

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Even in the 1990s, remote Alpine regions seemed to be at the mercy of demographic, socio-economic and agricultural decline - without any alternative. Although many regions are still facing the out-migration of autochthons and the abandonment of mountain farms, my presentation aims to break these stereotypes dealing with lifestyle mobility. Recent results of two mixed-method studies conducted in peripheral communities of the Eastern Alps highlight the interplay among lifestyle, mobility and entrepreneurship in agriculture and tourism. While especially young people migrate from rural villages to urban centers in the quest of better prospects, others follow opposite paths. Fieldwork identified a rising number of urbanites who are relocating their residence temporarily or permanently to the Austrian and South Tyrolean highlands. Due to this amenity-led type of spatial mobility, newcomers seek an Alpine lifestyle to improve their quality of life. However, they only manage this by integrating themselves into the local community. Therefore, a first step is to overcome hurdles in the tenure of land, caused by a nontransparent real estate market in general or its strict regulations, specifically regarding the acquisition of second homes or the extrafamilial takeover of mountain farms. Secondly, those newcomers, who cannot transfer their work to the new residence via teleworking, have to participate in the regional labor market. Against this background, newcomers show a high degree of self-employment. They either use their previously acquired urban expertise in support of the prevailing economy or to establish individual niches closely related to agritourism, as I will illustrate with interview quotes and footage. Entering agriculture from scratch seems to be a step backwards in newcomers' social mobility, but it opens up a lifestyle far from their preceding occupation in the service or industrial sector. Furthermore, new entrants strive for self-determination and independence from agricultural industry, which rubs off on the local agricultural regime. The presence of newcomers, even outside agriculture, thus sustainably strengthen development in the investigated communities, rather than weakening it. The impacts of these lifestyle mobilities are evident both spatially and socially, ranging from the revitalization of abandoned farm building stock to the introduction of innovative economic strategies, but also including the preservation respective the advancement of traditional knowledge.