period of new policies, which saw the consolidation of quasi-industrialized

dairy farming that generated income to re-invest in intensive milk production. Moreover, nowadays that past is looked back at from a present in which, given the problems that the monoculture of dairy farming means for the animals, soil and species loss, policy advice goes towards a *re-diversification* of farm activities (re-introducing more diversity among animals and crops) and promotes self-marketing to generate income.

Nevertheless, the daily work of high-altitude dairy farmers implies that they also focus very much on the present. The current seasonal weather conditions, the everyday needs of the animals and the functioning of machinery all require regular as well as immediate acting. Often, what has been done the previous day determines the tasks of the following days, and farmers report of the loss of time or energy when they get the work sequences wrong. During the haymaking period in the summer months, whatever work is planned or in progress must be able to be interrupted immediately, depending on whether the weather conditions are favourable for mowing, drying or bringing in the hay. On haymaking days, only the care of the cows is similar to the rest of the year – otherwise everyone is in a state of emergency, concentrating on this one task. The management of the extremely diverse tasks and projects on farms is complex and requires organisational skills, the cooperation of all those working on the farm and, increasingly, the ability to overcome or exploit administrative hurdles.

Conclusion

It seems that the ethnographic reality of the year 2023, with its multiple crises, has gained the upper hand. Discussing the current situation of mountain farmers in South Tyrol inevitably leads to an engagement with a global system of agrarian modernisation that has climbed up to the Alpine heights to be implemented in small-scale local contexts. It may be helpful to understand both situations as two different temporal systems (borrowing from Luhmann's connotation of the term; cf. Noe and Alrøe, 2012 and Gershon, 2005) that are independent, closed and self-referential. In short, the systems' two vantage points on farming are barely congruent and each deal with issues that are only visible to them. That said, the issues both systems are concerned

with are quite similar and both sides consider themselves to be experts in the field. It is not a question of trying to bring both sides together but of challenging the ethnographer to see both sides at the same time; double vision as an ethnographic method (see Jiménez, 2018).

The mountain farmers I have worked with do not see their farms as subject to industrial development, as part of modernised agriculture, or even as monoculture dairy farms; they see their land and their cattle, and they use all the opportunities available to them to continue to work and survive with their animals on that land. As the case studies showed, they emphasise the continuity of the farms, which they see as a follow-up to their parents' and grandparents' way of working, indeed an essential impetus for their daily work, which they achieve by adapting their agricultural practices to the prevailing realities (currently dairy monoculture). What they are either less aware of, or consider to be of secondary importance, are the medium-term consequences for them: dependence on non-local policies that set changing, complicated rules for the payment of subsidies, on the world market price of cereals for concentrated feed, on the milk price set in the interplay between large milk cooperatives, EU regulations and the international market. The use of industrial means to cultivate high altitude pastures, or rather hay fields, in order to extract as much protein as possible from the steep mountain slopes, once considered the most desperate working environment, is not considered a paradox for mountain farmers, but a pragmatic survival strategy. Needless to say, they are far from the ideal of the autonomous farmer living off the land, which is still a much cherished model, while the high costs of industrialised agriculture mean that they earn little more than the minimum wage if the farm is run full-time (Mair, 2022). The industrialisation of agriculture in this region has also led to, or even made possible, the rise of part-time farmers (like Michael, mentioned at the beginning), who are now the majority in South Tyrol. These are farmers who get up at 4 a.m. to milk and look after the cows, then go to work in the valley before returning to the animals in the late afternoon. They often say that they do this paid work so that they can invest in the farm, keep it up to date or at least be able to hold on to it. To abandon it would be seen as a defeat, a betrayal of the ancestors or the children to whom they owe the land and the buildings; to move to a village flat on the valley bottom, close to so many people but without land to look after, is unimaginable for the vast majority of them.

What the policy makers seem to have been oblivious to when introducing the comprehensive modernisation measures in the beginning of the 1970s was how small the farms were, what topographical and climatic conditions they were exposed to and the impact the specific management of mixed crop-live-stock farms had on the ecosystem over a long period of time. The focus at that time was on preserving the farms and thus the cultural landscape. The experience gained from agricultural modernisation since the 1950s in Europe was applied here belatedly and, it seems, without paying too much attention to the specific environmental conditions. Trucks loaded with soya- and maize-based concentrated feed (of obscure origin), making their way up narrow switchbacks to mountain farms to deposit a few tonnes of their load are seen with more doubt today than they were then. And some farmers and policy makers are starting to see the paradox of such a delivery to hay milk producing highland cows. Whether it is due to the changed regulations regarding subsidies, which are increasingly linked to environmentally friendly measures, agricultural research initiatives (as in Zanon et al., 2023), or the focus on “sustainability strategies” of agricultural advisory institutions, there is a tendency towards attempting to reduce specialisation in high-performance dairy farming. A few farmers dare to leave the dairy cooperatives to market their products themselves, and their numbers are slowly increasing. This is possibly encouraged by the two crises since the beginning of 2020, which have made remarkably clear how little resilience the existing structures seem to have.

Whether a continuity of mountain farming could be achieved with industrialization is still in question. Currently, a slow change towards a kind of de-industrialization and re-diversification can be observed. More and more farmers are leaving the cooperatives and trying to market their products themselves. In times of recurring economic crises, whatever their causes, the exclusive milk farming model is anything but crisis-proof.

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Engaged Futures and Perspectives From Elsewhere

Thinking with Verticality: Making a High Place in the Alpine Cryosphere in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

This chapter explores the making of high places in the Alpine cryosphere in Tyrol, western Austria. In it, I propose that in our studies in and of mountain regions the three-dimensionality of space should become the focal point. Taking the Pitztal glacier ski resort as an ethnographic case study, I argue that, consequently, we must take the notion of “verticality” seriously if we wish to understand place-making in Alpine regions. What I claim particularly is to throw light on the “lived verticality”, as experienced both by local research partners and anthropologists working in Alpine cryospheres. By employing a relational and multidimensional understanding of verticality I show the physical, social, moral and political dimensions of it. In doing so, we gain insights into the relational and flexible as well as self-determined making and manifestations of verticality and identity in high places in the European Alps.

Introduction: Verticality Matters

This chapter explores the making of high places in the Alpine cryosphere in western Austria. It is based on my research on the anthropology of snow in the Pitztal, an Alpine valley in the province of Tyrol. Taking the Pitztal glacier ski resort as an ethnographic case study, I discuss how its staff, mainly local men who build, engineer and maintain the tourist landscape, are making this particular high place into a workplace that has only begun to emerge in the recent history of Alpine regions. Highlighting their daily engagement in and with the cryosphere, and broadly contextualizing it, offers valuable

insights into the current making of “high places”¹ (Cosgrove and della Dora, 2009) that are shaped by global tourism and climate change. Glacier ski areas provide numerous sites that are specifically defined for use by a variety of people, be it spaces for ski tourists and other visitors who consume and enjoy high places, spaces for alpinists and, last but not least, areas of environmental commons, such as water resources. All of those uses cannot be separated from “occupationscapes” (Hudson et al., 2011, p. 21²) based on snow and glaciers; rather, they intersect with each other in various ways.

Human–environmental dynamics in the Alpine cryosphere have only received scholarly attention in the last two decades or so (Orlove, Wiegandt and Luckman, 2008; Strauss, 2009; Dunbar et al., 2012; Elixhauser, 2015; Huggel et al., 2015; Beniston et al., 2018). However, until now anthropological enquiry has rarely focused on glacier ski areas. This is perhaps surprising, because, as I argue, glaciers provide important tourist spaces and are considered essential signifiers of climate change. As such they make a good entry point for learning more about the multifaceted processes, discrepancies and paradoxes shaping high places and human–cryosphere relations in the European Alps (see also Nöbauer, 2021, 2022).

While my chapter aims at a comprehensive understanding of current Alpine spaces and the prevailing political economy and political ecology therein, it also pursues methodological and theoretical goals. Referring to the overall theme of this book I show that through anthropological fieldwork we gain a variety of insights into larger transformations of the European Alps. This is made possible by grasping local people’s points of view, their attitudes to life and work and their vision of their world (Malinowski, 1972, p. 25). Or to use Vered Amit’s words instead, “[a]nthropology’s strength is the ethnographic spotlight it focuses on particular lives, broadly contextualized” (Amit, 2000, p. 15).

1 High places are polar defined “either by high altitude or high latitude: they are mountain ranges and peaks or polar regions ...: places of rock, snow and ice” (Cosgrove and della Dora, 2009, p. 3).

2 According to Hudson et al. (2011, p. 21) “occupationscapes” are “defined as landscapes formed and performed through histories of occupational behaviour”. While this concept articulates the structural and political dimensions of landscape formation through labour, it also shares certain similarities with the phenomenological approach to landscape as proposed by Ingold (1993) in his theory of “taskscape”. An ethnographic analysis of the Pitztal glacier resort as “occupationscape” is given by Nöbauer elsewhere (2021, 2022).

Acknowledging the large body of knowledge in the anthropology of space, I propose that especially in our studies in and of mountain regions the three-dimensionality of space should become the focal point. I argue that, consequently, we must take the notion of “verticality” seriously if we wish to understand place-making in Alpine regions in particular. According to mountain researchers from various disciplines, the three-dimensional space, shaped by altitude as an undeniably major feature, needs to be respected in empirical and theoretical terms (Orlove, 1977; Orlove and Guillet, 1985; Funnell and Parish, 2001; Rudaz, 2009; Mathieu, 2011; della Dora, 2016).³ Following Michael Reidy’s argument, “mountains teach us to take seriously the vertical as an analytical framework” (2017, p. 586). However, it is important to note that besides the attention on spaces above (height) a vertical analysis also engages with the subterranean spaces below (depth). “It acknowledges space as three-dimensional, with oceans and rivers, tunnels and caves, sanitation systems and mines, hills and mountains, skylines and airways” (*ibid.*, p. 585). In doing so, “[v]erticality can give the spatial turn some vitality, some graininess, some needed texture” (*ibid.*, pp. 586–587).

However, neither altitude nor verticality are given or natural categories; rather they are relational and historically constructed (Mathieu, 2011). If we accept the current popular understanding, which has its origin in science, verticality comprises altitude (the height measured from sea level) and depth (the dimension of what lies beneath the Earth’s surface, be it soil, water or rock). Both topographical directions relate to the sea level and the Earth’s surface. Besides this common scientific view, there are other vernacular understandings of “high” or “low” elevations throughout the world, which, depending on the respective social, cultural and natural environments, emanate from the perception of the relation between the two as a basic principle. From theoretical and ethnographic perspectives, verticality covers multiple physical, environmental, social and political dimensions, all of which gain significance in my analysis of the Pitztal glacier resort. The notion’s usage, first and foremost, relates to the physical, geological, geomorphological and ecological characteristics of mountain environments, which are shaped by

³ I wish to mention here that the multi-dimensionality of space has been analyzed also through the perspective of volumetry. The editions by Franck Billé (2018, 2019, 2020) on voluminous states and sovereignty demonstrate a significant example of the volumetric approach.

relative altitude, slope and zonation (Rhoades and Thompson, 1975; Viazzo, 1989; Messerli and Ives, 1999; Montero, Mathieu and Singh, 2009; Mathieu, 2011; Price, 2015). Besides these physical and material dimensions (socially and historically constructed though they are), verticality's applications also encompass the social, political and psychological spheres. Accordingly, verticality may, first of all, indicate social structures, segregation and hierarchies (Graham and Hewitt, 2012; Lewis O'Neill and Fogarty-Valenzuela, 2013; Debarbieux and Rudaz, 2015; Harris, 2015; Cian, 2017). Linking ecology to the social, a special model of verticality has been applied by cultural ecologists in the anthropology of the Andes since the 1970s (Rhoades and Thompson, 1975; Orlove, 1977, 1987; Mathieu, 2011). It "claims that a sociopolitical unit maintains access to a number of different ecological zones. Membership in the units offers individuals access to the products of the different zones through mechanisms of reciprocity and redistribution" (Orlove, 1977, p. 88).⁴ On the other hand, the political sense of verticality (which broadly overlaps with the social) addresses issues of power, control and surveillance through collective actions and public policies of targeting mountains (Debarbieux and Rudaz, 2015) and furthermore, exerting state and geopolitical power from above through modern technologies (based on the aerial gaze) such as illustrated by the concept of "politics of verticality" (Weizman, 2002). Conversely, the latter also tackles the exploration and exploitation of the subterranean (such as in mining). Drawing on my ethnographic research, I propose that there is a further variant of the politics of verticality that is expressed in spatial planning policies and environmental protection regimes in high Alpine regions. Last but not least, vertical-space positioning in its manifold dimensions is acknowledged in (anthropological) psychology as a basic human experience which is used for multiple metaphorical associations (such as hierarchy), more than any other physical dimensionality or location (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999; Cian, 2017). Reviewing the broad recognition of verticality in manifold disciplines and research fields, it seems even more surprising

4 However, when applying it to the question of global similarities in mountain agriculture, anthropologists failed to find answers for tropical and non-tropical mountain regions (Mathieu, 2011, p. 90).

to me that the significance of verticality in current anthropological research of and in Alpine regions has received so little attention to date.

Against this background and based on my research insights, I maintain that altitude, and particularly the relationship between higher and lower areas, gain pre-eminence in current place-making, in Alpine regions specifically. This includes the considerable attention the Alpine cryosphere has received in comparison to lower areas as a region where the impact of climate change has, unfortunately, become profoundly visible, first of all with the vanishing of glaciers. At the same time, the cryosphere, which in the Alpine past was regarded as useless land by the local farmers⁵, is now considered useful by local people, tourists and the tourist industry because it provides the economically highly valued resource of snow more reliably than lower regions can. I therefore argue that despite climatic changes snow continues to make the cryosphere an essential ecological and socio-economic zone. What I claim particularly is to throw light on the “lived verticality”, as experienced both by local research partners and anthropologists working in Alpine cryospheres specifically. Therefore, it will be of analytical significance to explain how and to which ends altitude/verticality is socially created and experienced in the Pitztal.

Studying place has been marginalized in anthropology in favour of space in recent decades. This shift occurred due to the overall focus on globalization and new conceptions of deterritorialized spaces and scapes. In a similar vein, so I argue, place finds itself put in a novel predicament in current approaches to planetary thinking (Chakrabarty, 2019). Notwithstanding, place is still “important in the lives of most people, if by place we mean the engagement with and experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness (however unstable), boundaries (however permeable), and connections to everyday life, even if its identity is constructed and never fixed” (Escobar, 2008, p. 30). It is important to note that it is solely through these experiences of a certain amount of boundedness that a “sense of place” can also be facilitated. It is created by people’s feelings of attachment and belonging to a place

5 There was an exception of using the glaciers though: local people used the crevasses of the Mittelberg Ferner, which in the past expanded down to the valley, as a fridge for meat until the 1950s. Sciences such as glaciology and ecology, in turn, considered glaciers as dead matter for a long time but acknowledge them as living matter now.

that arise from their emotional and cognitive experiences and cultural beliefs and practices (Low, 1992, p. 165).

Anthropologists share the view that place-making is a deeply social, constantly ongoing though contested endeavour which also includes the symbolic and emotional dimensions. However, along with some mountain researchers and anthropologists (Entrikin, 2009; Escobar, 2008) I argue that the material and environmental or ecological dimensions must equally be taken into account if we wish to understand high places specifically.⁶ They appear particularly relevant in the increasingly contested efforts of place-making for touristic ends. In his investigation of territorial makings in the Colombian-Ecuadorian Pacific Arturo Escobar (2008, p. 23) emphasizes that “[a]ny territory is a territory of difference in that it entails unique place making and region making, ecologically, culturally, and socially”. In accordance with Escobar (and many others committed to overcoming the dualistic thinking and binary categorization of nature versus culture predominant in Western thinking) I maintain that besides social life the non-organic and organic are also important for analyzing the production of place in its various dimensions (ibid., p. 35). To put it briefly, we can understand a high place (such as a glacier ski area) as a web of human and non-human relations implying different actors, forces and agentive powers.⁷

Having said this, developing a comprehensive notion of verticality requires consideration of its connection to global forces and spaces. Indeed, there are diverse local and global efforts targeting vertical spaces, both in their heights and depths (see below). This is especially true for the global capitalist economy in its endless search for and exploitation of natural (frontier) resources (cf. Ong and Collier, 2005; Tsing, 2001), including global tourism. Beyond that, the term “vertical globalization”, which I have proposed elsewhere (Nöbauer, 2018, 2021), may help us to describe the increasing flows of people, ideas, infrastructure, communication technology, trade, and finance oriented towards high mountain areas and the sky.⁸ While this orientation is

6 As emphasized by Nicholas Entrikin (2009, p. 217), bringing together the symbolic with the material is essential in analyzing high places.

7 For details about the agentive power of glacier water to destroy snowmaking technology and humans’ plans to engineer the alpine cryosphere see Nöbauer (2021).

8 Increasing flows oriented towards the sky include for instance satellites, space flight and plans of climate engineering. I wish to add here that since that definition I have contin-

directed upwards in topographical terms, vertical globalization may also be directed downwards beneath the surface of the earth (e.g. towards maritime areas or focused on the extraction of diverse resources from beneath mountains or the earth).

High altitude matters in multiple and polymorphic ways in the Pitztal glacier ski resort. To briefly illustrate at this point: According to climate research, future snow reserves will be limited to high elevations, whereas snow at lower elevations will disappear. At the same time, glaciers are vanishing at unprecedented speed due to the impacts of climate change, and the retreat of permafrost is causing new dangers, such as increasingly frequent rockfalls and landslides. Furthermore, altitude is marketed by the tourist industry as the key feature in guaranteeing snow reliability, fantastic panoramic views, exceptional architecture, excitement and thrills for visitors. Moreover, the global circulation of images of snow and ice landscapes both by tourism professionals and tourists are paradigmatic visualizations of high places. Special infrastructure and technology are crucial for making, operating, accessing and consuming high places. At the same time, technological devices are exposed to numerous challenges caused by the unique atmospheric conditions high up, as are the particular techniques of snowmaking and glacier protection that the workers employ in the glacier ski resort. And last but not least, high places are characterized by physical and atmospheric conditions that place harsh demands on the human body due to the extreme weather in the form of biting wind and cold, burning sun, blinding snow and decreased air pressure (see also Cosgrove and della Dora, 2009, p. 10). Such a demanding physical environment affects the bodily experiences and health of the staff, tourists and me, as a field researcher, in undeniable and sometimes uncontrollable ways.

Having clarified my approach and focus in this introduction, I will next outline the ethnographic site of my research. Besides describing the settlement and socio-economic structure of Pitztal I will highlight the commitment to tourism and how it has contributed to the socio-economic transformation of the Pitztal region from extreme poverty to wealth. In the subsequent section,

ued to think more comprehensively and critically about the buzzword of “globalization”, which has gained such prominence in anthropology and many other disciplines.

my methods of researching snow and vertical globalization and “doing the glacier ski resort”, particularly, will be described. From the following section on, various topics related to and determined by verticality will be the focus. Beginning with the physicality of high altitude the unique physical and atmospheric conditions, the impacts of climate change on the Alpine cryosphere and spatial and safety policies at work in the glacier ski area will be presented. In the subsequent section the organization of the glacier ski company, the socio-structural dimensions of verticality are considered. Against this backdrop, I will then describe in more ethnographic detail the glacier ski resort, how it is made a high place and experienced as such. In doing so, the multiple dimensions of the lived and constructed verticality will be demonstrated. In the conclusion I will sum up the main analytical findings.

I have decided to design this chapter as a short journey to and through the Pitztal glacier ski area, thereby focusing on some ethnographic illustrations, broadly contextualized, in order to present the significance of verticality.

The Pitztal: From Agrarian Poverty to Prosperous Tourism

As mentioned above, the Pitztal is a high Alpine valley located in western Austria, in the province of Tyrol.⁹ Beginning near the district capital of Imst, it follows a course for around 40 kilometres southwards from the river Inn, and stretches into the impressive Ötztaler Alps, which shape also the border between Austria and Italy in that area. Around 7,600 permanent residents currently live in the valley’s four political communes.¹⁰ Due to the high-altitude location the valley’s settlement structure is very dispersed, requiring a steady up and down in daily mobility. With 3,158 permanent residents, Arzl is the biggest commune; it is located in the lower valley, near urban Imst, at an elevation of around 900 metres. At the other end, the commune of St. Leonhard is situated at the top of the valley and has 1,423 permanent residents settled in areas at more than 1,700 metres. In between we find the communes of Wrens (nearly 1,000 metres at its lowest) counting 2,123 permanent resi-

9 The geographic coordinates are: 47° 6' N, 10° 49' E.

10 As of 1 January 2022 (Statistik Austria – Bevölkerung zu Jahresbeginn 2002–2022 nach Gemeinden. Gebietsstand 1.1.2022).

dents and Jerzens (1,100 metres at its lowest), which has the smallest number of permanent residents (920).

Each commune is composed of a network of very small villages (and even single houses), some of which have large church buildings of their own and various social and cultural associations besides the main communal infrastructure. Settling at different altitudes has led to a specific social (infra-) structure that until recently has occasionally resulted in stark social distinctions and separation between even those tiny villages. The lower valley is characterized by a mixed economy balancing small trade, craft, diverse service companies, small-scale agriculture and tourism. In contrast, the upper valley is predominantly based and fully dependent on tourism, mainly winter tourism. All three Pitztal ski resorts – notably the Hochzeiger resort, the Riffelsee resort and, adjacent to it, the Pitztal Glacier ski resort – were established there, in Jerzens and St. Leonhard. Besides tourism, there is some Alpine pasture and sideline farming, which mostly participates in the tourism business in various ways. It was in the latter two communes that I carried out my fieldwork on the anthropology of snow and issues of vertical globalization between 2012 and 2019.

As in many mountainous regions in Austria and elsewhere, in the Pitztal snow provides the major rationale for the regional economy and identity. It constitutes the most important occupationscape both for the local permanent residents and the significant numbers of seasonal migrants who currently come mainly from Eastern European countries. Although some mountaineering in the Pitztal had already started in the nineteenth century (Pechtl, 2005, 2015), modern winter tourism was initiated by provincial politicians together with local inhabitants in the 1960s. They shared the socio-economic and political aim of reviving the Pitztal, which at the time was extremely poor, and of securing its economy. This ambitious goal was expressed in the following commitment by local people in 1966: “We will put our existence, our future, and all of our energy into tourism” (Hochzeiger Bergbahnen, 2009, p. 6).¹¹ The valley has undergone a profound socio-economic transformation since then: from an extremely poor high Alpine region, which in the past was primarily based on agriculture, into one whose wealth today de-

11 German original: “Wir legen unsere Existenz, unsere Zukunft und all unsere Kraft in den Tourismus” (Hochzeiger Bergbahnen, 2009, p. 6).

rives from the service-based tourist economy. In the past few decades, tourism has brought stability to residence levels in the valley as a whole, and even an increase in the population, with some in-migration to the mixed-economy lower valley. However, in the upper valley, which depends exclusively on tourism, while population fluctuates, overall population is decreasing. This poses a certain threat to the Pitztal, as it does to other Alpine regions in Austria and elsewhere. Therefore, the commitment to winter tourism which, in spite of retreating snow and glaciers, is still regarded to guarantee residential and economic stability, continues to have great economic, social, cultural and emotional power in the Pitztal. Modern winter tourism has changed the value of snow, transforming it into a commodity now known as “white gold” throughout the European Alps (Denning, 2015). Snow as a commodity and all the associated infrastructure and imaginations now circulate within global economic and cultural flows – in addition to the global mobility of the many thousands of tourists from all over the world who consume snowscapes.

“Doing the Glacier Ski Resort”: Methods of Approaching the High Place

Despite considerable criticism on ethnography for various reasons from within the discipline, the significance of ethnography in/for anthropology still is paramount. The methodological attempt to enter and understand a different world by using the whole self physically, intellectually and emotionally as an instrument of knowledge constitutes a disciplinary consensus (Ortner, 2006).¹²

I felt (and still feel) deeply committed to this fundamental consensus when following my main question of how people live with snow and make a living from it in the Pitztal. Accordingly, in addition to conducting a range of interviews, I have adopted a mixture of qualitative methods, among them – and most importantly – taking part in as many meetings, joint adventures, events and informal talks with local and some non-local people as possible. The mutual building of reliable and trusting informal relationships was by

12 It should be mentioned at this point that the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus limits and even undermines this fundamental self-understanding of anthropology as a discipline.

far the approach most appreciated by my local interlocutors and myself as it was not mediated by a contract, in contrast to the informed consent forms that increasingly shape social research practices now (Stacul, 2018, p. 97). Participant observation took place in diverse settings, such as various public and family festivities and events, local council meetings, numerous days out hiking and skiing with locals, and environmentalist activities. In the glacier ski resort, I regularly accompanied some individual glacier workers in their daily work as well as “going along” (Kusenbach, 2003) with local mountain guides and passionate local alpinists in order to learn from their reflections on the changing cryosphere. Without doubt, the most physically challenging and intense fieldwork was in the glacier ski resort, basically due to the extreme weather and atmospheric conditions (lower air pressure, rapidly changing weather). My fieldwork stays as a single researcher took place between 2012 and 2018¹³ (lasting between two and six weeks).

Although I had visited (and still visit) the Pitztal glacier resort during each of my fieldwork stays in Pitztal, making a broad range of contacts, and preparing fieldwork access, fieldwork in the glacier resort itself was carried out during the 2014 winter season, in the summer and early autumn season in 2015 and finally in winter 2019. The warmer season in particular is the most intensive time for the workers who maintain the overall infrastructure of the resort and prepare tourist snowscapes by engineering the landscape (see below). Although a seemingly paradoxical choice when researching snow and ice issues, the timing in the summer period was actually perfect for unlearning the significance of the temporality of snow and learning more about the deep transformations of the Alpine cryosphere.

13 In addition, I had four of two- or three-week stays in Pitztal between 2012 and 2019 in the course of fieldwork seminars with master students from the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. The research conducted by students has made valuable contributions to my own research and that of other students, as does my research to theirs.



Figure 1 – The “occupationscape” of the Pitztal glacier ski resort in summer 2015.
Copyright 2015 by H. Nöbauer.

The Physicality of High Altitude: Between Nature, Climate Change and Policy

Glacier ski areas share many similarities with ski resorts in non-glaciated areas, such as lift and restaurant infrastructure, piste management, snowmaking and safety measures for skiing. At the same time, they differ from them in several respects: including the unique atmospheric, climatic and ecological conditions that characterize their environment. As I experienced and witnessed throughout my fieldwork, elevations of 3,000 metres and above pose myriad challenges to the human body and health, to technical apparatus, to snowmaking technology and to many of the plans humans make in order to engineer the cryospheric landscape.

Although glaciers in general have been shrinking since the end of the Little Ice Age in the nineteenth century, from the mid 1980s glaciers worldwide have undergone a more or less dramatic retreat (Bender et al., 2011, p. 407). Glacial loss and lack of snow cover not only affect the ecological balance, but

they also impact directly on people living in the vicinity, affecting their local economies, regional and global tourism, modes of perception and senses of place (Cruikshank, 2005; Dunbar et al., 2012; Orlove, Wiegandt and Luckman, 2008; Wiegandt and Lugon, 2008). The retreat of the glaciers in the Ötztaler Alps, which are (still) home to the largest continuous glaciated area of the Eastern Alps in Europe, is particularly drastic (Lieb and Kellerer-Pirklbauer, 2020). Nevertheless, glacier ski areas are marketed to tourists as providing “true snow reliability” when compared with resorts at lower elevations. In a similar vein, due to their high-altitude locations glacier ski resorts have mostly been considered in climate research and tourism as exclusive future skiing reservations. Climate-research models project that ski areas in Europe located below 1,200 metres will disappear towards the end of the century (APCC, 2014, p. 16, 25; Marty et al., 2017), though a recent study has revealed that there may also be a decrease in snow depth of about 50 per cent for elevations above 3,000 metres by then (Marty et al., 2017). As will be illustrated below, the extreme weather and atmospheric conditions prevailing in the Alpine cryosphere along with the dramatic climatic change pose a variety of challenges to the glacier workers in their daily work.

Glacier ski areas incorporate a whole range of legal provisions, including standard operating procedures, as a prerequisite for their establishment and maintenance and environmental protection regimes. While many of these predominantly province standard regulations relate to particular weather, ice and snow conditions¹⁴, provincial, national and supranational EU environmental policies are directed at the proper use and protection of the cryosphere environment or landscape and its resources (such as water)¹⁵. Regional spatial planning policy defines, among other things, the areas to be protected: for example, “untouched” glaciers are considered highly vulnerable areas requiring protection. Familiarity with these regulations is very important when carrying out field research, in order to fully comprehend

14 Aiming at the safety of humans and infrastructure these include for instance the constant control of snow conditions, of the pistes, crevasses, ablation, wind.

15 To protect the environment or landscape against humans’ disproportionate interventions into it, the provincial and national environmental protection authorities must assess the impacts of intended interventions on the environment (in German *Umweltverträglichkeitsprüfung* or *UVP*). Put in different words, before realizing plans such as building new infrastructure, expanding pistes and blasting off rock areas the glacier ski resort companies are legally obliged to apply for formal permission by the respective environment authorities.

the diverse tasks and narratives of the workers. For example, rapidly changing weather, snow and ice conditions must be monitored several times a day by the staff in order to make, and keep, the ski area safe for skiers. Besides the daily weather forecast, measurement of the wind is especially crucial, as members of the technical staff are individually responsible for immediately stopping the lifts once the wind speed becomes a risk factor. To put it more precisely, the unique and rapidly changing wind conditions at high elevations directly impact on the safety of mountain railways, and hence on the security of humans and the stability of the business economy. Thus, the relevant staff need to acquire and apply sound knowledge about the weather, wind, glaciers, snow and avalanches, among other things, and must observe them in detail so as to be able to act rapidly to risks. The movement of glaciers, crevasses and the breaking up of ice are further potential dangers to skiers, and thus must also be monitored and appropriately managed (Amt der Tiroler Landesregierung, n.d., pp. 21–22). In particular, so-called “atypical dangers” such as avalanches, a piste entirely freezing, crevasses that cannot be filled in or ablation (i.e. the melting of snow and ice cover over large areas) must be constantly safeguarded against and/or eliminated. If this is impossible, then pistes must be closed (*ibid.*, p. 23). When glaciers move, as they do by natural way, they have an impact similar to that of melting permafrost and destabilize the towers of the T-bar lift. Consequently, each year workers must adjust and relocate the lift towers. Ablation poses another challenge, as I saw during my fieldwork: bare rock, debris or permafrost soil are exposed in ablated areas, which must then be adapted into a “piste-friendly” base by flattening the ground. Drilling and blasting technologies are used to break up the rocks, and vast amounts of stones are removed in trucks. In this context workers would warn me, again and again, “Pay attention and keep away for the next few minutes!” (see also Nöbauer, 2021).

While these tasks are mainly defined by provincial piste-security regulations, other practices (such as preparing the ski slopes, making snow depots, applying snowmaking technology) widely described as snow management, have emerged from the economic and competitive imperative for “snow reliability”, and are interrelated with the changing global climate. However, both categories of practice intersect with each other, insofar as they share the safety of tourists and piste security as their prime objectives (Nöbauer, 2021).

Indeed, in the course of tourism history in the Pitztal glacier area, numerous accidents, including fatal ones, have already occurred as people – often due to carelessness and ignoring safety warnings – fell into crevasses or were crushed by avalanches.

Social Verticality: The Organization of the Glacier Ski Company

Counting around 100 employees, currently the glacier ski resort company is one of the biggest employers in the Pitztal. The great majority of employees are local people, mainly men. Some of them have been working there for as long as thirty years or more. So far, only a very few people, all in senior positions, are from other Tyrolean regions, and none of the significant numbers of seasonal migrants working in restaurants and hotels down in the valley are employed “high above” by the glacier company. This in turn accords with the contract concluded between the political commune St. Leonhard and the glacier company to give preference to locals’ employment if more candidates are equally qualified. In the early years of the glacier resort the prevailing local narrative about glacier workers teased and attached little value to their jobs and professional skills (see also below). This former disrespect and devaluation of them has changed profoundly because their manifold skills of craftsmanship, technological, organisational and entrepreneurial ability and deep knowledge of the weather, snow and ice are widely acknowledged now. Against this background and compared to the elder generation of workers the younger one experiences more and better career-development options today. Similar, and related to the changes of locals’ valuing glacier workers, the greatest majority of the Pitztal inhabitants now attribute also a high economic value to the glacier ski resort. Even those local people who reject any ideas and plans of expanding glacier ski tourism¹⁶ profit from current glacier ski tourism by hosting tourists in their hotels and pensions down in the valley.

16 The Pitztal glacier ski company (supported by all Pitztal communes) together with the glacier ski resort company of Sölden in the neighboring Ötztal valley had a plan for many years to build the biggest glacier ski resort of Europe. However, after a recent communal vote in St. Leonhard in 2022 a majority of its permanent residents rejected that plan.

Beside the aforementioned generational and ethnic differences between workers health issues represent and indeed are another pre-eminent factor in experiencing age and high places particularly. Although high altitude affects also the health of younger staff elder ones reported more frequently about that burden. Among those working in the glacier ski resort for decades is Heinrich¹⁷, a man in his late fifties who is responsible for security and piste management. He described the health implications of working in the cryosphere, especially with increasing age:

In the long run, working up here is a health risk The extreme weather conditions at these altitudes make the workers sick. Worst of all is the wind, because it determines everything! And also the sun is much more dangerous up here. Look at my skin: it's like thick leather,

he pointed at his face. Then he continued: "Listen to me, you really must drink a lot of liquids! We have to drink five litres of water a day up here otherwise we get bad headaches, fatigue or dizziness." (interview, 14 November 2014)

In addition to the growing health risk, most of the older glacier workers also complained about the lack of respect for their work among many locals in past decades. Working high up on the glacier, for them, has only slowly begun to receive increasing appreciation down in the valley. In contrast to Heinrich and his generation, his young(er) colleagues emphasized their fitness and sporty attitude and passion (though also reiterating the importance of drinking sufficient water up there). Moreover, the younger ones still find working at such high elevations exciting. They not only feel fitter but also that their work is more appreciated. Unlike most of their older colleagues, many of them are offered various apprenticeships, professional training and careers. At the same time, some are keen to experience the pleasure of skiing at the end of their work day. Heiko, a young man in his late twenties, loves to work on the glacier, and had had the chance to progress into the responsible position of snow technology manager. "I really love it up here! Who else would be able to ski downhill in such a fantastic landscape at the end of a work day. Whenever possible I ski downhill after work", he enthused (field note, 7 February 2018).

17 All names are authentic names of my research partners/participants

Although nearly all employees are local people, and unlike the Hochzeiger ski resort in Jerzens, which is entirely in the hands of local shareholders, the glacier resort is owned by a private non-local, Tyrolean company with a variety of investors. However, the land on which the ski resort operates is owned by the political commune of St. Leonhard, which, back in the 1980s, assigned the right to use the land for an unlimited period to the company, providing that it offered as many jobs as possible to local people. However, the divergence between land use and ownership causes various ambiguities and conflicts today.

Besides generational and ethnic differences there is a gendered division of labour: Women and a few men work predominantly as part-time employees in the three restaurants/cafés up in the glacier area and in the tourist office down in the valley.¹⁸ Only men hold leading positions,¹⁹ personnel and technology manager, restaurant managers, security and piste manager and public relations manager. All the men who work up in the glacier area, and who have different tradesman skills and technical training or are semi-skilled, are employed full time all year round, quite in contrast to the seasonal female staff. The former are called “glacier workers” and it is with them that I spent most time during my fieldwork, thereby participating as a woman anthropologist in a men’s world.²⁰ Their main tasks are: maintaining the “hard” technological infrastructure (such as cable cars, snowmaking technology, snow groomers, trucks and snow mobiles, the solar power plant); preparing, maintaining and securing the slopes; transporting tons of supplies up to the restaurants and garbage down to the valley again; transporting various construction materials and fuel for the snow groomers and snow mobiles (by using the underground train Glacier Express or trucks or helicopters).

The glacier resort’s ski season lasts eight months, usually from early September to early May – a period twice as long as that of ski resorts at lower elevations. The early season is dedicated to the training of competitive Alpine and cross-country skiers from various countries, including Austrian champi-

18 As recently as in 2022, a young local woman has started to drive the underground train Glacier Express.

19 After I completed my fieldwork, a non-local woman (the daughter of the former managing director) together with a non-local man became the managing directors. However, the managing director(s) did and do not have their offices in Pitztal.

20 Due to lack of space I cannot go into the details of this gendered constellation.

ons. Due to its expanded season, the glacier ski resort is the most prosperous of all three Pitztal ski resorts, generating the greatest economic value.

Uniqueness and Troubles in a High Place: Experiencing and Creating Verticality

During wintertime the Pitztal glacier ski resort is completely covered with snow. In contrast in the summer season the impressive landscape features the browns, reds and greys of seemingly endless glacial debris and soil, rocks and peaks; large grey and light-blue glacier fields carved by crevasses; numerous milky glacial streams; huge white snow depots; inactive snow canons and a massive infrastructure of buildings and ropeways. As construction work is constantly being carried out, visitors frequently encounter noisy excavators, cranes, drills and trucks.

Staff and visitors can access the resort within ten minutes by riding the Pitztal Glacier Express; this underground funicular railroad departs from the tiny village of Mittelberg at 1,730 metres and arrives at its top station at 2,840 metres, with its views of the large Mittelberg Ferner²¹. As indicated here infrastructure and technology indeed take on a pivotal role in building this high place in Pitztal. Infrastructure and technology in turn intersect with a variety of physical, social, moral and environmental issues in constructing this particular high place. In the following this will be illustrated.

Physical and Social Strain of Working at High Altitude

According to Alois, one of the original workers (now retired) who participated in building the Glacier Express tunnel and the first buildings up in the glacier resort in the early 1980s:

physically and socially [it was] a brutally hard time, full of physical and mental strain In the summer we stayed up there for long periods without going down to the valley. We felt extremely lonely and had a cute little pig to keep us company. We named it Ms. Daisy. But you know, at least I had a job again. ... However, I

21 The regional term for glacier is *Ferner*, which literally means snow from previous years.

must also say that all this wet, cold and wind destroyed my health, so that I had to retire prematurely due to the painful chronic illness I contracted. (interview, 6 August, 2015)

As already emphasized earlier by Heinrich, Alois also strongly and repeatedly lamented about the demanding physical conditions of working in the cryosphere environment and the serious effects of it on his health. However, quite in contrast to today, in the initial period working high up also had the social consequence of loneliness.

In the large building that houses the top station, there are also a couple of offices for the managers, cabins for workers and tourists, ski equipment shops and toilets. Nearby there are two big restaurants and, next to them, is Europe's highest photovoltaic power plant, which was built during my field-work stay in the summer of 2015. In our conversations, the male workers for the Austrian steel company that installed it emphasized that working at such high elevations had been by far their most strenuous working experience.

Social and moral values of higher and lower elevations

On its website the company claims that “[w]ith the construction of a modern photovoltaic system at Pitztal Glacier we have set a clear example for more sustainability and environmental protection in the Alpine region”.²² One of the managers, Reinhold, agreed suggesting that the plant (delivering one third of the company's electricity demand) provides a good example of the progressive and future-oriented attitude of the company and its director, in contrast to the valley, where many people oppose progress.

Prior to that, Wilhelm, the first general manager, originally from the northern part of Germany, became a key figure in promoting the new ski resort until his retirement in the early 2000s. He also identified the glacier ski resort with progress, ascribing “backwardness” to “the valley”, and reported the many difficulties in the new glacier resort and him being accepted. According to Wilhelm, in the beginning there was strong resistance from a group headed by a Catholic priest: “There was and still is this ‘church tower’ mentality²³ here in the valley. Many won't accept people from outside, like

22 <https://www.pitztal.com/en/en/photovoltaic-pitztal-glacier> (accessed 5 February 2021).

23 In German original *Kirchturmmentalität*.

me, and they try to prevent and stop progress. It's like thinking only as far as the church tower but not beyond it". He described his experiences in an insulted though haughty tone. (interview, 7 February 2014)

The heated relationship constructed and performed between high and low that these quotations address by way of ascribing progress to the high place and resistance to progress and even "backwardness" to the lower places reverses the stark but by now restored dichotomy constructed from the eighteenth century on between rural (or Alpine) and tradition versus urban and modernity. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere (Nöbauer, 2022, p. 228) modern winter tourism (coming along with various processes of turning natural snow into the commodity of "white gold") became part of a broader process of configuring and pushing modernity and capitalist economy in the European Alps and beyond. Modern technology and transport infrastructure have, among others, become intensely associated with modernity and progress, as echoed above by the glacier workers and managers. But while the dichotomy in its reversed variant still remains a frame for values for them, a more differentiated analysis must be considered. By linking Arturo Escobar's (2008) understanding of territory (see above) with an analytical perspective on verticality, as I proposed at the outset, I argue that through the vernacular ascriptions of values addressed above (which are part of wider cultural ideas of modernity) we gain insights into the relational and flexible and self-determined making and manifestations of verticality and identity.

The above-mentioned competition between high and low echoes also Alois's experiences. In the above-mentioned interview (6 August 2015) he recounted that he was regarded as a traitor by some people in Jerzens, his home village, because they saw the glacier ski resort as a big competitor to the Hochzeiger ski resort. This uneasy relation is also reflected in what one of the local Jerzens women explained to me some days later: up on the glacier there would simply be plain, boring highways for the masses of rather unskilled skiers, whereas the Hochzeiger resort would offer a variety of attractive slopes for better skilled skiers (field note, 16 August 2015).

Even prior to his work in the glacier company, so Alois admitted in one of our many informal talks (field note, 8 August 2015), people in Jerzens were envious about his leaving the valley for the big wide world and accused him of arrogance and of thus trying "to be better than the locals". Alois, who grew

up on a small high Alpine farm, became a ski instructor in various huge resorts in the Tyrol, the USA and Japan. He frequently and passionately told me about his many experiences abroad and, in particular, his fascination for Japanese culture. Later he owned a hotel in Jerzens for some time before he lost it. Back then, in a time of deep personal crisis, the construction of the glacier ski resort (including the tunnel) provided him with a highly welcome new employment option.

Especially Alois's narrations reveal multiple dimensions of local and global experiences of verticality. Looking at them in chronological order, we first find him growing up on a small farm located high up on a steep mountain slope (which he showed to me) with its extensive view of the outer Pitztal. Next, he participated in and actively contributed to the global spread of skiing, both in his home country and abroad. As a glacier worker he then reached out to new heights and depths with a conquering attitude. As he explained to me: "You know, there was nothing there before. Nothing. Just ice! And now there is big business" (interview, 6 August 2015). After this initial phase he continued to engineer, reconstruct and modify that place for touristic ends, until his premature retirement. In doing so, he became an important and still well remembered part of the novel high place. However, leaving the local sense of "lived verticality" of Jerzens and expanding the senses of verticality caused social trouble to him. In particular, Alois personally experienced the harshly competitive relationship which is still going on between the lower Hochzeiger ski resort and the glacier ski resort above it. In addition, the new spaces on top of and beneath the glacier area have severely harmed his health even though he previously was a very fit and sporty person.

Climate Change and Frontier Technology at High Altitude

Continuing our journey through the glacier area, nearby buildings buzz with activity. Enclosed in one of them is a unique, huge snowmaking machine called the All Weather Snowmaker (Figure 2).



Figure 2 – The All Weather Snowmaker installed inside a special building.
Copyright 2016 by H. Nöbauer.

This machine attracted my interest from the very outset because I was curious about why a machine was desired that, as its name indicates, is able to produce snow even at very warm temperatures and claims to be independent of the weather. By researching the machine's special vacuum-ice tech-

nology²⁴ and its history through written sources I learned about its different uses in several countries around the world. Combining this knowledge with my fieldwork insights it turned out that it was a globally dispersed frontier technology deployed in extreme environments for accessing new spaces and various resources, both at high altitudes and high latitudes (such as the polar regions). The paths of this freezing-separation method started in particular from the Arctic Ocean in Siberia and the Mediterranean Sea in Israel – two regions where sea water was transformed into drinking water by means of this method in the 1940s and 1950s, respectively. Its path then takes us to South Africa, where for some decades it has been employed to cool the hitherto deepest gold mine (reaching down as far as 4,000 metres). Finally, this special technology has arrived at Europe’s glaciers, where the All Weather Snowmaker is currently used to produce snow for skiers. More specifically, this special *all weather snow* facilitates the early season start in two glacier ski resorts in Europe: one in Zermatt in Switzerland, the other in Pitztal (details see Nöbauer, 2018). As Reinhold, the chief technical manager, reported to me, their company had acquired the 30-ton, 15-metre-high machine “in order to counter the effects of climate change” (field note, 31 August 2016) and allow the ski season to start in September. In fact, during the last few decades the glacier had vanished (also) in the particular moraine area at 2,900 metres, where all weather snow is produced and employed. After countless problems due to its emplacement at high altitudes, it began operating for the first time in the Alpine cryosphere environment in 2009. However, it requires a very high amount of energy, which is why some glacier workers criticize the Snowmaker, Heinrich in particular. He explained that this machine “goes against nature because it is unnatural to have snow at warm temperatures” (interview, 14 November 2014). According to him “technology should always go along with nature and not against it”. Quite in contrast, his colleague Markus, a technician, reaffirmed his strong conviction that “any technology available in the market should be used for guaranteeing snow” (interview, 2 November 2016). After I had been in the field for some time it became ap-

24 In this case, the production of all weather snow is based on the vacuum-ice-principle. For details see: <https://www.prnewswire.com/il/news-releases/ide-is-offering-vim-all-weather-snow-maker-a-sustainable-and-environmentally-friendly-solution-for-all-snowmaking-applications-800827151.html> (accessed 10 January, 2022). This system differs from the one operating in snow cannons.

parent that the machine could not function properly as it “was not compatible with glacier water” and “could not handle glacier water” (field notes, 16, 20, 21 August 2015). In fact, the glacier water, which naturally contains sediments from the rocky environment, hardened into a kind of cement in the turbine and as a result regularly impeded and even destroyed it. As I have analyzed elsewhere, glacier water has emerged as an agentive force in the cryosphere environment (Nöbauer, 2021). The particular problems arising in that high place could not be solved in a satisfactory way until my latest fieldwork stay in late 2019.

Environmental Policy at High Altitudes

Environmental policy in high Alpine altitudes comprises a whole range of regional, national and supranational (EU) prescriptions and regulations. Among others, defining areas, such as glacier areas, to be protected, measuring of landscape intervention and of the use of natural, common resources such as water, as well as assessing the impacts of man-made environmental changes, are paramount. Both, water policy and environmental impact assessment play a particularly important role in glacier ski resorts in Austria. In Tyrol, the provincial government’s *Wasserbuch* (waterbook) strictly prescribes the use of water (in high areas glacier water, in lower areas spring water) for snowmaking. In addition, the regional (and national) authorities, through the environmental impact assessment, permit or prohibit the building of special infrastructure such as water-storage pools for snowmaking and humans’ interventions into the (protected) landscape such as rock blasting. During my fieldwork the managers clearly articulated their growing problems with water. Above all, the rapid retreat of the snow cover caused problems and thus made them claim additional quantities of water for snowmaking.²⁵ The second water problem emerged due to the above-mentioned incompatibility of glacier water with the All Weather Snowmaker.²⁶

25 The glacier company’s managers had already applied for the formal permission to build an additional water storage system. They were stressed and angry that they had to wait for a considerable time for the permission to access an alternative source of water from a lower area. However, they had still not received this permit by the end of my fieldwork in 2019 (personal comment Reinhold, 7 December 2019).

26 In order to cope with the ongoing problems that glacier water was causing to the snow-

Related to these problems and as analysed elsewhere (Nöbauer, 2021), both the Tyrolean water and environmental protection policy as well as the nature and power of glacier water have not appeared as passive material entities. Rather, they can and must be considered as materialities that are able to impede or block either the entire construction of a water-storage system or the use of water for snowmaking.

A further problem emerged with the transport of the snowmaker to the high altitude. Prior to the installation of the snowmaker in the Alpine cryosphere, transporting it from Israel, its country of origin, up to the glacier in Austria was full of unprecedented challenges for the glacier company. After being shipped to Slovenia it was carried by special trucks to the Pitztal. On arrival, the smaller parts were transported up by the Glacier Express. The biggest parts, however, were driven in another special truck up a very steep path called *Notweg*²⁷, which was later renamed *Sicherheitsweg* (emergency path and security path). This path, which partly crosses a protected glacier area, became the subject of a, also publicly, highly disputed legal case²⁸ because its construction was approved by the commune of St. Leonhard, the landowner in 2006, without environmental assessment permission. It was intended to provide a path for bringing down skiers in the case of an emergency on the Glacier Express. As an ungroomed slope, it is currently used by skilled skiers to ski down to the valley in wintertime and as a path for the glacier company's trucks transporting various construction materials in summertime.

maker, the company decided, after the end of my fieldwork, to order a modified turbine model which was to be constructed and also adapt the snowmaker's water-storage pool. The proposed new pool material and technology would significantly reduce the amount of sediment in the pool (personal comment Reinhold, 14 September 2017), so that it would no longer block the turbine. During my visit in Pitztal in August 2022 I was told that the turbine was renewed and would be ready for operation this year. After year-long troubles, the company would have finally also received the formal permit for constructing another water-pool only very recently.

27 The slope gradients are up to 30 per cent.

28 In 2008, the Austrian Alpine Association filed a complaint to the European Commission against the Tyrolean authorities because of their approval of the emergency path and its construction without the obligatory environmental impact assessment. Although the construction violated EU law, the long-drawn-out proceedings were terminated in 2013 with no consequences for the province of Tyrol.

Collecting Snow and Covering Glaciers at High Altitudes

Another striking presence in the glacier resort immediately attracts attention: a significant number of huge white hills stand amidst the landscape. These are the snow depots. Glacier workers use snow groomers to collect the snow from previous seasons²⁹ and store it in these hills, covering them with white geotextiles to prevent the snow from melting too soon (Figures 3 and 4).

Before the beginning of the next season in September they distribute the stored snow in order to fill in and shut crevasses with it and to make pistes out of it. This method, which is widespread in glacier ski resorts in Europe and beyond, has been used in Pitztal since the early 2000s. These depots comprise natural and man-made snow. According to the glacier workers, the snow depots represent the most important technique for securing the early seasonal opening. Later, during the winter season, additional snow produced with snow cannons is employed to secure sufficient snow cover for the pistes. Moreover, snow depots are of social significance to workers, as illustrated by Heinrich, who emphatically stated that “[t]hese depots stand for my job’s future!” (field note, 29 July 2015).

²⁹ Harvesting snow for improved irrigation is increasingly used in various agricultural and environmental realms in different countries. In ski tourism, so-called harvesting snow or snow farming is a widely applied measure regarded as a key measure to save ski tourism in Europe and beyond, and, in particular, to expand the skiing season. In English, the term “harvesting snow” is commonly used. This is not the case with its German translation. Rather the vernacular expression used by the glacier workers and local people in Pitztal is “Schnee-Depots anlegen” (literally “making or mounting snow depots”). I never heard them using the expression “Schnee ernten” as termed in English with “harvesting snow”.



Figure 3 – Snow depots across the glacier landscape in summer 2022. Copyright 2022 by H. Nöbauer.



Figure 4 – Workers use a digger for removing geotextile covers in summer 2015.
Copyright 2015 by H. Nöbauer.

Certain areas of the glacier and permafrost also have an extraordinary appearance. Like the snow depots, they are covered with textiles during the summer period. The aim of this is to slow the rapid retreat of the glaciers and permafrost, and thereby to keep the slopes safe. Indeed, the vanishing of glaciers and the degradation of permafrost are considered to be major hazards in Alpine regions. Both cause rocky slopes to break up, leading to deposits of large amounts of soil and debris as well as rock falls that endanger the built environment and infrastructure and cause casualties (Krautblatter and Leith, 2015, p. 147). The workers have constantly expressed their concerns about these dangers to me. Besides their daily control of and safeguarding against “atypical dangers” in glacier ski resorts such as avalanches, entire pistes freezing, crevasses and ablation (see above), they must now make even greater reconstruction and repair efforts in the face of the increasing effects of climate change (Figure 5).



Figure 5 – “Repairing” the glacier landscape in summer 2020.
Copyright 2020 by H. Nöbauer.

Severe damage occurred in 2018 at the highest point of the ski area when a huge glacier broke and destabilized a slope. In order to rebuild the damaged slope and enable the season opening, the company illegally blasted away a considerable area of rock that was defined as protected. Although the company was forced by the environmental authorities to close that particular slope, it was permitted to reopen it a few months later on the condition that it would “rebuild” the area as much as possible.

As Reinhold explained to me, the company was already cooperating with geologists in finding solutions. “We must find answers within the next five years otherwise we could be forced to close everything down”, he commented dramatically when describing the profound geological changes (field note, 4 December 2018).³⁰

³⁰ During my visit in August 2022 I tried to find out details about the current state of future solutions. The latter appeared even more pressing because the vanishing of the glaciers has accelerated with more speed during the extremely hot summer 2022 than perceivable

Consumption at High Altitude

Visitors and some staff access that very same peak area, at nearly 3,500 metres, by means of Austria's highest gondola: the Wildspitzbahn. Building its top station and the café-restaurant, in 2012, presented the various workers, all of whom were men, with unprecedented challenges. Reinhold, the chief technical manager of the glacier company, with a proud tone, recalled in one of our talks: "Work at those altitudes was extremely tough. Even the strongest men were knocked down!" (field note, 14 September 2015).

Besides people, the gondola also transports food, drinking water and the like to the most promoted local tourist site, namely Austria's highest café-restaurant, Café 3.440. Here, during the day, visitors can consume drinks and home-made cakes. From the viewing platform located above the café, visitors, including myself, can experience the physical, emotional, mental and technological dimensions of lived verticality. As tourism communication is promising, standing at such a high point, one can indeed gaze at a fantastic panorama that takes in the impressive ranges and (white) peaks of the Austrian, Swiss and Italian Alps, including Tyrol's highest peak, the Wildspitze (3,774 metres). However, at the end of the day, after all visitors have gone, personnel transport sewage and the restaurant garbage to collection points next to the two restaurants further down. Transporting the sewage is a highly delicate and risky procedure and workers must wear mouth and nose protection and gloves.

Of all the sites in the glacier ski resort, the peak area described above, with all its ambiguities and contradictions, is the one that has been turned into the touristic place most extensively loaded – symbolically, materially and emotionally – with altitude as a key signifier. There the consumption of high places in modern tourism becomes a focused and special variant of lived verticality. The panoramic view provided by the café's architecture, which represents a big frozen wave made mainly from glass, and the terrace integrated into the café along with the adjacent panorama platform are all materializations of the modern visual techniques of consuming the Alps and experienc-

ever before. The response I received was that a regional geologist advised the company to wait with more substantial adaptations because the climate would turn around again towards cooling.

ing high places and space particularly from above (cf. della Dora, 2016).³¹ As if this was not enough, this special view is combined with the consumption of food and beverages such as coffee or beer, both poured from fascinating machines adjusted to the lower air pressure at high elevations. Furthermore, the marketing of this high place includes such events as “the highest breakfast”, “the highest wedding”, “the highest wine tasting” and the end-of-season running contest Vertical 3,440. All together these experiences of verticality each year attract many thousands of visitors from various countries (except for the first two years of the pandemic).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the multiple ways of how and to which ends verticality comes into play and is experienced in the making of a high place such as the Pitztal glacier ski resort. Starting from a relational and multi-dimensional understanding of verticality I have demonstrated physical, social, moral and political dimensions of it. Considering the Pitztal valley as a whole, the relationship between lower and higher elevations runs through the whole region and its glacier resort as a significant marker of social, moral, economic and environmental differences. Altitude determines this high Alpine valley’s settlement structure, economies and ecologies in fundamental ways and generates social, economic and environmental differences between even tiny villages. Amidst the paramount importance of winter tourism, the competition between the Hochzeiger ski resort, located at a lower but still high elevation, and the glacier ski area is a striking example in its own right. Attending to the Pitztal glacier ski resort, first and foremost, the unique physicality of glaciers, crevasses, snow and steep rocks, harsh atmospheric conditions and deep environmental and climatic changes present prime characteristics of this high place. These affect humans, non-humans, infrastructure

31 It should be mentioned here that this view became popular in the so-called Alpine paintings in the 18th and 19th century. Beyond that, it resembles the concept of the panoptic view of surveillance as proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to be installed as a modern control system in institutional buildings. Later this concept was expanded by Michel Foucault in his analysis of social control of all citizens in everyday life in modern nation states.

and technology in essential and manifold ways. In particular, economic competition and accelerating climate change require manifold and increasingly challenging but also contested measures to be taken to guarantee an overall safe ski resort and a stable, profitable economy. The unique physical and atmospheric conditions also form the precondition for understanding the multiple dimensions of lived verticality as experienced by male glacier workers, on whom I focused in my contribution. Moreover, the physical and atmospheric overlap with further dimensions of verticality.

The social organization of the company running the glacier resort revealed a pronounced social and structural sense of verticality. It ranges from social differences – mainly in terms of gender, generation (or age) and ethnicity – within the organization of the glacier company to the distinction between locals and (seasonal) migrants. The most relevant differences of the lived verticality among male glacier workers emerged by age. Health problems, the change of values regarding glacier work(ers) and career options were portrayed as significant mismatches. Thereby health problems were experienced with increasing age due to the harsh physical and atmospheric conditions determining the cryosphere. The valuation of glacier work(ers), in turn, was, for a long time, dominated by the view taken on by locals down in the valley. Finally, career options were and are offered to a minor extent to the elder generation in the past and today, whereas younger staff gets better options today. The striking change of the valuation of glacier work(ers) by local people down in the valley must be viewed in relation to the high economic value that the glacier ski resort has gained for the Pitztal valley and its inhabitants over the decades. Relational social verticality here intersects with the changing value of the glacier from a formerly agriculturally “useless” area to an economically highly useful resource today.

Infrastructure and all associated technology referring to altitude such as the highest cable car, the highest café-restaurant, the highest photovoltaic power plant, unique frontier technology such as the All Weather Snowmaker, for their part, prove to be central in constructing – and indeed building in a material sense – this particular high place. At the same time, the emphasis on placing things “highest” forms an integral part of tourism that builds heavily on unique selling points and consumption of the high place. However, promotion strategies also have become fragile. A particular example of this

became obvious with the former public promotion of the unique all-weather snowmaking machine which, for the first time, was installed in the Pitztal cryosphere. As I illustrated, this technology has been causing problems to the company because an essential material entity of the cryosphere, notably glacier water, by its natural composition and force, blocked and destroyed that same machine.

Beyond that, modern technology at high altitude was used as a preeminent reference by glacier company's staff for attributing social and moral values to high and low elevations by ascribing progress to the glacier resort. In contrast, staff ascribed "backwardness" to the areas lower down in the valley. In doing so, they reversed the historically constructed myth which made a stark distinction between urban and lower regions associated with progress and modernity and, contrasted to it, rural (including Alpine) and higher regions associated with tradition and "backwardness". Understanding verticality as a relational, variable and analytical category proved to be particularly relevant for analysing this dualistic reversal.

Finally, the illustrated physical, social and environmental pressures conspicuously mingle with the current politics of verticality which prevail in the form of environmental protection legislation of glacier areas and water policy. Amidst the rapidly growing impacts of climate change on the Alpine cryosphere, discrepancies between the glacier company and environmental authorities have emerged in multiple ways. They involve opposite interests regarding the increase of water for snowmaking. Similar contrasts occur with human interventions into protected glacier areas and the projected (but very currently cancelled) expansion of the glacier ski resort.

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A “Magic Bubble” and a “Place of Strength” – When Images and Connections Shape the Swiss Alps

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Abstract

This chapter reflects on the production of locality in a specific urbanized, tourist, and cosmopolitan region of the Swiss Alps. Through the example of two ski resorts in the canton of Valais, we examine the ways in which people from different horizons connect to mountain places and the dynamics between human practices, imaginaries, and place.

To understand the role of representations when visiting or settling in the Swiss Alps, we use ethnographic interviews conducted in Verbier and Zermatt with people who, for different reasons, live, tour, or work there. The reputation of these international resorts is actively produced and maintained through tourism promotion, whose conveyed imaginaries are embedded in the discourse of residents. In addition, the historical and social specificities of Zermatt’s bourgeoisie and Verbier’s liberal attitude help to understand how these factors influence the way residents interact with the place and the landscape.

The chapter explores how the cohabitation in Verbier and Zermatt among wealthy second-home owners, creative entrepreneurs, tourists, permanent residents with migration backgrounds, precarious seasonal workers, natives, and the mountain other-than-human entities, with their affinities and tensions, contributes to (re)composing locality. In the end, the distinctive ways of dealing with otherness in Zermatt and Verbier partly determine the modes of relating to the place and thus the production of locality.

Introduction

Mountains, like other places located “outside the city”, have been considered since the 1990s as ideal places to live in, particularly for people searching a better quality of life. The idea of a “good life” – one that is connected to nature, landscapes, sunshine, quietness, and leisure, is mostly present in the imaginary of an urban middle-class. New ways of living “in the mountains”, “in the countryside”, or “by the sea” result from recent changes in human mobility. This transformation has been driven by globalization, improved transport infrastructures, and technological advancements, which favour new kinds of jobs and flexible ways of working, particularly in wealthy countries. In neoliberal contexts, for instance, some urban citizens can afford to choose either to adopt a multiresidential lifestyle (alternating between several places of residence, with or without a fixed place of work), or to migrate to non-urban or less urban spaces. This type of migration has been referred to by various terms: lifestyle migration (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009), amenity migration (Moss, 2006), or multilocality (Perlik, 2006), depending on which aspect of mobility is emphasized (way of life, amenities, economy, and access to facilities, respectively). The common idea behind these types of individual moves from one living place to another is the aspiration to blur the lines between leisure and work on a daily basis, within an environment considered to be “natural” (Cretton et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2015).

In Switzerland, the places chosen as particularly eligible to live “outside the city” are not, however, “out of the world”. Alpine societies have long been considered as societies that are unchanging, living outside of time, and isolated from the rest of the world (Niederer, 1996; Mathieu and Boscani Leoni, 2005; Cretton et al., 2012). Interactions with the “outside world” and human mobilities are far from a new phenomenon for people living in the mountains. Historically, the Alpine arc has been subject to various forms of mobility since at least the Middle Ages (Head-König, 2011). Population movements in the Alps have historically been motivated mainly by economic reasons – seasonal cattle migration and pasture needs, seasonal work in tourism – but also cultural reasons. For instance, the tradition (and status symbol) of hav-

ing a secondary home in the mountains, called a chalet¹, was already beginning in the 1930s. Of course, human mobilities in 2024 differ from historical human mobilities in several aspects, most notably in terms of the means of transport used, motivations, frequency and international dimension.

Furthermore, the preferred places to live in the Alpine region – particularly for a relatively wealthy group, living on the move – are the ones that have tourist attractions and amenity infrastructure. These places are often visited by the new residents first as a leisure spot, before becoming either a permanent place to live, or a location where to live occasionally, alternating with other dwelling places (Perlik, 2008, 2011; Petite and Debarbieux, 2013; Clivaz, 2013). In urbanised mountain places, as in our case study, the economy is mostly driven by the tourism industry and a lifestyle-amenity-multilocality migration is particularly present in the fields of sport, culture and entrepreneurship (Cretton and Decorzant, 2023). International labour migration workers are also highly represented in the hotel, restaurant, bars, transport, ski lift, or construction industries. For decades, the arrival of those inhabitants, whether they stay year-long or a few weeks/months every year, is both dependent on, and involved in the emergence of new forms of mobility, interactions and sociability (Perlik, 2006; Cretton et al., 2020). Lifestyle migrants, labour migrants, multilocal dwellers, and tourists take part in, and reshape, both the social structures and existing models of social relationships in mountain villages (Richard et al., 2014).

The presence of a new and diversified population, who settle temporarily or more permanently, or who regularly visit these mountain areas, induces both sociocultural and spatial transformations through the interactions they have, or do not have, with the place. Thus, individuals do not simply interact with other individuals, they also relate to their environment, its artefacts and landscapes, through their subjectivities and emotions. Imaginaries about the mountain as a place of nature (filled with snow, rocks, animals, birds, grass, sun, hills, forests, air) have a long history in the Swiss Alps (see Boscoboinik and Cretton, 2017; Leitenberg, 2023; Tissot, 2017). They are also inseparable

1 A chalet is a traditional Swiss construction in mountain areas, built in wood with a gable roof, mainly used as a secondary home (for holidays or weekends), but can also be a main residence.

from human practices of the territory, the place and the space (Debarbieux, 2015; Staszak, 2012).

From Appadurai's seminal writings, locality can be understood as "primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar² or spatial" (1996, p. 178). Given that locality is above all a matter of relationships, and that it is constructed by and in situations of interaction between the various residents and visitors, as well as among humans and other-than-humans, we consider how the locality is produced in a context of global movements. The mountain, understood as a collective construction, a symbolic production born of social interaction and made of shared representations (Debarbieux, 2003, p. 47), is both a source and a producer of varied imaginaries³ (Boscoboinik and Cretton, 2017). Thus, looking at the way humans voice their interactions with the mountain environment they live in, and the affinity and tensions that may emerge from these interactions, this chapter studies different modes of relating to a mountain place, and the motivations behind them. It reflects upon the production of locality, in a specific urbanized, touristic, and cosmopolitan region in the Swiss Alps, as a complex relational dynamic between human practices, imaginaries, and place.

Verbier and Zermatt, Two International Ski Resorts

To have a closer look at ways of connecting to the place, and the role imaginaries play in the context of the Swiss Alps, we focus on data collected as part of a long-term fieldwork in the mountains.⁴ The research study was conducted simultaneously in Switzerland and Spain by two female anthropologists, one working in Valais⁵, a canton in southwestern Switzerland known for its tourist attractions – particularly skiing, hiking, and thermal baths, but also

2 Meaning "scale".

3 Understood as a "set of representations that make sense, separately and as a system, for a given group or individual, making its world apprehensible, comprehensible and practicable" (Staszak, 2012, p. 179, translation by the authors).

4 The research project was titled "Becoming local in mountain areas: diversification, gentrification, cohabitation. A comparison between Swiss Alps and Spanish Pyrenees" (2017-2021). It was financed by the Swiss National Fonds (FNS Project No 10001A_172807) and coled by Viviane Cretton and Andrea Boscoboinik.

5 We warmly thank Andrea Friedli for the interviews and observations made in Valais, the collaboration and the sharing of inputs and thoughts.

concerts, cultural events, and sports contests – and the other in two valleys of the Catalan Pyrenees⁶, also renowned for tourism. The authors of this chapter directed and supervised the whole research.

We selected here ethnographic interviews conducted in Verbier and Zermatt, two international tourist resorts in Switzerland, located respectively in the French-speaking part (Lower Valais) and in the German-speaking part (Upper Valais) of the Valais canton. Both field sites depict the reality of Alpine ski resorts with their strong seasonal demographic fluctuations, omnipresence of the tourism industry, urbanization, and diversification of the population. 79 registered interviews (both formal and informal) were carried out in French, English, German or Swiss German.⁷ They covered different categories of residents in both sites: male and female, new and old residents, national and international, wealthy and less wealthy, independent contractors and employees, regular and occasional visitors. The interviews were conducted using a life course approach. The researcher invited people to talk about their relationship to the place, considering the length of their residence. For instance, permanent residents who came from migration were invited to discuss the reasons for and duration of their settlement. Temporary residents were asked to specify the frequency and length of their stays, their motivations for choosing this place, and their objectives. As for long-term residents, they mainly shared their connections with other residents, as well as their experience of the place and the region. In addition, short, floating and repeated observations were conducted in key places of daily life, such as bakery, public place or grocery store and during international sport, cultural or musical events. Several sequences of empirical experiences were also collected at various times by the two authors from 2011 onwards.

All data gathered through these various tools provided us with a comprehensive background to understand the field. However, for the analysis we are developing here, we have focused mainly on presenting extracts from inter-

6 We sincerely thank Maria Offenhenden for the fieldwork conducted in Val d’Aran and in Cerdanya, for her collaboration, and for sharing her insights and thoughts.

7 In the German part of Switzerland, each canton has its own dialect. Upper Valaisans speak a traditional dialect, “Walliserdütsch”. The interviews were conducted in German, Swiss German and English for the German-speaking part and in English and French in the French-speaking part. All the interview extracts presented in this chapter were conducted by Andrea Friedli.

views, allowing the voices and views of the interviewed people to be heard in their own words. It is important to note that their responses were directed to a Swiss woman anthropologist living in an urban area in another canton. Research participants often tailor their opinions and statements based on the perception of the interviewer. We also noticed that their words present a degree of idyllic and picturesque imaginary. We believe this representation is intrinsic to the imagination that has motivated them to live in or frequent these places, or that has kept them living there. While their words may echo the sentiments promoted by tourist offices, it is their own voices that we wanted to capture and present. These perspectives, as articulated and idealized, play a crucial role in constructing the locality.

We have chosen Verbier and Zermatt because they are emblematic of tourist-related transformations, and both present a high number of foreign residents year-round, not only during high season. Both in Verbier and in Zermatt, around 40% of residents are not Swiss citizens.⁸ They are both internationally renowned tourist resorts and have a significant economic impact on the surrounding villages. For instance, Täsch is a village located about 5 kilometres from Zermatt and is an important hub for travellers heading there –the road to Zermatt stops in Täsch, where travellers must leave their cars and take the train for the last leg of their journey. Beginning of 2021, Täsch counted 56,7 % of foreigners, most of whom are Portuguese – which is the third largest foreign community in Switzerland⁹ – and work in Zermatt. In the same way, Le Châble, where the cable car towards Verbier is situated, is continuously growing to accommodate the increasing number of former inhabitants of Verbier for whom life in the resort has become too expensive. Both Alpine resorts present a cosmopolitan population, with a wide range of socio-economic profiles, from rich second homeowners to precarious seasonal workers. They also present different types of residence (long-term, tem-

8 Verbier belongs to the Val de Bagnes Municipality, where in 2021, the number of foreigners was 27,6%. There are no statistics for Verbier alone, but according to our informants 40% of the population living in Verbier is of foreign origin, and there are “59 nationalities in the municipality” (interview with a municipal officer, 28.02.2018). In Zermatt, 41.1% of the population is of foreign origin. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/regional-statistics/regional-portraits-key-figures/communes/portraits-communes.html>.

9 In 31.12.2022, the Portuguese were among the largest foreign population in Switzerland (11%), alongside Italians (14.5%) and Germans (13.8%). <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/population/migration-integration/foreign/composition.html>

porary) and stays (repeated or occasional). Nevertheless, despite presenting some similarities (mountain environment, good ski slopes, internationally renowned, situated in the same Swiss canton although with different local language, French and Swiss German), their economic and touristic development has been quite different.

Verbier has known a rapid urbanization since the 1960s, with the development of chalets. With its vast sunny mountain plateau, its tourist development began with skiing. Prior to 1950, Verbier was home only to alpine pastures, its people lived from the alpine agriculture and access was difficult – people had to travel up the mountain by foot or on horseback. Verbier’s rebirth began with the laying of a road to the village in 1935, and since then has never stopped. From 1990 onwards, Verbier has known an unbridled development. The resort has grown, building an average of thirty chalets a year, completely changing the village’s disposition.¹⁰ Nowadays, chalet owners are mainly of Swiss and British origin, but also count French, Belgian, and Swedish owners, amongst others. Verbier is known for its international community, for being fashionable, hip and young, a place of parties and of innovation, creation, and development with the presence of several start-ups and co-working spaces. It can be so hectic during the high season that we were told by research participants that some elder retired German owners had decided to move out of Verbier to more quiet places nearby.

Zermatt began its tourist development in the 19th century, bolstered by the presence of the Matterhorn mountain, a site of fascination for locals and foreigners alike. Up until the mid-19th century, Zermatt was predominantly an agricultural community. After the Matterhorn’s first ascent in 1865, however, the subsequent rush on the mountains that surround the village led to an early – and intense – development of tourism towards the area. Today, Zermatt proudly presents itself as the oldest operating tourist resort in the whole Valais. It is highlighted for its mountaineering past, its hotel infrastructure, the absence of motorised traffic (banned from the village); and, last but not least, the copious amounts of shops, including luxury retailers. Nowadays, much of the local economy is based on tourism, with many jobs related to the

10 For more on Verbier’s transformation, see Deslarzes (1998).

maintenance and operation of tourist facilities. Families native to the area¹¹ have kept control of the land, many properties, and the main infrastructures, where a significant community of foreign employees have arrived and settled.¹² Labour migrants in Zermatt have different origins, but by far the most represented community comes from Portugal, and the family networks that emerged mean that people of Portuguese origin have been coming to Zermatt for – at the very least – the last forty years.¹³ They mainly work in hotels, restaurants, city hall services and various activities linked to tourism.

Zermatt, the Aristocrat and Verbier, the Liberal

At a national level, Zermatt is a mythical place, in the anthropological sense of the term: with the Matterhorn as its figurehead, it embodies the myth of the Swiss mountainside. At an altitude of 4,478 metres, the Matterhorn is one of the highest peaks in the Alps, and is well-known for its distinctive shape, that has become a symbol of the Swiss nation. Its pyramid-like appearance, as seen from Zermatt, is regularly used in logos of world-famous brands (such as Toblerone chocolates¹⁴). But Zermatt is also emblematic in a different way, for its “Bürgergemeinde” (in German) or “bourgeoisie” (in French), that plays a crucial role in the area. This institution, specific to Switzerland, is a remnant of medieval law (cf. Guex, 2016, p. 38). It is – put simply – a local community, in which solely the original inhabitants of a commune or former bourgeois

11 We understand “native” families or “native” individuals as families or individuals who are born and have grown in the place for several generations. Some individuals may have left and returned but are identifiable by their family name, often rooted in the history of a place. In this paper, “native” is synonymous with “historical inhabitants” or “locals”.

12 For the tourism development in Zermatt, see Guex (2016).

13 In Valais, as in the rest of Switzerland, the Portuguese started to arrive in the 1960s. From 1990 onwards, the conditions to immigrate to Switzerland were eased, following the Schengen agreement on the free movement of persons. In 2020, “Portuguese” is the most represented nationality in the canton of Valais (8.0%), more so than French (3.0%) and Italian (2.7%). <https://www.vs.ch/documents/529400/8641714/2020+08+27+-+COM+-+Statpop+2019.pdf/c01b155e-7a28-e5e6-01d0-16344dcb490a?t=1598450326675>

14 Nevertheless, Toblerone had to remove the use of the Matterhorn logo because chocolate production has been transferred from Switzerland to Slovakia in 2023. With a Swiss law enacted in 2017, the Swiss Confederation has taken measures to protect its image. Foreign companies are required to remove Swiss symbols if the product is not exclusively produced in the small Alpine country.

participate, and not new inhabitants.¹⁵ In Zermatt, native families – such as the Julen, the Perren, and the Biner – are referred to (by themselves and others) as “the Mattini”, meaning people from Zermatt since many generations.

Louis Courthion (1903), a keen observer of Valais society at the beginning of the 20th century, highlighted the clan structure of traditional Valaisan society, built around and by the family. In many ways, Zermatt still embodies this historical structure of collective ownership, especially compared to Verbier which appears to be much more liberal in regard to land property (see Cretton and Decorzant, 2023). This distinction is well-known by the natives and the long-term residents, as emphasized by Michèle¹⁶, who works in the real estate industry and has lived in Verbier since 1987: “Here [in Verbier] it’s exactly the opposite of Zermatt. Many big hotel families in Bagnes¹⁷ have sold their hotels for a fortune” (Interview in French on 26.4.2018¹⁸). Quite the opposite, in Zermatt, they were mainly kept in the native families’ hands.

In her study on tourism and local development in three places in the Swiss Alps, Guex (2016) describes a “conservative economy” in Zermatt, characterized by property remaining in the hands of the historical “bourgeoisie”. She shows how this socio-economic conservatism contributes to forging the “authentic” character of Zermatt, thus reinforcing its image as an authentic alpine resort (Guex, 2016). This reputation, highly promising for tourism, is actively promoted by the Zermatt tourist office and, as we shall see, is firmly embedded in the imagination and discourse of residents. In contrast, Verbier’s specific development pattern is primarily motivated by what Cretton and Decorzant (2023) call the entrepreneurial risk-oriented practices shared by both insiders and newcomers. Nevertheless, Verbier’s tourism promotion also emphasizes the spirit of a privileged place, but rather in the sense of a

15 The “bourgeoisie” no longer exists in all cantons, but in Valais it is specifically anchored in the cantonal constitution. It is defined as “a community under public law responsible for carrying out tasks of public interest laid down by law” (Ruff, 2018). Today, the cantonal law on the bourgeoisies gives them specific tasks, the most important of which is the management and maintenance of bourgeois heritage. This is often composed of forests or mountain pastures, sometimes of buildings or rental properties and even, in some cases, of ski lifts, businesses, hotels or restaurants. For the sake of clarity, we will refer to it as “bourgeoisie” in the rest of the text.

16 All participants names have been changed for the sake of anonymity.

17 Val de Bagnes is the municipality where Verbier is located.

18 All translations from French and from German have been made by the authors.

playground full of adrenaline, energy, and adventure (Fig. 1), which is also a sentiment echoed by the residents themselves, as we will see in the next sections.



Figure 1 – Promotion of Verbier as an infinite playground, November 2017. Photo and Copyright 2017 by A. Friedli.

Verbier, a Magical Bubble

Like other lifestyle migrants met in Verbier, Bart knew the resort first as a tourist, then as temporary worker (ski instructor) before finally deciding to settle down there in 2016:

I'm Dutch, I came here first time ehm... 23 years ago on a holiday. I did a season.... eleven years ago. A winter season. And.... I fell in love with Verbier. The reason why I fell in love with Verbier is that there is an international vibe, an international

community. If I look at the reason I moved, it is because I love mountains. I grew up in Holland in a flat land where you don't have any mountains. And I love to be in nature. (Interview in English on 29.5.2018)

This Verbier enthusiast particularly appreciates being able to do his work commute via mountain bike, go for a short run in the mountains in the summertime, or ski for a few hours in winter. His lifestyle embodies a new way of looking at daily life: alternating, or even merging, leisure time and working time in a natural environment (Cretton et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2015). He has found in Verbier his ideal life setting: nature, sport facilities, “vibes”¹⁹ and entrepreneurship.

Most of the interviewed participants show a strong emotional attachment to Verbier, even Swiss citizens who do not settle there but visit regularly like Laure, a 27-year-old Valais native who lives in the lowlands. Every time she mentions Verbier, her eyes shine: “I think it's the fun, the freedom, the cool side of the mountain, the sporting aspect and then there's a little bit of the artistic side that develops because there are [also] musicians there ...” (Interview in French on 13.11.2018)

Laure describes Verbier as a “bubble” and as being “magic”, two words that sprinkle her account of why she sometimes brings her friends with her:

Come on, you feel good, and in summer you're in a bubble, you don't feel like you're in Valais and you're with people from all over the world, you meet new people, you feel like you're in a parallel world, often you see this magical side of Verbier and there are a lot of newcomers who feel that way too.

Martin too feels like he is in a special and privileged place in Verbier. This multinational resident (Swiss, British and Swedish) has lived in the resort since 1980: “I decided this is home”. For him, Verbier is a unique place: “compared with a big part of the world, we're living in a bubble”. His friend Paul, an Italian-British former business manager and part-time Verbier resident, confirms:

¹⁹ “Vibes” is a term commonly used by the research participants to refer Verbier as a place with a specific atmosphere, including the feelings, the state of mind, the spirit of the place and people.

Verbier is a bubble, we live in a bubble, there are no problems in Verbier, you know, everyone is happy, everyone says “hello, good morning” on the street, the bus driver, the locals, all the problems are left in the valley. You don’t bring any problems up here. We are happy, we live like in cotton wool, we are protected up here. And I honestly feel like that... I feel when I’m in Verbier, I feel protected, nothing can get wrong with me. Everything is cool and happy. (Interview in English on 15.5.18)

Both of them, Paul and Martin, love skiing. Martin explains how he first decided to come and ski in Verbier with a group of friends when they were students, after skiing in many places in Switzerland. For him, the advantage of Verbier, at the time and now, is “the mixture of English and Swedish and Norwegian”.

As exemplified by the above cases, Verbier’s social network, filled with international people and characterized by a friendly atmosphere or cool attitude that most participants feel, reveals a spot that is particularly attractive to those who have accumulated a certain amount of network capital over their travels (Cretton and Decorzant, 2023) (Fig. 2).



Figure 2 – Networking in the snow during the Verbier Art Summit, February 2020. Photo and Copyright 2020 by A. Friedli.

This kind of social resources can be understood as “the capacity to engender and sustain social relations with individuals who are not necessarily proximate, which generates emotional, financial and practical benefit” (Larsen and Urry 2008, p. 93). Like stated by Cretton and Decorzant (2023, p. 278), “in some ways, Verbier lovers are similar. They share a passion for skiing, art or business, or they already know each other from having met in another *en vogue* spot. (...) They all share a genuine love for the place”. This affection towards the ski resort is mostly expressed in terms of attachment to its people, mountains, skiing, snow, events, the vibes. This is a well-known process within snow sport cultures. As shown by Holly Thorpe (2017), especially in snowboarding, transnational snow sport migration contributes to producing transnational identities, a sense of belonging to the world, or global citizenship.

In addition, the process of promoting Verbier as a paradise for freeride, as an incredible playground for outdoors activities, or as a great place to push your own limits, is daily maintained and nurtured as part of a successful promotional strategy. Indeed, to carry out its mission to attract various profiles in the resort region, Verbier Promotion has identified five visitors’ customers profiles (Verbier sport, Verbier adventure, Trendy, Authentic, VIP) with their associated consumption habits, events and ambassadors (Broch, 2019, p. 52). A sort of interweaving between network capital, experiencing snow sports, and the location, wrapped in effective promotional discourse, can explain a certain attachment and sense of belonging to the place, a strong feeling of experiencing something privileged, like being in a bubble, albeit with varying degrees of intensity. Nevertheless, relations to, and feelings about Verbier are expressed in a different way when the reasons for choosing to settle there are not ski, art or business, as we will now explain.

People’s Politeness

In 2018, our colleague Andrea Friedli met Silvia in a local restaurant in her village, located at the foot of Verbier. At the time of the interview, Silvia had been working for six years as a cleaning lady and housekeeper in a chalet at the ski resort, which was owned by a Scottish man. Silvia is a woman of Por-

tuguese origin who came to work in the valley in 2003. Her aim was to earn money, but she ended up meeting her future husband, a fellow worker at Verbier, and decided to stay. Later, they bought a house down in the valley. During the interview, Silvia talked about the region, Verbier and its inhabitants, as if she had always lived there, in the way that someone who is profoundly rooted somewhere talks. She described the repercussions of certain national votes (related to second homes and land use planning) on the valley with great emotion, distinguishing herself from the people of the plain ("the law they vote down"). She liked to tell how much she appreciates Switzerland compared to Portugal:

What captivated me in Switzerland is... it's really the rules, the... the civics.... It's really something... I was so touched... because you cross the road, you greet each other... you know? You pass by someone here even if you don't know them... you have to say hello, because if you don't... for example at the beginning I wasn't used to... I was ashamed, you know, because in Portugal you don't say hello to someone you don't know. (Interview in French on 28.2.2018)

Greeting passer-byes in the street was noted by several research participants as something specific to the place that they particularly appreciate. Lisa is a 43-year-old woman, born in Zimbabwe and raised in Venezuela and Portugal. She was employed in Portugal as an accountant for a very small salary until her sister, a resident of Verbier for 17 years, invited her to join her. Lisa spends nine months of the year in Verbier as a cleaning lady and returns to Portugal for three months during the summer. She said she appreciates the friendliness she felt in the casual interactions:

Even if you are walking around, people say 'Bonjour' with a smile, with an honest smile... 'Hello'. It's not like in Portugal, if you say 'Good morning', they'll be like 'Who is she? What does she want?' (...) But here people are really polite, really friendly, really... honestly friendly. (Interview in English on 8.10.2019)

She expressed how she literally fell in love with the place:

It's not just the money, it's... yeah, this place for me is special [looks towards the mountain]. It's beautiful, this is my sixth year and I still walk the dogs from the clients in the morning, and every morning when I walk the dogs, I see... and I even cry sometimes... because it's so beautiful. (...) And I love snow!

Lisa manifests her attachment to the place, especially the mountain called the Grand Combin, with a lot of emotion. She talks about the shapes of the clouds, is mesmerised by the stars you can see at night and the clear sky, and she compares it with Portugal, where, according to her, you can see much less of the night sky. She concludes: “Yeah, it's my special amazing place”. This is also the case for Silvia, who repeats over and over again how much she likes Switzerland, appreciates the politeness there, and the fact that people say hello to each other in the valley. She is proud that her three sons are considered to be locals, while emphasizing the “beauty of our valley”, describing it with strong emotions and with value descriptors like “simplicity”. This woman, who arrived in the region 15 years ago (at the time of the interview) from a very small village in Portugal, has completely internalized the local norms of behaviour and ways of speaking. She says she regrets that there is no longer any trace of “the spirit of the mountain”, “the family side”, as it was when she arrived. She considers that the place has become more anonymous, urbanised, with far fewer social gatherings. “The feeling of belonging to the mountain has been lost”, she says reluctantly, and then she specifies: “You no longer have an aperitif at 11 am... you see, this friendly spirit is a bit lost” (Silvia, interview in French on 28.2.2018). For her, nowadays, people do not take time to meet and share a convivial moment together as was the case in village life “before” [at the time of her arrival].

Through prior research conducted in Valais, we showed how people who choose to migrate based on love, labour or leisure all adopt, more or less of their free will, a strategy to participate in social life. This can be spending time in bistros, participating in village activities and festivities, or joining a band (Cretton et al., 2012). All these tactics enable contact with the local population and help them to become visible in other people's eyes. Like the sports enthusiasts mentioned above, Silvia and Lisa have developed a special attachment to the place. Despite not participating in winter sports, they nevertheless built up a network of connections over time through their integration into the local workforce (Friedli and Boscoboinik, 2023).

Capital Network

Capital network is not the specificity of an upper social class, it rather cuts across various groups of people, from very rich second homeowners to penniless backpackers and seasonal workers. The kind of specific atmosphere found in Verbier is something attractive for wealthy foreigners like Paul, middle-class people native from Valais – particularly young adults like Laure – but also for average immigrant workers like Lisa or Silvia. For instance, before working as a housekeeper for a Scottish man in Verbier, Silvia also worked as a caretaker in the commune's multipurpose communal hall. As a result of this highly visible public function, she knows a lot of people in the valley and has a significant network.

It has been shown that to be socially integrated in a village in Valais, like in other villages in Europe, it is necessary to socialise to be seen, recognised, and identified by the local population (Cretton 2013, p. 69). Like Silvia, Lisa who had been living in Verbier for six years at the time of the interview, states that she has an extensive network of people from different origins ("Swiss, English, French, Spanish... from everywhere") who live or work there:

I started working with Nicola and then you meet the people who work with you... and then you meet the friends of the people who work with you... the family and the people you work for... and their family... and that's how you start the connections ... (Interview in English on 8.10.2019)

Unlike Paul and his friends, Lisa and Silvia do not go skiing or mountaineering between two hours of cleaning. It is quite the contrary, as Lisa (who optimises her working hours during the winter) explains: "I can work some days like... 18 hours and have two-three months without a day off... or a morning off or an afternoon off... nothing... just working."

It is a well-known fact that seasonal staff work hard during the high season. Their presence at Verbier comes as a result of the tourist urbanization of the mountains (Stock and Lucas, 2012), as well as the presence of a new urban population that demands services. Consequently, there has been a growth of the hospitality industry and corresponding geographical moves of so-called "low skilled workers", often labelled as "saisonniers"²⁰ or "new saisonniers"

20 It is necessary to point out the hierarchies that can be found (see also Bourdeau, 2016)

(Guzzi-Heeb, 2014). These groups come to Verbier during the high season, from December to April, and work in hotels, restaurants, supermarkets, but also in the building industry, roadways, and infrastructure. They are largely marked by low-level employment, low wages, economic insecurity, and a form of cultural and social invisibility. Laure, the young Valais native living in the lowlands, encounters them regularly when she goes to Verbier to volunteer at the Verbier Festival during summer, or for skiing in winter. She affirms that seasonal workers are “fighters, they really want to work! (*Ils en veulent!*)” (Interview in French on 13.11.2018). Despite the precarity and uncertainty of their working contract, the temporary employees express an emotional attachment to the place, constituted of positive feelings towards the environment, particularly the mountain, the landscape, the people that live there, and the festive spirit of the resort, sometimes compared to that of other party destinations like Ibiza.²¹

Zermatt, Represented as a Place of Strength

Like in Verbier, nature, mountains and landscape are all very present in the interviews and observations conducted in Zermatt. Foreign tourists take pictures of the landscape, but even regular visitors and residents mention the fascination of lights and shapes to be captured. Doris, a young woman in her late twenties, grew up in Zermatt but left for her studies. She recalls that in her childhood there, Zermatt combined aspects of the mountain village (*das Bergdorf*), the authentic (*das Ursprüngliche*), the proximity to nature (*die Naturverbundenheit*), the rootedness (*die Bodenständigkeit*) and was simultane-

within the category of “saisonniers”, such as the differentiation between “labour migrants” and “working tourists” (Uriely, 2001). The latter can be described as workers whose labour is valued for a strong professional identity, such as sports instructors (ski instructor, mountain guide, paragliding, climbing, river rafting, etc.). They can be self-employed, proposing their services autonomously, or accept temporary jobs in ski schools. The so-called “ski bums” (young tourists who work in a bar in the evening and go skiing during daytime) are also “seasonal working tourists”, whose social status and visibility is different from those working as technical and service employees in ski lifts, hotels or restaurants.

21 For instance, see the series of articles by Romane Mugnier dedicated at the beginning of 2024 to the festive life and drug use among ski resort employees, including those in Verbier. Heidi.news. <https://www.heidi.news/explorations/tout-schuss-dans-la-cocaine/a-verbier-est-dur-de-recruter-des-employes-qui-ne-se-droguent-pas>

ously extremely international, with the presence of both the tourists and the Portuguese seasonal workers (*Gastarbeiter*) living there.

The local natives tend to prefer hidden places, preferably between tourist seasons. Clara, another young woman, born in Zermatt and with no connection to the tourism industry, is fascinated by the excitement of Asian tourists. She evokes that they stand at five o'clock in the morning on the bridge from where there is a nice view of the Matterhorn with their camera in hand, ready to take "the" picture (Fig. 3). And she comments: "And I think it's really beautiful how they can enjoy a mountain, actually a stone!" Next, she explains the characteristics of tourists according to the seasons:

In summer, there are a lot of Asian people, and you have very little contact with them, many of them don't really speak English. They are just out and about in their group, and they just look at the beauty of this village. And that is, that is super. And after that, it's the mid-season and there's no one there. And in winter, it's the winter season and, hum, yes, people come for skiing, each season has its own speciality. And I have to say, I don't like being in the village in winter.

(Interview in Swiss German on 6.11.2018)

She herself prefers hiking in the "Lost Valley" (*das Verlorene Tal*), a place only known to locals, only accessible by foot. She affirms to enjoy seeing the colours in autumn and the arrival of the first snow. As for Kate, a Swiss German woman in her forties who does not live in Zermatt but has been coming for the last 20 years, particularly on weekends with her friends, Zermatt is a special place as well. She calls it a "place of strength" (*Kraftort*), the only place in the world where she feels a special kind of energy. She does not go there for skiing, but for the atmosphere. She says: "I go there to recharge my batteries, and I always feel reborn when I return from Zermatt." (Interview in Swiss German on 8.10.2018). She continues:

I think any place with a view of the Matterhorn is a kind of place of strength for me. (...) Simply put, the Matterhorn has something magical about it. (...) I can't explain it to you. I have 100,000 photos of the Matterhorn on my mobile phone, and every time I'm there, I see something different or feel that today it's even more beautiful than the last time. It's just very special. There's something extremely attractive about that mountain.



Figure 3 – Taking a picture of the Matterhorn, November 2022.
Copyright 2022 by V. Cretton.

The Matterhorn is one of the dozen places in and around the resort that the Zermatt Tourist Office recommends as being particularly photogenic, and thus promotes as photopoints²² (Mourtazina, 2019). Taking pictures of the

22 <https://www.matterhornparadise.ch/en/Experience/Top-Experiences/Photopoints>

Matterhorn is encouraged to the point that the tourist office has established a touristic route, indicating the best viewpoints (photopoints) from which to photograph the famous mountain (Fig. 4). There are additionally many individual tactics for capturing the “best picture” of the Matterhorn, including one particularly perilous strategy to avoid capturing other tourist photographers’ arms and heads in the shot (Mourtazina, 2019).



Figure 4 – Taking advantage of the photopoint in Zermatt, November 2022.
Copyright 2022 by A. Boscoboinik.

The Matterhorn is a highly identifiable mountain with its distinctive pyramidal shape. Its unique profile makes it a strong symbol, widely featured in advertisements, postcards, media, and marketing campaigns, rendering it omnipresent. The legendary story of its first successful ascent (by Edward Whymper in 1865) further enhances the mountain’s mythical aura, and its fame attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists each year. These combined factors have made the Matterhorn one of the most photographed mountains in the world, confirming that Zermatt’s promotional strategy is so effective that the myth has become reality, convincing everyone that the Matterhorn is indeed mythical.

This attraction to the Matterhorn, as well as the changing nature of the mountain, is also expressed by João, a man in his fifties of Portuguese ori-

gin, living in Täsch with a Swiss woman. João came to work at Zermatt when he was 18 years old. His career has gone through much iteration: he has worked in a restaurant, in the building industry, as a driver, with cable cars, in a waste disposal centre. In the end, he decided to stay because he likes the place. His way of loving the place is voiced as following: “There is good air and nice weather most of the time. It is really great. You have good water. The water here is great” (Interview in Swiss German on 21.11.2018). Although he does not like to ski – he says he has never learned it properly –, he loves hiking in the mountains and taking pictures:

And I say, if you look back every ten minutes and take a photo of the same mountain, you’ll see at the end, no two photos are the same. Even though you photograph the same mountain, every photo is different. The light changes, the perspective changes, and I enjoy taking pictures. This phenomenon only exists here, in the mountains.

João particularly appreciates walking in the mountains, when according to him, the view changes with almost every step. He has also discovered “magical places”, as he describes them, where nobody else goes and where nature, according to him, is purer. “You see nothing, no human intervention. You can walk up to the glacier and touch it.” Besides the mountain and the glacier, there is also a lake that he considers “magical” and where he loves to swim, despite (or perhaps because) it is near the glacier and the water temperature is five degrees. He seems very proud to know every single path in the area. “Yes, I know them all. I know every path. I have really been everywhere here.” He explains that this is thanks to his friendship with a colleague – his former employer – who belongs to one of the ancient native families of Zermatt (“Yes, that’s why I know”, he says, “we sometimes went to places where there was no hiking trail”). He recounts how they wandered the mountains together, looking for crystals and fishing. Besides the landscape, João also mentions the animals in the forest and how he used to go hiking and “hunting with his camera”²³ as he puts it, only to photograph the animals. “I would wait and see where the wind was coming from, and observe what the ani-

23 João : “Das ganze Jahr habe ich gejagt. Weisst du im Sommer, die ganze Zeit habe ich einfach gejagt.” A.F.: “Was denn für Jagd?” João: “Mit der Kamera.” (21.11.2018)

mal was doing. Sometimes, I watched the chamois for hours, and the animal watched me. I used to do that a lot”, he said. João states he truly considers Zermatt to be his place, where he feels at ease and where he belongs.

Like Lisa and Sylvia in Verbier, João arrived in Zermatt not for an imagined connection to the landscape but more prosaically for work. However, he also chose to stay for “the beauty” and “the magic” of the place. This magic, he remarks, is anchored in the natural elements: rocks, water, glaciers, and animals. When someone asked him if he was going back “to his home” in Portugal, he answered: “Here is my home” (see also Friedli and Boscoboinik, 2023).

As we see above, none of the research interviewees in Zermatt talk about the “vibes” or the festive spirit, like the research participants in Verbier did. In Zermatt, attachment to the place is stressed in relationship with the landscape, the mountains, the snow, the light, the temperature, the air, the water, and the spots to be photographed. In Verbier, the feelings related to the place are expressed in terms of fun, of the international and cosmopolitan ambience, where the “après-ski parties are the best in the world” (Jenny, a tourist in Verbier, interview in English on 30.11.2019). This does not mean that the beauty of the landscape is not acknowledged in Verbier, or that the party aspect is entirely absent in Zermatt. Many cultural events and festivities are mentioned by the interlocutors in Zermatt, but their scope is less widespread than in Verbier; or rather, according to their words they do not primarily characterize the resort.²⁴ Be that as it may, on both sides, there is a deep influence of promotional discourse in the statements of the interviewees.

The “Mattini”, the Tourists, and the Others

In Zermatt, the interviewees regularly made the distinction between the hosts (the natives of the place, the “Mattini”), the guests (the tourists) and the others (mainly the Portuguese workers, but not only²⁵). This was less the

24 For instance, there is the Zermatt Unplugged - a music festival every spring, the Summer Folklore Festival, sport contests and events, and many Portuguese and local related celebrations.

25 People from 60 countries live in Zermatt. <https://gemeinde.zermatt.ch/unser-dorf/einwohnerstatistik>

case in Verbier, where the collected discourses mainly emphasize the “community spirit”.

The polarization between local inhabitants (hosts) and tourists (guests),²⁶ or the distinction between insiders and outsiders, has been questioned in the anthropology of tourism since the late 1990s, with a focus instead on the porosity between these statuses (see Debarbieux et al., 2008; Loloum, 2015, 2018). More recently, it has been shown that the metaphor of hospitality (Rickly, 2017) can be fruitful for analysing the redistribution of symbolic roles and statuses within a heterogeneous population in a specific location. Questions such as “Who is the local and who is the foreigner?”, “Who is the host, who is the visitor?”, “Who receives and who is welcomed?” are explored in this context (see Friedli, 2020). Despite the porosity between these categories, they can still be a source of issues and tensions for the individuals involved, particularly concerning legitimacy, original ancestry, and access to property. For instance, Reto, a man in his fifties who was born and raised in Zermatt (but is not a native “Matti”²⁷), left the village for his studies and settled in another canton. He regularly returns to Zermatt because his family owns an apartment in the resort. During the interview, he describes Zermatt’s native population in terms of “clans”: “Each local family is like a clan, you have the clan of Julen, the clan of Biner, the clan of Perren” (Interview in French on 17.2.2020).

The concept of the clan has a long history in Valais, where it generally refers to extended families often associated with political affiliation and religion. In his book *Le peuple du Valais*, Courthion places it at the foundation of Valais society (1903, p. 155–163). He notes that “the clan” has its roots in high-altitude villages, describing it as a “very small milieu” (a village, a rural circle). In these small communities, the particular interests of the clan often take precedence over those of larger governing bodies or central administration. Today, the term “clan” still refers to Valais families of local origin who hold economic or political influence.

From the interviews made in Zermatt, tensions between members of the bourgeoisie (Zermatt “bourgeois”) and members of the municipality (not

26 These stereotyped distinctions remind the title of the volume edited in 1977 by Valene Smith (“Hosts and Guests”), that marked the beginnings of the anthropology of tourism.

27 “Matti” is used for singular of “Mattini”.

Zermatt “bourgeois” citizens)²⁸ were depicted by Peter, a 65-year-old American living in Zermatt since 1988 in the following terms:

These indigenous citizens basically feel that Zermatt belongs to them and their families. This dichotomy [bourgeois/non-bourgeois] is also within the different families. I mean they are still... even to this day, there is still so much envy between the residents and the local native from Zermatt who owns the hotels (Interview in English on 8.4.2019)

Since 1996, the establishments of Zermatt’s bourgeoisie (hotels and mountain restaurants) have been united under the label of the Matterhorn Group.²⁹ Zermatt bourgeoisie owns hotels and restaurants at high altitudes, has a large share in the ski lift company and owns 1,000 hectares of forest. In addition, many bourgeois families still own and operate hotels privately (Guex, 2016, p. 41). Today, the bourgeoisie numbers around 1,200 people³⁰, mainly from families that have historically originated in the area.

When talking about the traditional families of Zermatt, the word “envy” (*Neid* in German, *Niid* in Swiss German) appears in almost every informal discussion collected with the interviewees. However, this does not mean that all participants were critical of the “Mattini”. For instance, Kate, a Swiss woman who visits Zermatt regularly, explains that even though the wealthy “Mattini” are considered by the rest of the residents to be very snobbish and aloof, she herself does not share this feeling. “The only difference is that they might be wearing a \$3,000 jacket while you might be wearing an H&M jacket.” (Interview in Swiss German on 8.10.2018). Kate mentioned that the seasonal workers appreciate the “Mattini” because they employ them. She says she believes that if the seasonal staff return, it is because these local families are “good employers”. No matter why she made these statements, her words reveal the marked distance and hierarchy between the native families and the others.

28 See note 16.

29 <https://www.matterhorn-group.ch/en/home/>

30 Zermatt population at 1.11.2023 includes (without the seasonal workers) 5,733 inhabitants (2,537 foreigners, 1,823 Swiss, 1,209 Zermatt bourgeois and 164 resident citizen) <https://gemeinde.zermatt.ch/unser-dorf/einwohnerstatistik>

As seen above, the relationship between João, of Portuguese origin, and his former employer, a “Matti”, who went hiking together, shows that friendship can also be forged between “immigrant” and “local”, employee and employer. However, despite the heterogeneity of each group of residents, the population of Zermatt is depicted in terms of essentialised and stereotyped social groups in the discourses, which can be summarized as: the “Mattini”, the Portuguese workers³¹ and the tourists.

For most of the interviewees, whether long term residents or natives, tourists appear to be more tolerated than truly appreciated. Similar to Verbier, the very rich tourists in Zermatt have a reputation for not mingling with others, often having their own ski instructors and generally staying away from the other tourists. “Some have their own cooks, so you do not meet them in restaurants” (Kate, interview in Swiss German on 8.10.2018). The majority of tourists arrive by train³², and many come just for the day to see the Matterhorn. Peter, an American who has lived in Zermatt for more than 30 years, affirms: “So they come up, they look at the Matterhorn, then they take off and leave. Lucky enough for us...” (Interview in English on 8.4.2019). While Simon, a young native from Zermatt, explains:

We are dependent on tourists (...). We, as Zermattians, try to give them the best holidays possible, so they come again next year, that they appreciate it (...). And they should also have this “feel-good experience”. They don’t come here to look for friends (...) sometimes you spend some time with them, but you don’t make friends. You just want to be friendly. (Interview in Swiss German on 17.11.2018)

Stereotypical portrayals of the Zermatt population provided by the research participants seem to oddly mirror the pyramid shape of the Matterhorn as seen from Zermatt. They depict a classic pyramidal social hierarchy: the “true” locals, who benefit from ancestry, political and land rights are at the top; the foreign workers, who run the local economy are in the middle; and the tourists, who are essential to both groups due to economic necessity, are

31 The stereotype of the hard-working, football-loving, beer-drinking Portuguese is very much in evidence throughout the Valais, as we have shown in previous research (Cretton et al., 2012). In Zermatt, it is exacerbated.

32 Car-free Zermatt can be reached by train, taxi or helicopter.

at the bottom. This does not entail that social hierarchy does not exist in Verbier, but it is neither signified, nor expressed in the caricatural terms displayed in the discussions about Zermatt.

Conclusion

As we have shown, locality – as a phenomenological property of social life (Appadurai, 1996) – is produced, lived, experienced, felt, expressed, and voiced by a multitude of individuals who share a geographical location at different times of the year and have in common a kind of fascination or love of the place. Native mountain dwellers have long practised multilocality: in winter in the village, in summer on the mountain pasture and in the fields, and in autumn in the vineyards. Similarly, the new multilocal or temporary residents in the mountains also develop anchoring and belonging to places. They make friends, develop social networks, watch the mountains, and feel the landscapes to the point of sometimes being overwhelmed with emotions.

Locality is then produced in close connexion with the imaginaries about mountains and their ecological components: snow, forest, stones, sunshine, air, water, altitude. The imaginaries about animals (chamois, birds, wolves, sheep or goats), flora (trees, alpine meadows, flowers) and other elements (rock, torrent, lake, glacier) also contribute to the “production of locality” (Appadurai, 1996; see Chapter 9). Moreover, these perceptions not only affect the ways people relate to the place, but they are also reproduced through the pictures taken and easily shared with others, via social networks.³³ They can thus nourish other representations and motivate actions by others, who might then decide to come see for themselves.

The cohabitation in Verbier and in Zermatt between wealthy second-home homeowners, foreign creative entrepreneurs, tourists, permanent residents with migration backgrounds, precarious seasonal workers, and natives contributes to (re)composing locality. This experience of locality depends on their

33 As Mourtazina has shown, the digital technology has made possible a range of new activities like the management (archive, consultation, classification, memory), the communication (dissemination of images on social networks) and image editing (Mourtazina, 2019, p. 10).

interactions with each other and with the mountain – how they relate to the place at different times of the year, according to the seasons, events, or their own wishes. This does not mean that tensions between new and old, foreigners and locals, wealthy and precarious – whatever these categories may embody – do not exist. Rather, it shows that these tensions, in and of themselves, also contribute to the production of locality and its different layers.

The cosmopolitan discourses in Verbier present a more inclusive image than those collected in Zermatt, which explicitly reflect social and class divisions. Nonetheless, the accounts of people with less network and economic capital frequenting Verbier, such as those working there temporarily, speak not only of the beauty of the landscape but also of the specific community feeling of the place. This does not mean that there is no class segregation in Verbier, but rather that the interviewees do not express it in terms of experienced or perceived hierarchy.

It seems indeed caricatural to suggest that Zermatt represents an aristocratic type of resort (older, pyramidal class hierarchy, local owners versus foreigner employees), and Verbier a more bourgeois type (younger, liberal, foreigner owners). Nevertheless, it appears that these distinctive ways of dealing with otherness, the aristocratic and the liberal, partly determine the modes of relating to localness and the production of locality. When the land is considered inalienable and in the hands of the historical natives, the only possible option for “others” (non-natives, be they workers, tourists or non-historical residents) is to be an outsider (guests), invited to admire and take pictures of the landscape, and to enjoy the mountains, the scenery, the animals, along with all the associated emotions. On the other hand, when the natives consider the place to be a property that can be “shared” with “others” (thus, marketable), it becomes possible for the outsiders to be involved in community life and act (nearly) like locals, to the point of feeling lucky to be living in such a comfortable “bubble”.

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Journeys Beyond: Navigating Through Land, Movement and the Dead in the Italian Eastern Alps – Perspectives From Elsewhere

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Abstract

Focusing on Sinti concepts of time, space, memory and respect, this paper explores the overlooked presence of Sinti in the Alps and their relationship to Alpine landscapes, which is closely linked to their relationship to their dead. Their way of making the world calls for a rethinking of concepts concerning the relationship between humans and land and opens up a different possibility for thinking about societies in the Alps. Since silence is a practice linked to Sinti memory and land, the question arises of how to write about these people. Drawing on the discussion of the concept of silence in the work of Patrick Williams, the paper interweaves ethnographic data from twenty-five years ago with more recent ethnographic archival research.

In memory of Patrick Williams

To show that the Roma, the Gypsies, the Sinti, the Travellers, the Mānuš etc. help us to come to a definition of society, presupposes that we have first shown that they belong to that society. The value of studying “Gypsies” can only be recognised once it has been admitted that they belong to our society (Williams, 2021, p. 624).

In the autumn of 1997, Gianni was buried in a cemetery in South Tyrol. However, it was still not easy for *his Sinti*¹ to get a burial place there. During

1 *His Sinti* refers to the concept of *my Sinti* or people of the *familia*, to whom the living and the recently deceased have a direct connection, going back one, two or, at the most, three generations. The order of inclusion in the unity of *my/our own Sinti* is according to the presence of the recently deceased. This affects the plus first (+1), plus second (+2) or at most

negotiations with the cemetery administration, the head administrator considered the following possibility: “It would be much better for you Gypsies if you had your own cemetery, then there wouldn’t be the constant quarrels with other people (the non-Gypsies)” (Tauber, 2014, p. 46). This suggestion was met with irritation by the Sinti present and one of the older men explained why such an idea could only come from a *Gažo*² (non-“Gypsy”), one who must be really stupid if he could not appreciate what a common cemetery would mean for Sinti:

What a stupid *Gažo*. What would we do with a cemetery? How do you manage to reach your Sinti when the whole cemetery is full of Sinti. You would just bounce around: I don’t want to see him, I don’t want to see him either ... It won’t work. It takes you the whole day to get to your Sinti, and by the time you get there, you’re completely exhausted. (ibid.)

In this contribution, I will look at ethnographic data from twenty-five years ago and link it to more recent ethnographic-archival research, bringing it into the anthropological discussion of the Alps and the question of what societies are in the first place. As for Alpine contexts, the Sinti making of society introduces a further possibility and, coincidentally or not, this has not yet entered the canon of Alpine anthropology.

The presence of Sinti, who manifest themselves in a specific region through their relationships with each other, with non-Sinti (*Gaže*) and with the places where these relationships are expressed, is completely absent in discussions of societies in the Alps. We know that Sinti and other groups of Roma people exist, but they do not represent the problems, situations and issues generally associated with discourses concerning the Alps. Their fleet-

the plus third (+3) generation: If a member of the +1 generation dies, then the dead of the +2 generation no longer necessarily belong to the recently deceased. This means that above all, but not only, the dead closest to the next generation belong to *my/own Sinti*. Horizontally, siblings and spouses are included in the group of the recently deceased. This memory of descent (called *respect* by Sinti), which spans one or at the most two generations, is very short. The consequence of the short generational memory and the relationship of respect for their own deceased is that each unit of *my/our own Sinti* endeavours not to jeopardise this *respect* through any relationship with *other Sinti*. Another consequence is the strong bond within the unit of their *own Sinti*, which is particularly evident in the relationship with their own children.

2 On the question of what a *Gažo* is, see Poueyto (2014).

ing presence can perhaps be explained by the fact that their existence in the world is inscribed subtly on landscapes: a hundred years ago on foot, or, if they were wealthy, with a horse-drawn cart, fifty years ago with the first caravans, and for about twenty-five years now also by living in flats. Their movements did not leave any material traces: Once they moved away from their campsites, there was still perhaps a cold fireplace and sometimes rubbish or a piece of clothing that they had left behind because it was no longer needed.

However, the attempt to explain their absence in the discussion on how society or community is made simultaneously risks, in a paradoxical way, not recognising them as part of these societies. Although it is remarkable that they are virtually absent from the discussion of the Alps as a whole, or from specific considerations of people who are more likely to be mobile, such as “new highlanders” (Löffler et al., 2014), amenity migrants (see Cretton and Boscoboinik in this volume) or others, their socio-cultural invisibility reveals blind spots in anthropological thought on the Alps.

Sinti are mobile and only visible in very small groups, and their networks of relationships extend over large areas of the Eastern Alps and beyond to the plains of the Po and all the way to central Italy, Southern Germany and Austria. Over the centuries (Iori, 2015), these people have maintained relations with local populations, helped shape micro-economies and left traces that have led to names such as the *Zigeunerwaldele* or *la via degli zingari*, as well as being probably the only population in the Alps that has produced a minimal ecological footprint during their presence. Their practices of remembering and supporting family members do not fit into any of the models described for the Alps, and yet they have kept up with developments in the *Gağë* world. They have moved from horse to car to flat, they use the internet and social media, and yet they elude the linear time specifications of industrialised and capitalist production and the associated production-oriented rhythms of life (cf. Tauber, 2018). Although they could not escape the violent dynamics of nation building (Piasere, 1999), in not considering the possibility of nation building for themselves they represent a European example of “perspectives from elsewhere” (Platenkamp and Schneider, 2019).

Therefore, integrating them in this volume is significant for several reasons: Their kinship networks extend beyond the Alps, their relationships to places exist both in the Alps and in pre-Alpine space. They are on the move, in most cases do not own land, do not inherit material goods and speak a language – Romani – that is the only language of a minority group not recognised in Italy.³

However, approaching this form of living within Alpine society (as well as elsewhere) demands caution and respect. Caution is an attitude that Sinti adopt towards other Sinti, but above all towards *Gaḡe*: caution in their language, in speaking to and about others, and in their nomadic movements. Respect is shown in their relationship with their deceased and is understood as a pendulum for measuring equal social relationships between the living. Caution and respect are elements that are of great importance for their creation of the world, not for the sake of respect and caution, nor for movement, itself, but not to disturb social relationships with other Sinti and with the dead. I will come back to this below.

But there is another reason to be cautious. Experience has shown – I remain vague for reasons of discretion – that ethnographic descriptions and attempts to understand these societies can lead to misunderstandings and to a different reading than that intended by the ethnographer. The decision to concentrate on ethnographies in the Alps in this volume, with a contribution on the Sinti in the Alps, means that I largely omit concrete ethnographic details, while at the same time appeal to the reader to consider the epistemological context – anthropological debate on Roma, Sinti, Manouche, Gitanos, Kale etc. (cf. Ferrari and Fotta, 2017; Piasere, 1999) – in order to avoid supposed certainties about “Gypsies”.

To get closer to the enigma of their absence in the discussions on the European Alps, my contribution also draws on archival material and historical analyses of the presence of the Sinti in the Italian Eastern Alps at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. And placing the discussion on perspectives from elsewhere in a wider context also requires an examination of the relationship between nation states and “Gypsies”, something dis-

3 Legge n. 482, 1999.

cussed below through a comparison between the Sinti and the linguistically and culturally related Manouche in France.

Movement and Presence

Looking at the European Alps over a time span of 120–150 years – with the ethnographic caution and respect discussed above – from a bird’s-eye view we can make out small groups of people who, unlike other people who were mobile, servants and craftsmen, for example (cf. Cole & Wolf, 1974), consisting of adults, children, old people, men and women travelling on foot or, if they could afford it, by horse and cart. This form of association in small, almost invisible, groups has been described above all for the linguistically related Sinti, Sinte and Manouche in Central Europe and France (Wittich, 1911, 1919; Yoors, 1967; Williams, 1993; Tauber, 2014).

If we look again a few decades later, some differences will be discernible between the Alps in the 1950s and 1960s of the western states and those of Yugoslav Slovenia (Štrukelj 1980). In the Alps of Western Europe, Sinti, Sinte and Manouche are still on the move, now with their first cars, if they can afford them, and the first caravans produced in *Gaže* factories. They are visible as small clusters that settle on the outskirts of villages and forests, sometimes on the outskirts of towns for a short time. In Slovenia, however, they are gradually forced to settle and stay put (*ibid.*).

We then arrive at the 1990s, the time when I got to know the Sinti in South Tyrol. From a bird’s-eye view we see strange clusters of caravans and wooden huts, often on the outskirts of larger towns, which will enter *Gaže* vernacular as “*campi nomadi*”. In terms of urban planning, the “*campi nomadi*” (Piasere 2006) are visibly inscribed in the landscape, and the density of people coming together in them has often multiplied. From the *Gaže* point of view, *campi nomadi* are problem zones, places of conflict between Sinti families, places of social decay and explicit exclusion. My Sinti interlocutors and confidants from that time always rejected these places and tried to avoid settling in them. This was only partially successful, however, because the municipal administrations, in the same way as the cemetery administration mentioned above, showed no understanding of the necessity to separate places of residence ac-

ording to family. From the 1990s to the 2010s, this led to conflicts in housing conditions which were completely unnatural for the Sinti, and which were repeatedly and voyeuristically rehashed by the media. The often overcrowded *campi nomadi* were gradually abandoned by the families in order to move into flats.

If we maintain our bird's-eye view, the movements of the Sinti have changed, in winter they live in flats, some stay with their caravans on *campi nomadi*, in summer they move around and settle – where it is still possible – on the outskirts of forests and villages, just like their ancestors did in the decades before (Tauber, 2014).

In 2023, as I write this article, the small groups of people on the outskirts of the forests and villages have practically disappeared. Looking down on the Alps from above, one sees large clusters of campervans and caravans, most belonging to the streams of tourists who frequent new modern campsites where Sinti, should they be recognisable as such, are not always welcome. The small groups of people who had adapted to the changes in the *Gaḡe* world during the last century are no longer recognisable.

“Letting the Dead Rest” – Genovefa and Lodovico

I first came across Genovefa with her three or more different surnames in the State Archives of Bolzano during 2017 while I was looking through the files of the Austro-Hungarian police documenting her arrest in a South-Tyrol side valley (Tauber, 2019). In the meticulous records of the police, I get to know a Sinta who moved on foot with her four small children (the youngest is 2 years old) and her husband from mountain village to mountain farm, from valley to valley, and back again. They were given board and lodging by the farmers in the crown land of Tyrol, and, when necessary, they also spent the night in the forest. After these first finds in the archives, which confirmed what the Sinti told me in the 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, namely that they have always been present in Tyrol, further archival finds confirmed their presence (Brunet, forthcoming; Brunet and Tauber, submitted for review; Jori, 2015; Trevisan, 2020).

What is striking is that, firstly, these sources have not previously been used by historians nor the language and attitudes of the police and the state analysed to shed light on the relationship between the state and “Gypsies”. However, “Gypsy” is a broad category covering all the family networks of, for example, Sinti, Roma and Manouche, and one in which they do not find their cultural individuality. For these family networks, the term “Gypsy” is a label that says nothing about the uniqueness of their relationship with a particular region. And it is even less suitable for recognising their individual cultural expressions, which differ greatly from each other (cf. Williams, 2011, Tauber and Trevisan, 2019).

Secondly, for my contribution here, however, it is even more important to understand how the Sinti themselves deal with the traces of their ancestors in the archives. When I tell them that I have come across archival material as well as photos of Sinti from the time before the First World War, they take note of this with the remark, “it is best to leave the dead alone”. To mention concrete names and stories is socially risky for them. On the other hand, they are always busy telling anecdotes about their dead, going back as far as their great-grandparents (Tauber, 2014, pp. 46–79). So how can we understand the relationships of the Sinti to what we call “the past” or “history” (Piasere, 2000)? How do they insert themselves into Alpine landscapes, how do they articulate their memories, their speaking and remembering? How can we write about the Sinti in the Alps, make them visible as a community – or better, as family networks – when they evade and escape this very definition and categorisation, and show themselves to be unreconcilable to any definition?

“Leaving the dead alone” has a number of implications for anthropological and historical research (cf. Williams, 1993, Foisineau, 2021), touching on the presence of the Sinti in the Alps as well as questions of where the Alps end (Grasseni in this volume) or to whom the Alps belong (Varotto and Castiglioni, 2012). Can the Alps belong to the Sinti? Can the Sinti belong to the Alps? What sense can the Sinti make of such questions? Of course these are their lands: In their Alpine places they know every old tree, every farm, every well, old inns, and all the former meadows where they were allowed to camp decades ago, which have now given way to industrial and commercial zones. They know the small and main roads from South Tyrol to Belluno, to Friuli, to Udine, Gorizia, Trieste, and to the northwest on from Bolzano. They can

imitate local Italian dialects and like cooking some of the local dishes of the Italian Eastern Alps. They know about their ancestors who – in the Habsburg Empire – came together from Lower Austria, Carinthia, Slovenia and Veneto for elopement marriages or to bury a deceased relative in one of the local cemeteries (Tauber, 2014).

In bringing together police files and their narratives with care, it is possible to reconstruct these networks of relationships in the context of the regional history of the crown land of Tyrol at the beginning of the 20th century. Although I use to the police documentation with the greatest suspicion, it enables us to (re)construct both a historical confirmation of the Sinti's memory and their movements from village to village (Tauber, 2019). This approach, bringing together police records, memories and contemporary practices, makes it possible to trace how Sinti live in specific places, move between and relate to them, in part, up to the present day (for similar methodologies see also About and Bordigoni, 2018; Aresu, 2019; Asséo and Aresu, 2014; Bartash, 2017, 2019, 2023; Sutre, 2017; Trevisan, 2010, 2017, 2019, 2020).

Here, however, it is important to understand that this approach is not considered essential by the Sinti themselves for the affirmation of their presence in the Italian Eastern Alps, it is rather their *respectful* relationships with their dead that give meaning to their presence and their movements. For this reason, they are recognised by other Sinti as Sinti of the mountains (*Bergaria*), because, just like their ancestors, they have adapted in some ways to the Alpine *Gağe*. They do not lay claim to land or the privilege of a political voice because of their long presence in the region, but this does not mean that it does not hurt them if their presence is not recognised as being “people from here”.

The example of Genovefa is interesting for us because the testimonies of Tyrolean peasants show how much Sinti were part of Tyrolean society on the brink of the First World War: Genovefa regularly spent the night with her children on mountain farms, and at some she could use the kitchen, and they were usually assured of a place to sleep in the stables or hay barns. Even minor thefts of food were accepted (Tauber, 2019, p. 69).

Borders and “Gypsies” – Contradictions in Terms and Different Criminalisations

But, as always, things are far more complicated when we leave the micro-level and look at state policy towards “Gypsies”. Historians (Asseo, 1989) and anthropologists (Piasere, 2016) have demonstrated many times that in the eyes of European states, the possibility that “Gypsies” could fully belong to a nation – any nation – was a contradiction in terms, while the criminalisation of their movements treated them differently within each state (Trevisan, 2024). The Sinti’s often good relations with the Tyrolean peasants were, therefore, not always mirrored by those with the police or judges, either within Austria or on the borders with Italy. The period when Genovefa was detained in a side valley in South Tyrol coincided with both Austria-Hungary and Italy enacting a series of laws that increasingly criminalised ‘wandering’ without reason. Paola Trevisan (2020) shows how, after unification, Italy issued a series of administrative circulars calling “foreign Gypsies” “true vagrants”. They were to be sent back across the border or expelled if they had already crossed it. Even with valid travel documents, “foreign Gypsies” were assigned to the category of “undesirable foreigners”: in other words “vagrants” (Trevisan, 2017, pp. 345–347). The latter carried with them negative connotations, subject to double repression, both from the police and by being essentialised as criminals (Trevisan, 2020). Not even the possession of a passport would allow “Gypsies” to escape being classified as “undesirable aliens” (ibid.). Genovefa and her family possessed neither a passport nor a licence to play music on the streets (Tauber, 2019), and according to the current state of research, they moved primarily on Austrian or, after 1919 (the southern part of Tyrol was awarded to Italy after the Treaty of Saint Germain), South Tyrolean terrain (Brunet and Tauber, forthcoming).

The history of the Austrian Sinti families surrounding Lodovico Adelsburg is different. These family networks repeatedly crossed the Italian-Austrian border in the Eastern Alps and stayed in Italy for long periods of time, although this was put a stop to by increasing levels of regulation (Trevisan, 2020). If they were persecuted in the Austrian Empire because they were poor families moving without documents between the districts of Habsburg Austria, they became an administrative point of contention between the two

states at the Austrian-Italian border (*ibid.*, p. 64). Paola Trevisan has reconstructed both the travails of the Lodovico family in the borderlands of historical Tyrol, and also their ability to overcome obstacles, she writes:

So, when he (Lodovico); his wife, Maria Gabrielli; and their four children, traveling in two carts pulled by four mares, were stopped at Monteforte d'Alpone (in the border province of Verona), they were all taken to the border post at Ala and given over to the Austro-Hungarian authorities on 27 April 1912. It was only under the protests and insistence of the Italian chief of the security police that they were accepted, even though Lodovico had a passport. The documents do not disclose which problems were raised by the Austrian border guards, but it is clear from what emerges afterward that the guards were doing everything in their power not to accept "their own Gypsies" back into Austrian territory, with or without documents. However, on 30 April 1912, the Italian police station at Ala received a postcard sent by Maria Gabrielli thanking the Austrian guards for their kindness and indicating where to send the cart they had been travelling in (i.e. at Domegliara—a village just over the Italian border—in the province of Verona). From later investigations made by Italian police, it emerged that Maria Gabrielli, with four children, crossed the rail border less than 24 hours after being accepted into Austria, going in the direction of Domegliara, while Lodovico left on 30 April, reaching the family, who had already joined up with another "company of Gypsies". Even if orders were immediately sent to find them, they had disappeared without trace. (Trevisan, 2020, p. 66)

On the one hand, this example shows the vehemence with which the states reject(ed) "Gypsies" and did not want them on their "own national territory", but on the other hand it also shows the sophistication and elegance with which the family networks move(d) in this hostile environment.

But why do we only learn about the existence of the Sinti 100 years ago from police files in the archives, and why are these details only sometimes mentioned in fleeting narratives by the Sinti? What makes their presence in these regions so suggestive, and how can we let the dead rest and yet show that the Sinti have probably been inhabitants of the Italian Eastern Alps for several centuries? Here it can be helpful to take a step back and look at the whole thing from a comparative distance.

Historical Localisation and Silence

In her examination of one of the most significant ethnographies of Roma people in Europe, *"Nous on ne parle pas": Les vivants et les morts chez les Manouches* by Patrick Williams (1993), Lise Foisneau (2021) emphasises the importance of historical location as well as the specificity of ethnographic detail in this work on the Manouche in the French Massif Central. The Manouche who Williams met in the 1950s and 1960s apparently did not speak of their dead. The silent veneration of their dead is part of a general art of silence and absence that holds the Manouche together as a community. The Manouche conceal the names and destroy the possessions of the deceased and leave former settlement sites alone as places of the dead where they no longer go. This silence about the dead is singular and restricted to the French Manouche in the Massif Central. And while Williams mentions the historical context somewhat casually at the end of his book, Foisneau addresses the historical context of this silence explicitly: The Manouche encountered by Patrick Williams as a child in the 1960s were victims of persecution by the Vichy regime during the Second World War, by the German occupiers and also by the French resistance fighters during the liberation (Foisneau, 2021, p.654). Williams notes at the end of his book that his observations took place a few years after the *Gaçe* had decided to put an end to the "Gypsies" once and for all. Although Williams only mentions this in passing, Foisneau wonders whether it was for precisely this reason that the Manouche, whose relatives, including children and young people, were arbitrarily shot, decided to remain silent out of respect for these dead.

Certainly, we will never know which social practices are a consequence of historical experiences or how historical experiences inscribe themselves on knowledge about the world, but we should definitely consider the possibility of practising silence about oneself as being a "response" to historical experiences. For Williams, the societies of, among others, the Manouche, Roma and Sinti – neither marginal nor dominated – never ceased to constitute themselves differently in Western societies. The ethnographic description of the Manouche's gesture of manifesting their being in this world in *Nous on ne parle pas* (we do not talk) has been noted with great admiration by anthropol-

ogists, for Williams succeeded in writing in depth, in counterpoint, quietly⁴ about the silence of the Manouche. *Nous on ne parle pas* became an essential ethnographic guide during my encounters with the Sinti in the Italian Eastern Alps, even though the Sinti are quite different, and yet at the same time similar to the Manouche in Auvergne and Limousin described by Patrick Williams. While thinking about and marvelling at the non-speaking, the silencing, the silent remembering, the meticulousness in the selection of details that are recounted, as well as the disappearance of entire episodes from the Sinti's repertoire of memory, it is helpful to consider the meaning of time among the Sinti: And this brings us back to the Sinti in the Alps.

“The Time, That Is the Others”⁵

Here it is useful to adopt Foisenau's (2021) suggestion for how to understand how or if historical context shapes the Sinti's relationship with the dead. How is it that the Sinti are still not considered by the other Italian Alpine inhabitants also to belong? How is it that the Sinti think of themselves very much as inhabitants of the regions in which they live, as Sinti of South Tyrol, Sinti of Piedmont, Sinti of Veneto, but have little use for proving, as the *Gaže* do, their identity and claim to territory through “historical evidence”? In order to understand these phenomena, it is necessary to leave behind our cognitive straitjackets (Oliviera, 2021), which in a European context are certainly shaped by national and sub-national realities and which also rely on historical evidence, in favour of bespoke tools.

Let us look again at the events on the border between the Habsburg Empire and the Kingdom of Italy during the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Paola Trevisan reports (following the sources) that after her illegal but successful crossing of the border in April 1912, Maria Gabrielli wrote a polite postcard to the border authorities thanking the Austrian guards for their kindness and indicating where to send the cart she had been travelling in. I have never seen Sinti making fun of the police, on the contrary, the police are explicitly not provoked, the aim is not to attract atten-

4 Book jacket text, Williams (1993).

5 The full quote from Patrick Williams is below.

tion. Therefore, Maria Gabrielli did not tease the police here, but made use of her ability to relate to certain *Gaže*, in a similar way to the much poorer Genovefa in 1905. For both the women we meet in the archive, it seems to have been possible to rely on *Gaže* support. These forms of relationships that we can reconstruct historically – in the example of Genovefa this is very explicit (cf. Tauber, 2019, p. 69ff) – certainly have a quality of informal obligation.

But how do the Sinti locate these relationships in their social universe? We can get close to an answer to this question by looking at their relationships with their dead, which make their understanding of both time and space intelligible. In their interactions with their children, adult Sinti often test whether they remain present in the social universe of the living: “When I am dead, will you do this and that (as I did)?”.⁶ When the Sinti show their children how to do this or that, it is often accompanied by the demand: “Will you do it like me?”. What the living check in preparation for their death is their presence post-mortem in the everyday lives of their relatives. That is, their children will do certain things in the same way as their deceased parents or other relatives. This is because in the social life of the Sinti, in the shaping of their common language (which also includes silence), the close deceased carry more weight: They provide the concrete traces that are nothing more than the respectful continuation of the traces of the temporally more distant dead, who are no longer present as individuals in the memories of the living. Thus, their traces are followed, and they differ from the anonymous deceased of the entire cohesive network in which they were known. But “their dead” did the same as those now living and respected the traces of their own dead. For the Sinti, it is therefore not necessary to know the stories of Genovefa, Maria or Lodovico in historical detail, because their experiences have been passed down through the generations through respect: through careful speech, acts and silence.⁷

6 In the following paragraph I refer to the analysis of the conception of time in Tauber (2014, pp.28–42).

7 Williams writes, “that it is noteworthy that some Manouche [use] the French word ‘pays’ (country)...where the dead and the living live together peacefully” (Williams, 2021, p. 654). “This good understanding requires that both sides abide by a set of rules. The living must take care that they do not unjustly invoke the dead, that they do not forget to visit them, and that they continue to take care of what was dear to them. For their part, the dead are asked not to impose themselves too much on the living and not to bring them misfor-

For the Sinti, the choice – the interpretation, the shaping of things in a Sinti manner (*romano kova*) – of their own life plan, is an individual decision. This is a decision, however, that is never made without reference to their dead and thus turns, in the structural sense of Robert Hertz and Lévi-Strauss, the individual decision into a collective one. If the reference to, and relationship with, the dead falls away, or in the words of the Sinti, if the deceased are not respected, then they become restless. And this restlessness of the dead becomes a threat to the living, which can express itself through failures or other fates. Ultimately, the Sinti are required to think of the modalities shaping the individual and thus coherent (Sinti) life (cf. Tauber, 2014, pp. 113ff.).

All individuals who, in the eyes of the Sinti, have a similar relationship with their anonymous dead are considered to be Sinti. “The linguistic nuances, styles of dress, forms of economic activity, musical styles etc., play a role in mutual observation insofar as all these characteristics are ultimately tracks that the living follow out of respect for particular dead” (Tauber, 2014, p. 41). But why, then, is it so difficult to bury all these Sinti in a common graveyard, as suggested by the cemetery administrator above? The practices of remembering are egalitarian, the Sinti community recognises the fact that each individual decides for themselves how to remember, and what should be remembered (cf. *ibid.*). At the same time, this leads to tensions when observing others; rarely or never do the practices of respect for the close deceased produce conditions of ease between the various families. Respect between the living who are always understood as equals – there are no social hierarchies, respect is given among equals – is at the same time subject to constant social control. In the older literature on *romani* people (e.g. Nicolini, 1969), reference is often made to the family as being the most important unit. This view is based on the Central European nuclear family from a Christian perspective and excludes the dimension of the connection with the dead – individually

tune” (*ibid.*). “It seems that this works in the departments of Creuse, Puy-de-Dôme and Allier where some inhabitants of the Massif Central, the Manouche, travel. In these regions, places are divided between the living and the dead: the places where one lives, the places where one no longer goes (*mü lengre placi*, ‘the places of the dead’), and the places where one meets again (*u gräbli*, ‘the graves’). When asked how to go on living when someone is missing, the Manouche in Auvergne answer that the dead are always present. Their concern is neither forgetting nor remembering but maintaining life together in a world surrounded by Gadje” (*ibid.*).

and collectively – for whose respect daily care and attention is required. Only within the small unit of the family is respect for the close deceased possible. This is articulated differently from the respect for anonymous dead people, whom the Sinti connect as a group, as a cohesive network. Any disruption of this respect leads to tension and conflict, which is why the Sinti spend more time avoiding other Sinti than seeking out their company, as Patrick Williams summarises in his preface to my monograph:

Are they at least aware, one wonders, that the cultural proximity that allows them to immediately share a secret understanding and familiarity has to do with the fact that they have common ancestors, and thus a partly identical historical experience? Admittedly, their attitude, that of one as well as the other, is precisely not to cultivate the memory of the past. The “tradition” is not an object of knowledge for them. Other Sinti exist a little everywhere: This statement is enough to ensure the serenity that lies in the affirmation of the identity of every Sinto or Sinta. The fraternisation of all Sinti in no way leads to the asking of questions about other Sinti: If they are Sinti, then they live like us; unnecessarily asking questions, unnecessarily examining it. (Williams, 2014, p. II)

Referencing the Sinti dead as a whole is not only a cohesive moment, but also shows the timelessness and immutability of their Sinti existence. Neither change nor movement occurs where these dead are. Their own dead will join them without displacing the others. The dead are in no fixed place. In the understanding of the Sinti, they are always there: “the dead are with you, always” (Tauber, 2014, p. 42). In their relationship with their deceased (their own and anonymous dead) there is no place and no time: That is all – that is always – that is the Sinti.

The establishing of the immutable and the setting in motion of time (one could suggest paraphrasing Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous saying, that for the Sinti: “Time, that is the others” are linked to *romane* events: Immutable or in motion, it is the Sinti time, and not the history constructed by the *Gaḡe*. (Williams, 2014, p. III)

The *Gaḡe* and their history stand outside of these relationships with deceased Sinti. At the same time, they are always part of the Sinti’s lives. The Sinti al-

ways live in the midst of the *Gağe*; they say of themselves that without the *Gağe* there would be no Sinti. For the Sinti, the *Gağe* are wild and uncultivated, and the Sinti separate themselves from them through the high culture of *respect*. At the same time, the Sinti and their relationship with the dead will, in a sense, only exist as long as the *Gağe* exist. What the dead demand of the living in terms of respect and reciprocity is a guarantee for the living remaining Sinti in the midst of the *Gağe*.

Ethnographic and Historical Facticity

Returning to the people we met from the State Archives in a town in the Italian Eastern Alps, we cannot know whether Genovefa, Lodovico and his wife Maria had a similar relationship with their dead as the Sinti I met 90 years later or the Manouche in France with whom Patrick Williams lived as a youth. In the narratives of the Sinti, Lodovico appeared more often (cf. Tauber, 2014, pp. 69ff), Genovefa was never mentioned as a concrete person, but her experiences and the shades of her memories with the peasants and the police were omnipresent as a narrative topos.

So let us return to the question of the strange absence of the Sinti in the discourses of belonging in the Alps. In order to address the tension between absence on the one hand and presence on the other, it seems important to take up the argument of Lise Foisneau. She notes that the legend surrounding *Nous on ne parle pas* undoubtedly stems from the “freedom of writing” (ibid.) that Williams claimed for and demanded of himself. Thus, he describes meticulously how the Manouche talk about the dead and talk about them constantly. But, according to Foisneau, the anthropologist has taken the liberty of using an antiphrasis in the title that can easily deceive a less attentive reader. The non-speaking of the title has led non-French-speaking readers and French historians to portray the “Gypsies” as groups who do not speak about their past, or as those who would not give the same space to material traces of memory as the *Gağe* (ibid., p. 655). The problem here is that an ethnographic facticity (Jean-Luc Poueyto, in ibid., footnote 7) – the Manouche in the French Massif Central – is used to imply “Gypsies” in general. This form of superficial generalisation, which anthropology cannot agree with per se, which Pat-

rick Williams himself has refuted through his two monographs on the Rom Kalderash (1984) and the Manouche (1993), carries a considerable risk in a contemporary context as well: In pursuing the question of why the Sinti are virtually absent from the historical, sociological, geographical and political literature on the Alps, in this case the Italian Eastern Alps, it is necessary to link ethnographic description to the larger context.

On the one hand, therefore, it is necessary to address the Sinti's respect for their dead and to ask whether their mnemonic practices require a certain restraint when dealing with their deceased, who are anonymous to them, in archival research. On the other hand, we must ask ourselves whether their position in the societies surrounding them contributes to their narratives and memories being given less credence than others. When I brought together the narratives of the Sinti with the archival material, which at the time was under-researched, it was not a question of verifying the accuracy of their narratives and memories. Rather, I followed the practice of the Sinti themselves of referring to the writing (of the *Gaže*) in order to use it for their own truth. When I began this process, it became clear how certain events in the world of the *Gaže*, although parallel, are not there in the stories of the Sinti and thus, in a sense, cancel out the events in the world of the *Gaže*, while others have a specific meaning. From the point of view of historians, this approach may be unsafe – historical inaccuracies and misinterpretations are a given – but that is the *truth* of the *Gaže* (Tauber, 2014, p.52).

For the Sinti, the truth is different, they do not oppose this hegemonic historiography with their own histories. Their meticulous and detailed remembering and commemoration, which moves along with their Sinti, places and events and expresses their *respect* for their dead, enables them to remain in contact with their deceased, to honour them, to ask them for help and advice when they are at a loss and, yes, also to remain true Sinti amid the *Gaže*. Here we come to the core of the reconstruction of their movements and their process of memory. The silence, the stillness, stands in the middle of their speaking, not as a rhetorical pause, but as an essential part of memory and remembering, an essential part of this speaking. It is also part of their memory, which from the outside looks like a fragmentary narrative, but from the inside forms a whole, because the living people enact their relationship to the dead in both speaking and silence (cf. Tauber, 2014, p. 53). In some ways their

relationship with their dead makes them unreceptive to hegemonic discourse and its practice, which tends to exclude them. But scholarly attentiveness is called for because, as Foisneau notes with some indignation (Foisneau, 2021, p. 655), Patrick Williams' masterpiece – which has provided several generations of anthropologists with ethnographic inspiration, food for thought, melancholy but also a knowledge culture which does not allow for clear definitions – has been used as a justification for not including the Manouche and other Roma groups in historical (oral history) research. And again, their practice of memory does not mean that forgetting their victims in historical world events and forgetting their presence in the present does not injure them. And here we are going in circles because the accuracy of the details is not always able to preserve *respect* for the dead, while generalisation makes it impossible to identify the specificity of a certain family network of Sinti in the Eastern Alps.

Concluding Remarks

We have seen that the question of speaking and writing about the presence of the Sinti in the Italian Eastern Alps is not a trivial matter. Rather, it raises ethical, epistemological and political questions, because the stories of the families of Genovefa, Maria and Lodovico cannot be told without taking into account the desire of the living to *let the dead rest*. Are the Sinti here concerned that we – the *Gaže* – are unable to treat their anonymous dead with respect? Because Sinti do speak about episodes and anecdotes from the past, over and over again they show how precisely they remember, how carefully they store things, how mindfully they are able to speak. Or is it rather a practice that for once has nothing to do with the *Gaže*? The recognition of their presence and their suffering is of great concern to the Sinti, such as when the victims of the Holocaust are commemorated. They are also by no means indifferent to the fact that they are repeatedly “forgotten” in the list of victims.

But writing about their presence without passing over their concern to let the dead rest remains an epistemological challenge. And that is not in itself only a potential conflict between *Gaže* and Sinti, but among the Sinti themselves: about whom can one speak without disrespecting others, the other

living Sinti and so their deceased. They settle this among themselves by scattering amidst the *Gaḡe*; the example of the cemetery at the beginning of this contribution could not make this clearer.

For the Sinti in the Italian Eastern Alps, Genovefa, Maria and Lodovico are in a place where all the deceased Sinti are, a place that accompanies them, a place where all their dead can be found, and which guarantees the cohesion of the Sinti. They are the dead whose traces are remembered without knowing the exact details of their individual stories. And if it is not possible to be precise, if it is not possible to refer to the accuracy of memory and the specific places of what happened, then the Sinti do not speak about it. This is because as soon as speaking becomes imprecise, it threatens to become disrespectful, and the Sinti's speaking – in its volume, fullness and passionate verve – is always and first and foremost respectful of their deceased. They do not limit themselves to a single space, and chronological time is irrelevant for their dead are always with them.

As Cristina Grasseni's contribution to this volume shows, Sinti are not the only mobile or nomadic groups in the Alps: Transhumance and movement are inscribed in the logic of the land and the self-image of the Alps. However, the Sinti, their relationship to the land and their deceased have been concealed; and if they are secretive and silent about themselves, they have also been silenced by others, the *Gaḡe*. For ethnographic research in the Italian Eastern Alps, this means confronting two elements of their ephemeral presence, because the reasons for the Sinti not speaking and the *Gaḡe*'s concealment of the Sinti's presence could not be more opposed. Patrick Williams rightly reminds us that writing about and trying to define their presence in society first requires establishing that they do belong to our society. Only when we admit that they belong to our society can the interest of their presence in the Alps be appreciated. And to return to the idea laid out at the beginning, we know that there are Sinti and other groups of Roma dwelling in the Alps, but so far, their social practices have not been connected with the problems, situations and questions that we associate with this mountainous European region. And since Sinti do not have to own land to be involved with it, their practices may force a change of perspective which would be a way for us, and anthropologists in particular, to see the Alps in a new way.

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Epilogue

Alpine Anthropology in the Anthropocene

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It is a great pleasure for me to write an epilogue for this collection of articles about one of the anthropological topics which is dearest to my heart, the Alps. Growing up in the foothills of the Alps, they were also my first field of study as an anthropologist. My point of departure was an interest in the differences between Swiss *Volkskunde* (folklore studies) and American anthropologists who studied the Alps during the 1970s. The encounter between these related, but different, disciplines initiated a dialogue and served as a starting point for an Alpine anthropology, as evidenced by several articles in this volume. Anthropological research in the Alps started in the Holocene, took an ethnographic turn and was critical in the emergence of political ecology. Today, anthropologists explore what it means to live in the Alps during the Anthropocene. In carving out this role, Alpine anthropology became a field of its own, with its own tradition, and as such, it makes an important contribution to anthropology in general.

Blind Spots

In his book *Blind Spots* the writer Teju Cole (2017) combines the pictures he took during several stays in Switzerland with short texts. One of these photographs shows a rocky crossroads on the Gemmi Pass, connecting the municipality of Leukerbad with the neighbouring canton. In the accompanying text, the reader learns that it was at this spot the African-American writer James Baldwin came up with the title for his first book *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (Baldwin, 1957). James Baldwin, who had travelled to Leukerbad to write

a novel, was, to his knowledge, the first Black person the people of Leukerbad had ever laid eyes on. The residents stared at him in amazement, and children ran after him, calling out “Neger, Neger”¹. Baldwin saw in this situation a reflection of when people in Africa saw a White person for the first time, and these observations influenced his novel about slavery and the relationship between Black and White people in the USA. The other photographs and texts that Teju Cole produced in Switzerland subvert the cliché of the over-photographed Alpine scenery: The laundry on the line or the parking lot take centre stage, while the snow-covered mountain peaks almost disappear into the background. In another picture, the radiant panorama of the Alpine landscape serves as wallpaper on a cabinet in a hotel room. These photographs and comments offer multi-faceted perspectives and shed light on the blind spots in our perception of Alpine landscapes in the 21st century.

Teju Cole’s book came to mind as I read the articles in this volume on Alpine research. They, too, draw attention to blind spots, to what unfolds outside of our attention, to the hidden stories of the Sinti in South Tyrol, the cheesemakers in the province of Bergamo, the climate researchers on the glaciers, the tourists in Verbier, or the herders in the Julian Alps. Anthropological research challenges the familiar patterns of perception and interpretation of the Alpine region, opening up new perspectives on the crises of the present, which manifest themselves in the Alps in numerous ways. The authors in this volume tell, archive, and question stories about life in specific places in the mountains as a way to uncover individual layers of time and thus show the full range of conditions under which life in the Alps was and is possible. In this fashion, they continue an Alpine anthropology which dates back to the beginning of modern Alpine research in the 1970s.

1 A highly offensive term for Black people in German (Deutschlandfunk, 2022).

Hot Spots

The Alps are precarious in many ways, and it has always required a sophisticated system of behaviours and techniques to sustain continuous life in Alpine villages: hence Robert Netting called his study of an Alpine village *Balancing on an Alp* (1981). This precariousness is more pronounced than ever today and affects the Alpine landscape as a whole. Foremost are the consequences of climate change, with the mountains being a place where its effects are particularly striking: the rapid melting of glaciers, the thawing of permafrost, and the dramatic threat to biodiversity. The Alps are an arena which is an exemplar of the Anthropocene. Human activities leave traces that will be identified in the distant future, whether it is the tunnelling through mountains for military and road construction or the consequences of ski tourism. The COVID-19 virus spread across Europe from the ski resort of Ischgl via tourists returning to their home countries. And the world's economic elite gather in Davos at the World Economic Forum. Are the Alps periphery or centre? These events make it clear that we need to realign ourselves in both time and space: Where are we actually when we are in the Alps?

Alpine Chronotopes

The term Anthropocene may still be debated in geological circles, but it has value as an analytical concept in the social sciences and humanities.² Here, the term serves as a spatial and temporal configuration in which phenomena as diverse as climate change, a viral disease, or the global economy can be discussed as contemporary elements of our societies (Pratt, 2017). The Anthropocene is a chronotope, following Bakhtin (1981), just as the Alps, their glaciers, or their green pastures are. Once, the white mountain peaks served as national symbols; today, they represent the consequences of global climate change. By focusing on individual chronotopes, various layers of space, time and meaning are revealed. For example, the mountain dweller was once revered as a national hero of freedom, while in the 20th century, they were re-

2 See, for example, Antweiler (2022) for an overview.

vealed as a poor soul who could not make it to the valley. Today, there are the “new highlanders” who inhabit mountain villages threatened by depopulation after the world economic crisis of the early 21st century. It is one of Bakhtin’s observations that old meanings tend to disappear, but they can suddenly reappear in a new context.

A pertinent example of a new chronotope, a shift in our coordinates, is the story of Ötzi, who died more than 5,000 years ago during the Holocene and whose body was buried in the supposedly eternal ice. Ötzi resurfaced in a new era, the Anthropocene, when the climate-change-driven melting ice released his body and it was found by astonished tourists. For a while, there was confusion about where Ötzi was actually found: was it in Austria or Italy? The border, running along a watershed on the glacier, had shifted as a result of climate change and is now the first movable border in the Schengen Area, measured daily.³ Ötzi was thus much more than a greeting from the past, he questioned the system by which we determine where we are. Where exactly was Ötzi found now, when the nation and the map are no longer our sole frames for our location and description? Where are we today when we are in a place in the Alps?

The Alpine Region as a Critical Zone

In anthropology, ecological conditions have always played a role in the depiction of the Other, especially when examining non-European peoples and cultures. When looking at their own societies, anthropologists prioritize concepts such as nation, identity, or class. However, in recent decades, the division between nature and culture has been repeatedly challenged, not least by anthropology itself, giving way to more complex approaches, such as political ecology, with John Cole and Eric Wolf, two of the originators of the concept, being prominent figures in Alpine research. Bruno Latour (2018) provides a contemporary response to the question of where we are when we are “down-to-earth” at a specific location. He adopted the term “critical zone” from the geosciences, which describe it as the zone from the depth of the soil

3 This is derived from Ferrari et al. (2016) <http://www.italianlimes.net/project.html>; see also Krauß (2018).

to the top of the vegetation and beyond to the climate envelope. In short, it is the zone where life originates and is possible. Today, the term critical zone might also be understood in a metaphorical sense, a place where life is precarious, endangered, and in need of care. This definition certainly applies to extreme landscapes like the Alps, where what is usually regarded as the background or stage for human activities – soil, rock, weather, atmosphere – is in the foreground. Mountains are not just a backdrop, but they are active too, they have agency. Geology matters, as the French Annales-School historian Fernand Braudel (1998) knew, connecting changes over a geological timescale with those of more human duration, such as the emergence of civilisations and historical events.

The anthropological method is characterised by its patience and duration, enabling the uncovering of various layers, breathing life into the skeleton of numbers and statistics which are normally used to define people and places. The articles in this book shed light on those areas which escape the attention of the objectifying sciences, and they inquire about what it means to be human in Alpine landscapes. Anthropological research and the production of knowledge about life in the Alps always has to define its field as a critical zone: It is situated in, and has to define the interaction and interconnection between, the elements, the weather and the people who inhabit and shape these vertical landscapes.

Narratives of Change

Glaciers are melting rapidly before our eyes: Within my lifetime, the Rhone Glacier and the Aletsch Glacier have shrunk dramatically. They have done so before, and there was a need to understand how changes in climate occur. My great grandfather, an amateur scientist, published a theory in 1900 about the last glacial cycle and the transition from the Pleistocene to the Holocene, which is remarkably valid even today (Krauß, 2015). At the same time, the Alps were becoming an icon of national identity, one of many homelands in Germany or a national symbol in Switzerland. Growing up as a teenager in the foothills of the Alps in the post-war era, I wondered if the Alps were, in fact, fascist because of Hitler's residence at Obersalzberg near Berchtes-

gaden and the strict discipline of the Alpine Club's activities. As a young anthropologist, I chose the Alps as a field of study and I wondered about the strict distinction in German speaking countries between domestic *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde*, that is, anthropology. The arrival of American anthropologists in the Alps challenged this.⁴ Arnold Niederer, the successor to Richard Weiß, the founder of post-war folklore studies in Switzerland, mediated in the dialogue between folklore studies and the anthropologists from outside. Throughout his career, Niederer sought to free folklore studies from its nationalist biases – in which it was deeply entangled – and he helped to initiate an ethnographic turn in folklore studies. Richard Weiß had already debunked the myth of the Alpine mountain dweller as a Swiss national hero. Using the example of a photograph of a young man on a moped with a large alphorn under his arm, Weiß asked himself: Was it possible to reconcile tradition and modernity? Arnold Niederer, in turn, discovered in the *Gemeinwerk*, the collective work of mountain farmers in the Valais, an alternative to the capitalist production of commodities. For both, it was a central task to free folklore studies from its nationalist delusions and transform it into a modern field of study. It is worth revisiting the beginnings of what is now an anthropological engagement with the Alps, especially since much of what they overcame is gaining renewed relevance today.

This is particularly true in the face of the alarming rise of far-right and populist tendencies in Alpine countries, which are gaining ground in remote areas with their theories of the unity of people and territory (Stacul, 2015). Rewilding, reforestation, nature conservation, and EU agricultural policies are often perceived as foreign interlopers by populists in Alpine regions. In the light of the necessity to adapt to the consequences of climate change, which are particularly acute in many Alpine valleys, we can learn from the mistakes of the past. The study of the multifaceted narratives of change in the field's history and the region itself can act as an antidote and offer alternatives to a return to an imagined idyllic world or to top-down technocratic measures, whether in agriculture, nature conservation or climate adaptation. Narratives of change provide access to the many layers of time that make up an Alpine landscape (Krauß and Bremer, 2020).

4 The following information is all based on Krauß (1987).

Revisiting and Renewing Alpine Anthropology

In the 1980s, the transition from studying non-literate to peasant societies marked a turning point in anthropology. While European ethnography, with a focus on the Mediterranean, was gaining momentum, anthropology in the backyard had limited prestige among well-travelled anthropologists. Even when John Cole (1977) announced that anthropology was now “coming part-way home”, this did not prompt a great change in practice. The concept of symmetrical anthropology and the idea that “we have never been modern” (Latour, 1993) were still generally unknown. However, as a student working on my master’s thesis on the encounter of domestic folklore studies (*Volkskunde*) and (mostly American) anthropological research in the Swiss Alpine Region (Krauß, 1987), I had no doubt that our own societies were no less exotic than others. Were the crimes of World War II not exotic? The Holocaust, racial doctrine, and the ideology of a people without territory, all drew their justification from so-called scientific approaches, including *Volkskunde*. In my opinion, it was high time for anthropology to come home, and with John Cole and Eric Wolf, who wrote the classic *The Hidden Frontier* (1977) on Alpine anthropology, it was in good hands. They had a different, enlightening, and materialist approach to ethnicity, nation, and ecology. The encounter of Swiss *Volkskunde* with American anthropologists who conducted field research in the Alps in the 1970s gave me the opportunity to confront my phantasm of the fascist Alps and was also my entry into anthropology as a profession.

With the current volume, it becomes clear that this encounter between folklorists and anthropologists serves well as a foundational myth of Alpine anthropology. Despite lying dormant for decades, it is more relevant today than ever. The anthropologists in this volume implicitly or explicitly take up this thread and develop it. Their unity lies not in the geographical coherence of the Alpine region or in a shared theoretical framework, but in a methodologically informed engagement with the experience of “making a living in the Alps”. This collection of articles articulates “hidden histories” (Schneider and Rapp, 1995) and seeks to understand the Alpine world from an existential perspective. Alpine anthropology, in many ways, stands in the tradition of Malinowski, and carries it forward into the 21st century.⁵

5 See Tauber and Zinn (2023).

Paolo Viazzo retraces the origins of Alpine anthropology and, almost fifty years later, transposes its questions to the present. At first glance, the opposing pairs that structure his retrospective may seem obvious, but as his article and the essays in this volume progress, they reveal an intense dialogue about what Alpine research means in the Anthropocene. The debate between folklorists and anthropologists revolved around whether being native was an epistemological advantage (native vs foreigner), it covered the conflict between the domestic and exotic, i.e., whether one's own culture was worthy of ethnographic research and who the preserver of culture was, the local or the newcomer. The articles presented here address these tensions in different ways. These are questions that go to the heart of anthropology and which are discussed over and over again in ever-new contexts. Eric Wolf addressed the tension between who is marginal and where the centre is in *Europe and the Peoples Without History* (1983 [2010]), just as Bruno Latour did ten years later in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993). The Alps no longer lie at the periphery; as a hotspot of climate crisis, they belong at the centre of critical debates in the Anthropocene.

One of the points of conflict between the American anthropologists and local folklorists was the duration of fieldwork. Folklorists often remained loyal to their field for a lifetime, wandering from alp to alp, knowing every mountain farmer, while they accused anthropologists of having a “slash and burn” mentality with their – typically – one-year of fieldwork. While these debates are now a thing of the past, the long duration of field research, the documentation of processes over long periods, and, following in the footsteps of Eric Wolf, their historical roots are characteristics of all the contributions in this volume. Valeria Siniscalchi dissects long-term fieldwork as a process, a movement between different places, based on comparative research in the Apennines and the French Alps. She follows in the footsteps of Mediterranean anthropology and Alpine research but, above all, she follows the thread of heritage, demonstrating that space must be understood primarily as an economic factor. In her analysis of conceptions of space and nature at the example of the Parc National des Écrins, she uses political ecology as a central element of Alpine research, closely engaging with the work of Eric Wolf.

Anthropology as a slow movement in time and space is also a theme in Cristina Grasseni's work, who is an expert on the slow food movement. She

explores spatial and seasonal movements using the example of Alpine farming and transhumance, showing how “in the last decade, care for the ‘alps’ (grass, cows and milk) has begun to mean also care for the microbiological extracts and strands from the local microbiome”. This shifts the focus from material culture, which has always characterized Alpine research, toward bacteria and microbes as non-human actors. Grasseni demonstrates how cheese varieties that have emerged from the seasonal movements of Alpine farming and transhumance are labelled with a sense of “locality”. This leads us into the world of European regulations which deeply influence local practices today. The hallmark of Alpine field research is not places but “practices of locality”. These culminate in accommodation for tourists built from clay, where visitors can simulate life on the alp and engage their senses by smelling hay, touching wood and experiencing the soundtrack of a cowshed through video installations. In many ways, it is indeed a long way from the considerations of Richard Weiß, who, based on a photo of a moped rider carrying a traditional alphorn, pondered whether tradition and modernity could ever be reconciled. Yet, it is this long journey that leads to the postmodern “practices of locality”, which Grasseni and other authors describe in this volume.

Storytelling: The Alpine Pastures as a Chronotop

The term Alps does not originate from the white mountain peaks but from the green meadows that are created by seasonal farming in high-altitude areas above mountain villages. Alpine pastures are undoubtedly a chronotope, with the various meanings ascribed to them providing insights into the prevailing perception of time. Goethe could scarcely imagine how people could live in such a harsh region, while Albrecht von Haller considered mountain dwellers to be free national heroes. In contrast, Richard Weiß noted that after the war only those who were too poor or too old to resist the call to the valleys and the temptations of the department store catalogue still lived in the mountains (Krauß, 1987). Today, there are the “new highlanders”, refugees from the city and austerity politics, who take up herding in the mountains. And these are merely some of the meanings attributed to the green pastures of the Alps, each of them carrying meaningful messages for their time.

Four of the articles in this book comprise ethnographically grounded storytelling which reveals the diversity and dynamism of these seemingly remote areas. These are landscapes which are precarious in many ways, ecologically, economically, and demographically. Being subject to conservation and climate policies, they are permanently “caught between abandonment, rewilding, and agro-environmental management” (Krauß and Olwig, 2018).

In her meticulous ethnographic study of Vinigo di Cardore, Anna Paini describes how the remaining inhabitants tell stories of an unusual winter snowfall, of population aging, and altered forest management. According to Paini, these are narratives that develop a philosophy of care based on connection and dependence. In earlier times, the surrounding woodland was used for agriculture, while today the forest is advancing and is perceived as a threat, a sign of disorder. Migration patterns have changed; formerly the ice cream makers who operated abroad returned, but today, the emigrants stay away. The climate is changing and becoming unpredictable, and the forest is no longer managed according to old norms, but is advancing further and is altering the social and physical microclimate. Many vignettes unfold into an ethnographic narrative where the sense of place of the Vinighesi is taken literally: all the senses are engaged, and an image of an intact landscape emerges, one that returns agency to people and presents the encroachment of the forest as a loss.

Špela Ledinek Lozey conducted long-term fieldwork on an Alpine pasture in the Julian Alps in Slovenia. Here the distinction between insiders and outsiders seems to blur over the length of her fieldwork and repeated visits, as well as her work in the dairy. Her deep knowledge of the Krstenica alp comes from regularly revisiting both her fieldnotes and the field site. This allows her to analyse the changes in the recruitment of herders, of ownership structures and the meanings of the alp, along with the tensions arising from them, and to compare these events with her own interpretations. This method of reflective participant observation reveals that the Krstencia alp is not the common ground of an otherwise diverse Alpine community, but their uncommon ground. The alp is not viewed differently by different actors. It is “a pluriverse and a shared setting” across many different actors, both human and non-human. The tensions arise from differences in worldviews and being in the world rather than distinctions between local and non-local actors.

It involves a continuous negotiation of interests among those invested in Alpine farming, with common goals, rather than traditional politics which exclude certain actors. This form of “cosmopolitics”, as advocated by Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (2016), acknowledges ontological differences and promotes a pluriverse: a preservation of plurality.

One starting point for Almut Schneider’s article is the crisis faced by high-altitude farming, once already described by Richard Weiß during the middle of the 20th century. The regional South-Tyrolean government recognized this problem in the 1970s and convinced mountain farmers to transition from diversified self-sustaining agriculture to a monoculture of dairy farming. This ensured the families had a livelihood and the cultural landscape, which is crucial for tourism, was preserved. Today it is not surprising to see trucks loaded with soybean-based concentrated feed climbing the narrow mountain roads. Schneider juxtaposes this with the hybrid apples produced under hi-tech conditions by cooperatives in South Tyrol and then marketed as “pure” and natural products. Through two case studies of mountain farmers in South Tyrol, Schneider portrays this paradox of modernity from an insider’s perspective, emphasizing the importance of the role of inheritance and how biographical events, climate change, market mechanisms and the effects of recent international crises need to be balanced by mountain farmers. Ultimately, for her, dairy mountain farmers embody the paradox of modernity. The return to diversified agriculture may be an alternative, with some farmers already attempting this, and adaptation to climate change will further boost diversification.

Hot Spot Anthropology

The starting point for the research of John Cole and Eric Wolf in the 1970s was the different inheritance patterns in the German- and Italian-speaking parts of Val di Non. On one side, there were individual farms, each passed on to a single heir, and on the other side, there were clustered villages resulting from reallocation, where all the children were provided for. This came to mind when reading Andrea Boscoboinik’s and Vivianne Cretton’s article about Zermatt as a “place of strength” and Verbier as a “magic bubble”. Could

the contrast between ‘conservative’ Zermatt and ‘liberal’ Verbier also be due to different attitudes towards inheritance and the resulting ownership patterns, as suggested by the authors’ reference to clan-like family structures in the Valais?

Boscoboinik and Cretton integrate the mountain landscape, particularly the iconic view of the Matterhorn, into their vibrant portrait of the two tourist hotspots, Zermatt and Verbier. In good ethnographic tradition, they present an insider’s perspective and emphasize the diversity of the populations, as well as the differences within that diversity. It seems that everyone is under the spell of the magic of the Matterhorn and the Alps, from Portuguese domestic workers to Japanese tourists, from jewellery-clinking jetsetters and ravers from around the world, to local homeowners and hotel owners. Despite all the iconic symbolism and mediatisation, this still appears to be a place where the magic of the Alps is revealed to the observer. By examining inheritance structures, and thus forms of ownership, the subtle differences between Zermatt and Verbier become evident. Place is here de-territorialised in various ways due to the dynamics in the population – tourists, travelling employees, second-home owners – and held together by both hierarchies and flat structures, by “practices of locality”, and by the Matterhorn, which stands out because of its verticality.

Equally spectacular is the example of a glacier ski resort in the cryosphere, the realm of frozen water which mostly occurs at high altitudes. In her article, Herta Nöbauer combines verticality, climate change and ownership. Glaciers like the Pitztal glacier in Tyrol turn old hierarchies on their head: In the Alps the precariat usually lived at high altitudes, and the wealthy resided in the valleys. This is different in a ski resort where the glacier is the main attraction. Nöbauer uses a detailed examination of verticality to cast light on this, touching on physicality, geology, geomorphology, and ecology, as well as its social, political, and psychological elements. Different forms of ownership help structure the ski resort and its management, and working in the ski resort also creates vertical hierarchies among the residents. It is fascinating to see how this subtle infrastructure is literally on thin ice. The glacier and ski slopes are under permanent construction, water becomes a contested resource when it comes to making artificial snow, while the glacier is partially covered to prevent it from melting. Herta Nöbauer shows how the drama of

climate change plays out here, in the high Alps, and in doing so, she provides a glimpse into the accelerating pressures on mountain populations and their practices of locality as temperatures continue to rise.

Ski resorts in the cryosphere or tourist hubs in the shadow of the Matterhorn are far from being marginal or remote, they are each, in their own way, critical zones, with their own dynamics, assemblies, hierarchies and senses of place. Where are we, when we are on top of the Pitztal glacier or in a fashionable après-ski location in Verbiers? Who assembles there, who is included, who is excluded, and according to which rules? Hot spot anthropology does not differ from the anthropology of an Alpine pasture. It takes time to understand what is going on and what it means to be down-to-earth, be it on top of the world or in a club.

New Horizons for the Alps: Ethnographies, Reshaping Challenges and Emerging More-Than-Alpine Relations

This volume not only tells ethnographic stories of the history of and life in the Alps, but also about the blind spots in our perception and how to reveal them by continuously revisiting both the field and our fieldnotes. The Alps are, in many respects, a hot spot of climate change, and Alpine anthropology contributes to our understanding of what it means to be human in the Anthropocene.

A common feature of the articles in this volume is a consideration of fieldwork, the cautious and respectful approach to the Other, and, above all, the careful writing about it. Most of the articles can hardly be reduced to concise statements or partial information, they have to be read in full to become aware of the many twists and turns and many layers of seemingly familiar Alpine chronotopes. At its best, Alpine anthropology is about the art of storytelling. Designating James Baldwin as an honorary godfather of current Alpine anthropology is certainly not incorrect; his anecdote of his stay in Leukerbad tells us a great deal about how anthropologists gain their knowledge, the culture shock of seeing oneself in the mirror of the Other, and the transformation of these experiences through writing.

To speak about others means to speak with care and caution, as Elisabeth Tauber demonstrates in her article about the Sinti. This was a caution that led her to leave the material untouched for 26 years until she finally was ready to write about the fact that the Sinti are also residents of the Alps. Why were they never part of the ethnography of the Alpine region, its folklore and representation? What does active forgetting, exclusion and the stories behind them mean? The articles in this volume create a more inclusive Alpine region, a pluriverse that welcomes other worlds. This collection serves as a strong foundation for continuing – and sometimes rewriting – Alpine anthropology.

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