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AFTERWORD

Can Mobilities in Mountain Regions Be Understood through a Kind of ‘Mountain Factor’?

Bernard Debarbieux

This book, based on diverse research projects, addresses an important issue for mountain regions: the evolving patterns of individual and collective mobility to, from and within mountain places and regions. Increased mobility and changing patterns are not unique to these areas. All regions of the world, along with an ever-growing share of the global population, have experienced more frequent short- and long-distance, short- and long-term migrations over the last few decades. However, several mountain regions are said to have a specific long history in this matter and face significant recent transformations in human movement. By focusing on mobilities in mountain regions, this book implicitly suggests this idea. It weaves together a wide range of examples and case studies, sketching a complex matrix of flows observed in mountain regions through time and today, inviting the reader to understand these regions as a specific context for developing a distinct matrix. But in the end, can we conclude that mountain places and regions share common features in this matter? If so, what are the drivers of such specificity? As often when dealing with mountain matters, these

questions require clarification of the ontological and epistemological basis of such statements.

This is what this short afterword will strive to do, focusing its attention on the substratum of ancient and recent academic production on mountain mobilities, including the works gathered in this book. Here are the questions we will address: How has academic literature treated migrations as a specific feature of mountain societies? Can the search for common patterns be undertaken in similar ways when discussing traditional versus modern societies, and, more precisely, societies of the current reflexive modernity, in the words of Anthony Giddens? If such a search proves to be unfruitful, should we definitively abandon theories that articulate mountains and mobilities in some kind of explanatory form combining the two, and instead focus exclusively on the specificity of local arrangements of facts and meanings, using ‘mountains’ only as a convenient way of contextualising?

Naturalistic Understandings of Mountain Specific (Im)Mobilities

Let us recall the two main ways in which traditional forms of (im)mobility in mountain regions have been treated in historic academic literature. The first approach dates back to the Enlightenment and part of the nineteenth century: local communities were often described as being stuck within the shadows of their surrounding slopes, living in autarky and isolated from the rest of the world. This supposed isolation was characterised by contrasting valuations of tradition and modernity at the time: either as a stigma – a source of illness or narrow-mindedness – or, according to a pre-romantic or romantic vision, as a strength – a source of preservation of autonomous forms of sociality and political organisation.

The second body of traditional literature on mountain (im)mobilities is based on various comparative analyses of traditional agropastoral systems. It has been suggested that the spatial distribution of mountain natural environments and the high climatic contrasts between cold and warm, rainy and dry seasons have led people to rely on various types of resources located nearby or far away, adopting mobilities accordingly. Despite promoting two highly contrasted visions of (im)mobilities, these two bodies of work devoted to so-called mountain peoples have been guided by a collective spatial imaginary. This imaginary is grounded in certain naturalistic forms of knowledge or beliefs, eager to provide a universalist vision of ‘mountain people’ based on a universalist conception of what mountains are.

However, thanks to research done in history, anthropology and geography during the last decades, we have become aware of the limitations of such visions. We have learned to take into account the regional contextuality of spatial practices and the wide variety of collective behaviours that communities experience in terms of (im)mobility. Indeed, it is difficult to find examples outside of Europe of traditional long-range seasonal migrations of people circulating throughout a continent for commercial business during the winter season (such as the peddlers studied by Fontaine 1996). It is also difficult to find examples outside of the Japanese archipelago that resemble the mix of forms and motivations for migrations that existed there until the end of the nineteenth century. Therefore, the universality of motives and forms of traditional migrations in and out of mountain regions has reasonably been questioned.

A Mountain Factor in Industrial Times?

What about mobilities associated with the so-called industrial modernity (see Manfred Perlik's chapter in this book), which relies on a new set of tangible and intangible resources? Can some or all mobility trends be understood as common, to some degree, to all mountain communities? Are we able (and willing) to identify a new kind of 'mountain factor' that would explain these trends within their respective context? Let us try to explore this with some specific forms and motives of migrations.

Long-range and definitive work migrations have strongly impacted many European and Mediterranean mountain regions during the last two centuries. Migrations from the Southern French Alps to Mexico, as recalled by Mari Oiry Varacca in this book, are a good illustration of this. With the globalisation of the economy, similar long-distance work migrations have been occurring in many other regions of the world, such as those from Southern Mexico and the Andes to North America, or from the mountains of Northern Vietnam to many developed countries. In explaining this worldwide process – millions of people moving out from the mountains – scientists adopting a macroeconomic approach have mainly invoked the role of polarisation and urbanisation of modern economy, whose effects have impacted various kinds of rural areas. Therefore, the migrations out of the mountains, primarily rural, cannot be said to have been specific in nature, only in form and degree. This is exemplified by the century-long cohort of people who followed the rivers towards the lowlands and the seaside where urbanisation mainly took place. Indeed, the intensity of these migrations has been particularly high in mountain regions due to technical challenges and poor connectivity, which made industrialisation

difficult. Somehow, the ‘mountain factor’ implicitly invoked here has been a mix of topographic and capitalistic features, affecting mountain region migrations to specific degrees, but not in specific nature.

Symmetrically, job opportunities related to the construction of railways in the first half of the twentieth century, and to mining and the building of hydropower installations or tunnels in the 1960s and 1970s, attracted workers from far away. As recalled in Luigi Lorenzetti’s chapter, while some eventually took root in their new environment, others moved from one construction site to another, from one mountain place to another, thanks to the very specific qualifications they had acquired. A similar process led highly touristic spots to attract new inhabitants and families who eventually settled there. The high concentration of resorts found in Savoy (France), Tyrol (Austria) or the Rocky Mountains (U.S.A. and Canada) illustrate this diversification of familial trajectories. But again, we can ask ourselves if such a mobility has been fuelled by a sort of generic mountain factor or by specific assets and contexts. The answer is quite simple: this new attractiveness of some mountain places, based on the identification of a new generation of resources, has been largely specific to some mountain regions of the West and, for the rest of the world, some very specific places with mining resources. However, this process did not take place in all mountain regions; it has been common to regions, in the highlands as well as the lowlands, where capitalistic opportunities have been identified. If we want to refer to a (local) mountain factor, it is one associated with natural assets specific to certain places and converted into modern resources.

As already mentioned, this kind of work immigration in some very specific places has led to a significant mix of types of inhabitants, heirs of various individual or multigenerational residential trajectories. In a metaphorical phrasing (Debarbieux 2014), some can be said to result from ‘rootedness’ (literally, individuals who cannot imagine being uprooted from a place they consider to be part of their own identity; see for instance Danaé Leitenberg in this book), while others can be said to be ‘anchored’ (immigrants coming from elsewhere, deliberately settling in a new place). But such economic opportunities also lead to less durable or seasonal migrations. Many people hired for building dams have stayed only a few years before moving to other similar workplaces or returning to their home country (such as many Italian workers throughout the Alps). The seasonality of tourism also requires workers for several months who are willing to maintain another residential and professional base elsewhere. Though based on very different activities and according to very different temporalities, this seasonality of mobilities somehow reminds us of traditional ones, such as the peddlers already mentioned.

Mountain Mobilities in the Time of Reflexive Modernity

Should we conclude from this second step of this short synthesis that modern mountain mobilities, even contemporary ones, have very little in common? And that there is no generic 'mountain factor' that could trigger or qualify them? The arguments listed above invite us to answer no to the latter question. However, some increasingly influential factors in mobility schemes deserve attention and may lead us to a different conclusion.

The first factor is related to the growing influence of a generic, mainly scientific, conception of mountains in public policies since the mid-nineteenth century (Debarbieux and Rudaz 2015). This conception – a combination of natural features, economic opportunities, social qualifications of the populations, etc. – has led to the adoption of generic policies: official definitions of mountains at the national scale, programmes prioritising certain activities or modes of management (in agriculture, pastoralism, forest protection and exploitation, tourism, infrastructure building, etc.), and sustaining public services. This generic and functional conception of mountains has been a major component of national plans and regional policies, and a significant factor in the geography of subsidies and opportunities. While this occurred first in some developed countries (Western and Mediterranean Europe, North America, Oceania), it also later took place in some countries of the Global South. Though these programmes and policies have impacted mountain places in different ways and to different degrees, and individual mobilities at the same time, we know that this new way of framing the resources and management of mountain regions has influenced these mobilities.

The second factor is related to the symmetric, growing influence of generic social representations of mountains and the kind of lifestyle with which they are associated. The concept of amenity migrations (see Laurence A.G. Moss's chapter in this book), which was used to qualify some permanent installations and bi-residential individual practices, has been useful for understanding this trend. Here, expectations related to the imagined natural environment, amenities and the local society atmosphere have played a significant role in shaping new kinds of anchoring strategies. In fact, this trend is not entirely new; its genealogical history can be traced back to early tourism in the Western world and seasonal migrations during colonial times when wealthy individuals settled during the hot season in places with a mild climate not far from colonial cities, such as Darjeeling (India), Petropolis (Brazil) and Dalat (Vietnam). However, this type of migration became much more significant in recent decades in regions that have become more accessible with modern highways and nearby airports. This process differs significantly from the one that led

workers to settle in the mountains primarily to seize job opportunities. With amenity migrations, the main driver is the attractiveness of mountain environments per se, deeply rooted in modern and postmodern social and cultural perceptions of mountains as a whole. This process has profoundly influenced residential mobilities in many peri-urban areas and has also led to the emergence of new forms of rural lifestyles and alternative modes of production in such regions as the Pyrenees (see María Offenhenden and Montserrat Soronellas's chapter in this book), the Mediterranean Alps, or the Italian Apennines.

Some research projects (see Holly Thorpe's paper in this book, but also Petite and Debarbieux 2013) have also described emerging patterns of long- and short-term residential mobilities. Certain individuals, such as mountain guides and ski instructors in the West, have adopted residential trajectories that involve living in different mountain locations at different times of their lives or during different seasons. They are guided by a kind of 'mountain appeal' and a desire to reside in the mountains, selecting specific places accordingly. Drawing again on metaphorical resources, this kind of mobility requires an additional image beyond those already used (rootedness and anchoring): 'mooring' would be a better fit. This evokes the image of a boat moving from one place to another, temporarily fixing itself to successive fixed points for short periods of time.

Indeed, many of these emerging types of human movements have become increasingly common in the Western world, often intertwined with modern economic developments and financial requirements. Additionally, the allure of mountainous regions is widely shared within these societies. However, such movements are also gaining significance in developing countries, spurred by the proliferation of national and international tourism and the rising number of affluent families embracing Western lifestyles, especially when mountain destinations are accessible and provide expected amenities. Consequently, this new wave of mountain mobility is fuelled by globalised perceptions of mountain environments, a concept previously less prevalent in non-Western regions.

In summary, one can observe significant disparities between pre-modern and modern migration patterns in and out of mountain regions, making it challenging to pinpoint common drivers. However, in the era of reflexive societies, there is a noticeable rise in the global influence of a modern imagination of mountains, driven largely by social and economic assessments of their assets, opportunities and drawbacks, which are increasingly shared by people across various continents. This convergence can be seen as a variation of what Arjun Appadurai (1996) mentioned in the introduction of this book by Andrea Boscoboinik and Viviane Cretton, referred to as the 'mediascape'. Mountain imaginaries have been a part of regional

and national mediascapes for some time, but there is a current globalisation trend that makes this kind of imaginary shared by more and more people in very different and distant regions. Expanding upon Appadurai's analysis, local identities, shaped by the interplay of various 'scapes' (technological, financial, ideological, etc.), are undergoing significant social and cultural transformations. In a growing number of regions, particularly in the Western world, there is a noticeable trend towards the adoption of standardised modern (or perhaps post-modern) social imaginaries and perceptions of mountains – incorporating notions of their attractiveness, associated work and leisure opportunities, and so forth – into the process of local identity formation, while still retaining traces of cultural traditions and past migration patterns. For instance, the recent proliferation of modern mountain imagery – propagated through tourism and the capitalist valuation of local resources, such as extractive practices (as discussed by Skewes et al. in this book) – poses significant challenges in several developing regions. Here, the social and cultural shock between different types of inhabitants can be substantial, serving as a source of tensions.

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