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The Toxic Sides of Modernity and Possible Antidotes in Alpine Regions

Introduction

There is no question that the technological progress accompanying modernization in the mid-20th century changed the life in Alpine regions permanently. But was this evolvement really for the better? Modernity brought a new range of opportunities and challenges to the Alpine space. Tourism is one of the greatest effects of modernization in the mountains, creating a new prosperity-promising industry. The lifestyle of natives changed drastically, as the environment and nature of these Alpine areas began to be harmed lastingly.

The automation and mechanization gradually shifted the main labor industry of peripheral mountainous areas, decreasing the significance of agriculture. The beginning of tourism followed; an industry that now defines many Alpine valleys and regions. Eva Widmann illustrates the development of tourism in the Alps and presents the importance of sustainability in the future proceeding and increase of tourism, in her dissertation *Nachhaltige Entwicklung im Tourismus in den Alpen*, published in 2005. The years after World War II and the economic crisis are defined as the "Alpine Gold Mining Years", due to the extreme influx of summer- and eventually also winter tourists (Widmann 2005: 28), breeding what Widmann calls "*two-season-*

places with a touristic monostructure" (Widmann: 28), to the point of overcapacity of Alpine tourism.

Two main issues derive from this phenomenon known as "overtourism": the demographic challenges of emigration of locals in Alpine areas and the environmental impact of this over-usage of nature, whose solution approaches will be discussed in the following.

The Issues in Brief

Firstly, Bausch, Koch and Veser (2014) write about the demographic issue of out-migration in their book *Coping with Demographic Change in the Alpine Regions: Actions and Strategies for Spatial and Regional Development*. They present many topographical challenges of peripheral areas as a cause of "migration of younger people from mountains to the Alpine cities and metropolises" (Bausch, Koch and Veser 2014: 5). The "brain-drain effect" (Rieder et al. 2009 in Bausch, Koch and Veser: 6) is the forceful change of the working reality, as young locals leave their homes in the mountains to attain university degrees. Highly educated people seldom return to the peripheral Alpine areas, since development opportunities are very restricted (Bausch, Koch and Veser: 4-6). Tourism inevitably caused a sort of spatially restricted urbanization, engendering an increase of motor-traffic, a need for improved and infrastructure and technology and an entire industry revolving around fulfilling the desires and necessities of the visitors. All of these facilities, aimed to please temporarily present guests, are only in business seasonally, restricting not only the field of work but also its financial security and potential.

On an environmental level, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) warns that the permutations of modernization in Alpine regions has led to a 1.5°C increase temperatures in the

Alps in the past century ("Alpine Tourism"). The effects of this warming include the melting of glaciers, collapse of ecosystems and instability of mountainous grounds, all of which present threats to humans as well as nature.

Revitalization and ecological aid have been challenges faced over the past decades in the Alps. Tourists come to the mountains recreationally, but return to the convenience of their urban lives after a short period. Overtourism inevitably creates an industry of temporary enjoyment, even exploitation of natural resources, with no long-term obligation to invest in sustaining or improving its current state. This results in natives being dependent on external factors, such as weather or snow conditions and restricted by their seasonal services to tourists. Moreover, natural resources and landscapes are damaged irreversibly.

Revitalization of the Peripheries

Re-inhabiting Alpine regions comprises attracting more people to settle down permanently and keeping natives from leaving in the first place. There are many projects aiming to make life in the mountains more attractive, on local, regional, even national levels. An important aspect in many of these projects is the attempt to broaden the labor market of peripheral areas that are currently increasingly dominated by tourism. According to a 2016 study of the *Office cantonal de statistique et de péréquation*, approximately 5.6% of all labor in the Upper Valais corresponds to the primary sector, while 21.7% is in accordance to the secondary sector. The remaining 72.69% fall under the tertiary sector, one fourth of which consists of work in retail shops, hotels, hostels and restaurants (BVCA 2018: 14-15). Creating a greater spectrum of jobs would enable individuals to follow their personal aspirations and interests outside of metropoles and urban environments. Increasing the diversity of work fields also grants the

opportunity of an Alpine region to return to the industry it was knows for, pre-tourism. Langa Astigiana, for instance, is a rural place in Italy that was long known for its agriculture. The number of farms, however has bisected in the past 30 years, as the region is gradually giving in to the growing pressure of tourism (Maurer and Wytrzens 2011: 121).

DEMOCHANGE was a transnational, top-down project by the Faculty of Tourism at Munich University of Applied Sciences, aimed to spread awareness and improve the demographic condition of Alpine regions in Austria, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland to ultimately optimize rural and spatial planning in Alpine space. It took place from September 2009- September 2012. (Bausch in Maurer and Wytrzens: 13). After analyzing the according local and regional demographic change, DEMOCHANGE followed several approaches. The goal was to fight the dynamic of out-migration of young natives and immigration of amenity migrants, mainly retirees, looking to enjoy a natural, calm, beautiful environment, in hopes to revitalize these regions in a balanced manner:

> "Some important aspects to face these challenges in the Alpine Space are:
> - To attract the living and working conditions for young people and young families especially outside the metropolises and cities
> - To secure medicare and care for elderly people in an ageing society
> - To keep a high quality level of all kind of public services on regions with declining population
> - To safeguard the labour force by activating the endogenous as well as exogenous potentials

- To improve the local and regional resilience by using existing material and immaterial resources and heritage

- To improve the connectivity and cooperation among metropolises and cities on the one side and rural and touristic areas on the other side to attract the rural areas" (Bausch, Koch and Veser 2014: 6).

These intentions were put to reality, through numerous different pilot projects, after adapting process utilities. The projects were scattered over several Alpine regions, each with different objectives.

Oswin Maurer and Hans Karl Wytrzens summarized the midterm conference proceedings of DEMOCHANGE in 2011 and published the standings in a report named *Demographic Challenges in the Alpine Space. The Search for Transnational Answers*. They describe each pilot project and its analysis and challenges.

Aiding elderly amenity migrants seems to have been a central theme throughout many of the targeted destinations. In Nidwalden, for instance, the project "'Landdienst' for Elderly" was a project, creating a platform for farmers and the elderly community to communicate. The objective was to allow elderly residents to volunteer on farms, encouraging and securing the existence of farming and relieving famers occasionally, as well as occupying engaged elderly citizens. "Improving Basic Services in Remote Areas" was a project by DEMOCHANGE in the Škofja Loka Hills" in Slovenia, enhancing the infrastructure, mobility and services, to further assist the elderly community and to gain new residents in the region.

Another prominent issue is the decrease of young residents in the Alpine space. Many DEMOCHANGE pilot projects increased job and educational opportunities as well as housing options in order to attract younger generations. Germany's Allgäu, for example, faced the issue

of the "ageing society", by offering apprenticeships for young people in the care sector. This project was called "Attracting Young People for Training in Care Professions". In Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany local education possibilities were improved and expanded and the foundation of businesses in the area was endorsed by the "Adaptation of the Economy" project. The "Welcome-Service-Pinzgau" constituted a service facility, offering professional support. By encouraging the pursuit and establishment of businesses and being in direct contact with young professionals who have emigrated or remain in Pinzgau, the labor market and its opportunities for diverse employees was broadened.

The integration of newly joined citizens was also endeavored in several projects, such as the "Citizen Participation Process in Unterpinzgau Region". The opportunity for each individual to engage in local and regional debates and discussions, not only strengthened the feeling of civil unity and affiliation, but also improved the quality of life and infrastructure, by responding and adjusting to the ideas and wishes of participating citizens. In order to ensure equality and fairness amongst genders in decision-making, the "'Gender Check' for Communities" created a "gender checklist', to raise awareness and knowledge about gender and the effects of gender roles in everyday life (Maurer and Wytrzens: 113-123).

All this change brought by the pilot projects collectively, was monitored and analyzed closely. It offered a popular central topic for numerous papers. Černič Mali, Kerbler and Gantar thematize DEMOCHANGE's premises, purpose and proceeding in their journal article on the project, published in 2011. They name the following successful outcomes: "concrete strategies (for demographic change adaptation) in ten model regions; An international exchange network (exchange of experience and knowledge about the adaptation procedure for spatial planning and

development); Pilot investments for realizing concrete measures" (Černič Mali, Kerbler and Gantar 2010: 147).

In brief, many different measures can be taken, in order to revitalize the Alpine regions. Making the labor market and educational opportunities more diverse seem to be two prominent, sustainable and profitable motions. Additionally, many projects make use of the influx of elderly generations in Alpine localities, by creating jobs for and revolving around them. DEMOCHANGE especially focused on the ageing society and based a lot of adaptations on this important part of the community. Finally, revitalization encompasses an adjustment of infrastructure, opportunities for all generations and proper integration of migrants. Consequently, it excludes the idea of tourism being the primary focus and biggest investment of the area.

An Ecological Turn Long Overdue

It is no secret that the environment has been suffering massively under daily behaviors of humankind. Consumer behavior, especially, carries heavy consequences on natural resources. Alpine tourism is one form of consumerism, whose effects on nature can be seen with the bare eye and measured easily. According to a study, conducted by *Schweiz Tourismus*, mentioned in Paulsson and Liechti's report *Die sportliche Landschaftsnutzung- Outdooraktivitäten in der Welterbe- Region* more than half of the holiday-guests in Alpine regions consider nature to be a tourist need or even necessity ("Schweiz Tourismus" in Paulsson et al. 2012: 1). The area of Jungfrau-Aletsch accommodates more than 100 tourist transport facilities, which only include chair-lifts, cable-cars and gondolas. Each of these lifts has an average transport rate of 1000 persons per hour (Paulsson et al.: 2).

While outdoor activities and sports increase awareness and exposure towards ecological issues

and their urgency, they themselves seem to make up a big part of the root of the issue. The Jungfrau-Aletsch region is famous for its drastic peaks and the picturesque Aletsch Glacier. Tourists from all over the world come to appreciate the landscapes. The irony is that admiring the amazing scenery adds to its deterioration. Flora and fauna in the area suffer immensely under the direct impact of the scale of human presence and secondary effects of the deteriorating nature. The mere presence of humans can evoke stress in many wild animals. A simple shadow of a paraglider or voices of snowshoe hikers suffice to cause an animal to flee in fear. Especially in winter, when food is scarce, high energy attempts to escape can lead to starvation. Moreover, hiking trails, ski slopes, ski lifts and roads restrict animal's ecosystems and access to food, water and shelter, creating suboptimal habitats (Paulsson et al.: 2). Thus, it is the consumer's own behavior that will eventually diminish the existence of these natural phenomenon. On one hand, the best thing for the Aletsch Glacier, for instance, would be to strictly prohibit all recreational visitors, in order to protect and preserve it, but on the other hand, the visitors supply the main income of the area. The industry relies on tourists planning hiking and skiing trips in the Aletsch region, inspired by the desire to experience the glacier from up-close and thus, the harmful tourism prevails. The Swiss Confederation website even accentuates the significance of this issue in all Swiss mountain regions relying on tourism: "[…] the preservation of this landscape is […] essential. Otherwise, the tourist industry could be in danger of killing the goose that lays the golden egg" ("Alps: a year-round tourist destination").

There are, however, many places taking measures to reduce the impact of tourism on the environment. Another rural destination, suffering from overcrowding and decay of the territory itself, is Parc Naturel Régional des Monts d'Ardèche in France. Simone Moretti delineates the heavy consequences of the great extent of tourism in this natural park in an exposition written for

the European Parliament's TRAN Committee, *Overtourism: impact and possible policy responses*, published in 2018. A stunning 7.5- 8 million overnight stays were documented in the UNESCO Global Geopark in 2007 (Cartier-Moulin et al. 2013 in Moretti 2018: 201). Popular sites of the park are suffering severe damages, "caused by the excessive pressure on a delicate and fragile environment or due to inappropriate tourist behavior" (Moretti: 201). The tourism policy of the park was adjusted accordingly to protect and promote the natural heritage of the area. The number of visitors has been monitored and managed, in order to decrease the damage to specific tourist hotspots. Mont Méznec, for instance was declared to be an "*Espace Naturel Sensible*", due to its valuable ecological state (Cartier- Moulin et al. in Moretti: 201). A LIFE program by the EU also attempts to alleviate the harm of overcrowding in certain sites. These interventions "[try] to mainstream conservation activities and touristic development in an overall local development strategy" (Lutz et al. 2014: 1 in Moretti: 202).

Parc Naturel Régional des Monts d'Ardèche has been granted as a Charter Area for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas since 2011 (Moretti: 202). The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is one of many top-down interventions, advocating for the investment in sustainable development. In order to be certified as a Charter Area by the EUROPARC Federation, territories have to develop an action plan, including a five-year strategy for sustainable development in and around the protected area. The action plan must adhere to the principles of the charter and address the following issues: "[protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage, improving the quality of the tourism experience, raising public awareness, development of tourism specific to the area, training staff on local environment, protection and support of the quality of life for local residents, social and economic development and control of tourist numbers]" (European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

2010: 7-10). The results of the action program and strategy need to be evaluated and presented to the Evaluation Committee for the European Charter. EUROPARC Federation thereby rewards protected areas that contribute to sustainable, balanced economic, social and environmental development (European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas: 11).

CIPRA is another example of an international commission to protect the Alps, conducting sustainability projects in the Alpine spaces of Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland. The creative names of CIPRA's projects, show their unconventional and innovative approaches, from numerous different angles.

The "SpeciAlps" project, tries to conserve the diversity of natural treasures, by making the most out of every space of green land. These will be turned into grasslands or biotopes, with the help of local advisors and experts, thus restoring the habitat for animals and plants and increasing the quality and beauty of Alpine regions ("CIRPA Projects speciAlps"). Many projects are aimed to unite Alpine regions, to ease cooperation and ecological aid. "AlpES'" objective, for instance, was to introduce transnational ecosystems as a unit and provide cross-sectoral governance that goes beyond boarders ("CIRPA Projects AlpES"). Another project, named "AlpInnoCT" promoted combined transport in the Alpine region, by planning to shift transported goods from roads to rails ("CIRPA Projects AlpInnoCT"). CIPRA's project "Constructive Alps" tackles the issue of rising tourism directly, by annually offering a prize of 50 000 Euros for sustainably renovated or newly constructed buildings. The buildings should be built in an ecological and economical manner and can be tourist accommodations or local residential homes ("CIRPA Projects Constructive Alps").

To summarize, different measures can be taken to protect the environment and trigger a new ecological turn towards sustainability in the Alpine space. Small, innovative projects as well

as guidelines and charters of the EU and governments all contribute to spreading awareness and minimizing the impact of overtourism and human's behavior on natural lands.

Permaculture to the Rescue

Most of these "top-down" interventions mentioned above focus on one of the two issues presented individually. Many include and engage the local residents in an active manner, based on the programs or plans developed by experts from outside the peripheral, Alpine area. One expanding bottom-up, participatory alternative is permaculture. Permaculture is a lifestyle and agricultural structure that is as least harmful to nature as possible. The term "permaculture" is a combination of "permanent, culture and agriculture". The idea was first presented in Australia in the 1970s by Bill Mollison and David Holmgreen as a response to the socio-environmental crisis and realization that human's behavior and actions have a bigger impact on the biosphere than expected and intended. Its objective is to create a sustainable, holistic, ecologically-based agricultural system that works with nature, imitating its patterns and flows (Bambrey 2014: 1-2). The earth should be seen as one big organism with important self-sustaining cycles that can be used to one's advantage.

> "Permaculture is a holistic system of DESIGN, based on direct observation of nature, learning from traditional knowledge and the findings of modern science. Embodying a philosophy of positive action and grassroots education, Permaculture aims to restructure society by returning control of the resources for living: food, water, shelter and the means of livelihood, to ordinary people in their communities, as the only antidote to centralizes power" (Permaculture Activist 2004 in Veteto and Lockyer 2008: 48).

Permaculture is a possible answer to both the presented issues: the ecological and demographic crisis, as it develops "closed-loop, symbiotic, self-sustaining, human habitat and production systems that do not result in ecological degradation or social injustice" (Veteto and Lockyer: 51).

Firstly, permaculture is based on following the cycles of nature and intrudes minimally. It situates humans in nature, in a harmless, co-existing manner. Some of the most ecological principles followed are: observe the natural surroundings, in order to deeply understand its flows and to integrate the human community smoothly; catch and store energy, using for example, micro-hydro generating stations and gravity-fed water distribution; use and value renewable services and produce no waste; use natural patterns, such as the sun's cycle throughout the year to design further details of the construction and cultivation and set limits to consumption (Veteto and Lockyer: 51, 52). Permaculture combines "traditional ecological knowledge and modern scientific knowledge" (Veteto and Lockyer: 51) to optimize the human settlement and minimize the harm to the local environment- a concern that is not in all consciences in traditional Alpine tourism.

Moreover, permaculture creates many new, integrative, diverse jobs for employees of all ages and experiences and capabilities. Those, unable to invest financially in these farms and projects, can contribute to the community by providing labor, thereby diversifying its membership even more. Permaculture is part of a lifestyle and incorporates countless skillsets. This attracts new, permanent residents. "[…] these people are contributing to a more sustainable future by reorganizing their lives and work around permaculture design principles" (Holmgreen 2002 in Veteto and Lockyer: 50).

Another advantage is the tendency of rural area's farmers to return "back to farmer" (Veteto and Lockyer: 54) and consequently regaining the liberty of an own industry, not overruled by

tourism.

Additionally, permaculture could potentially fulfill many tourist-needs. A permaculture ecovillage is a site in and of itself, and could replace conventional Alpine tourism with an interactive, participatory experience of this new, natural system (Veteto and Lockyer: 53). It offers a way to enjoy the natural landscapes and resources in a highly sustainable manner and visitors might help spread this self-sufficient, regenerative structure of co-existence of humans and nature.

As opposed to countless other projects helping dampen the accelerating demographic and environmental changes in peripheral communities, permaculture is one basic idea that is adaptable to all landscapes, biospheres and settings. The principles are clear and it is up to the local inhabitants to use their knowledge of the region in order to adhere to these regulations to the best of their abilities. Permaculture requires well thought-through planning and expertise on the ecological characteristics of the specific area, however with the proper initiative and motivation, it presents a realistic solution for diverse rural and Alpine regions and enables people of all abilities, skills and competencies to participate hands-on.

Conclusion

As modernization is an ongoing process, its current and future consequences must always be taken into consideration. We find ourselves to be at a point, where past evolvements were not evaluated and actualization based on their sustainability, and thus need to compensate for the damage done. Tourism was long seen as a magnificent monetary source for Alpine regions, but the realization that overtourism is digging its own grave gradually began to spread, along with global warming awareness. Many foundations strive to help the environments as best they can.

However, taking the appropriate actions while refusing to let go of tourism as a main industry in the Alpine space is mutually exclusive. Changes need to be made in the demographics of these areas, attracting more people to reside there permanently. Therefore, educational and professional opportunities need to be broadened and expanded, while less labor and money should be spent on the infrastructure and services of "in-and-out" tourists. There are countless top-down and bottom-up projects, working towards these sustainability goals. Permaculture illustrates an approach that integrates many diverse employees and is highly sustainable, in the short and long run. Even just adapting a few of its principles into our daily lives could have immense positive consequences.

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