

**“Understanding & Managing Amenity-Led Migration to Mountain Regions”, Banff Center, Canada (15-19 May, 2008)**

***Contradictions of tourism and amenity migration mobilities in local development. Four cases of study in Argentina, Latin America***

**Abstract:** Tourism mobilities highlight that many different mobilities shape the places where tourism is performed and drive the making and unmaking of tourism destinations. Amenity migration may be viewed as a shadow of tourism development, because the kind of mobilities it caused could be interpreted as regressive in terms of local development.

This paper analyze four cases of study of four towns in mountain tourist destinations in Argentina, to better understand the kind of changes amenity migration produce. The principal threat that amenity migration means in terms of local development is its power to hide the lack of competitiveness of the tourism sector in mountain destinations.

### **Introduction**

Mobilities of both people and objects, all go into “doing” tourism. Tourism also concerns the relational mobilizations of memories and performances, emotions and atmospheres. But such complex set of mobilities also entails many risks. Tourism has always been accompanied by risks to host communities culture, landscape and environment, But it also implies the risk of been just a “screen” for another kind of business related to real state speculation. Therefore, tourism mobilities cannot be theorized separated from an appreciation of these other diverse mobilities.

### **Objective**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the contradictions of tourism and amenity migration mobilities in local development in four mountain tourism destinations in Argentina, in order to promote guidelines for the setting of an effective agenda facing local development in these communities.

## **Methodology**

Four mountain villages of Argentina were selected: San Martín de los Andes (SMA), Villa La Angostura (VLA), Villa General Belgrano (VGB) and El Bolsón-Lago Puelo (EB-LP)..

The methodological approach was descriptive, of a qualitative and quantitative and diachronic type, based in both secondary data analysis, including demographic, sectorial and local information, and primary information: focused interviews to key social actors of the different migratory phases, as well as in depth interviews to natives and old residents in the four analyzed cases. Community workshops were also carried out, in which participative action-research techniques were applied.

The analysis units were selected by key informants in each of the villages studied. A list of possible interviewed people was then determined, according to a quotas sampling scheme. The number of interviewed people was of 126 for SMA (72 in June 2006 and 54 in September 2007), 61 for VGB (taken in March 2007) and 40 in VLA (taken in November 2007).

In EB-LP, the study was based on primary sources of information, including in depth interviews with key informants. In total, 15 in depth interviews were made between November 2006 and March 2007. Content analysis techniques and speech analysis were also applied.

## **The mountain tourist destinations analyzed**

**San Martín de los Andes** (SMA) is a mountain town with a population of about 25.000. It is located in the North margin of the Lácar lake in the southwest of the province of the Neuquén, 420 kms. south-west from the provincial capital. The town is at 640 m, and is surrounded by the Andes. San Martín de los Andes is the

gateway to Lanín National Park, being one of the favourite places in Argentina for both amenity migrants and tourists.

**Villa La Angostura (VLA)** is considered among the main attractions of the Argentine Andean Patagonia, mainly because of its natural landscape and the beauty of its sights. VLA is within Nahuel Huapi National Park, being the gateway to Los Arrayanes National Park. It has a population of approximately 12.000, with an annual growth rate of 121,83% (1991-2001), and a population density of 98,15 inhabitants per square meters.

**Villa General Belgrano (VGB)** is a village with little more than 6,000 stable inhabitants, in the center of Calamuchita Valley, in Cordoba Province, 85 km south from the provincial capital city. It has been developed as a planned village, with a urban pattern with direction N-S and an identifiable central European building-style features. Tourism development incentives started in the mid 70´s. It can be said that today VGB lives almost exclusively on the contributions of tourist activity.

**El Bolson and Lago Puelo (EB-LP)** are mountain villages located in the Patagonia Andes sector recognized as *Parallel 42 Andean Shire*. The Shire is about 4,369 km<sup>2</sup>, and is located in the southwestern section of Río Negro Province, and the northwest part of Chubut Province, in Argentina. Although these villages belong to two different provinces, Chubut and Rio Negro, they are territorially contiguous, presenting some common characteristics related to their similar historical development process, sharing traditions and cultural facts, as well as demographic evolution.

### **Theoretical Approach**

Amenity migration is a significant part of a growing phenomenon all around the globe, consisting of the migration to mountain areas for

the remaining concentrations of our planet's natural environment and distinct cultures. Generally stated, amenity migration is the migration to places that people perceive as having greater environmental quality and differentiated culture. (Moss, 2006)

Amenity migration could be described as the desire to shift from living on a **land** to have a living in a **landscape**. Land is a physical and tangible resource, a place of functional work; while landscape is an intangible resource whose key feature is its appearance or look. A place is not only just a place with its own associations and meanings for those dwelling or even visiting, but a *combination* of abstract characteristics that mark it as more scenic or cosmopolitan or exotic or environmental degraded than other places. This language of abstract characteristics is a **language of mobility**, the expression of the life-world mobility groups, of tourists, conference travelers, business people, or environmentalists. Tourism mobilities refer to the many different mobilities that, in the way of tourist activities, shape those places where tourism is performed, and drive the making and unmaking of tourism destinations. Tourist destinations must be analyzed and interpreted as complex systems of diverse intersecting mobilities. As such, they have to be viewed as places that are economically, politically and culturally produced, through the multiple networked mobilities of capital, persons, objects, signs and information (Sheller, 2004). Such complex set of mobilities also entails many risks to host communities cultures, natural and cultural landscape. Tourism mobilities cannot be theorized separated from an appreciation of some other diverse mobilities; the places to which tourism comes to be performed are also places constituted by many other kinds of mobilizations and demobilizations. Furthermore, many overlaps between "tourism" and these other kinds of business, professional, and migratory

movement can be found. (Sheller, 2004: and Seller and Urry, 2004).

Mountain tourist destinations in developing countries, considered as “long-distance destinations” are put into play as amenity migrants destinations, due to the increasingly global character of the contemporary mobilities. Tourism global mobilities implies a consumptive movement of bodies, images, and information. Place after place get consumed. Places consumed, wasted and used up as they are “toured”, become, only at the end, a set of abstract characteristics. In the process of getting their “cosmopolitan features” those places get ready to reincarnate mainly as places for the performance of real state developers. Places are also often full of bitter disappointment and frustration, where personal performances cannot be realized. The contrast between people’s fantasies of a place and the performances it actually reach are a constant trope in amenity migrants.

Many mountain tourism destinations involving amenity migration process, at least those considered in this study, are places where the exercise of government power is very complex, stemming from the diversity of flows and interest of people as tourists, migrants and workers with a broad range of necessities.

One of the most important impacts of this type of migration is the fragmentation process of rural land to develop models of urbanization which are characterized as “diffuse urbanizations”. These models separate the different functions of the city, against to the “classic or historical city”, which is characterized to be compact and diverse (Souto González, 2006), and need more land to be developed. It is a model where an extensive and self sufficient urban pattern rules, as well as privatization processes and the

prevalence of individualism, privatization and unsustainability (Souto Gonzalez, Op cit.)

## **Contradictions of amenity migration and tourism mobilities in local development in mountain areas in argentina**

### **Contradiction #1: Official speech VS the negative consequences of AM in mountain villages**

*The first contradiction is related to the official speech at both municipal and provincial levels in all the cases studied, which encourages foreign investments and therefore the arrival of new amenity migrants to tourist mountain destinations as a positive side of development, hiding some crucial negative effects on local social and economical development.*

Although national migratory policies encouraging migration processes are not observed, a favorable will of mountain tourist destinations government towards the settlement of new migrants is well known and recognized, through instruments such as credit landing or tax-benefits policies.

Moss (2006)<sup>1</sup> mentions the phrase "the growth is good" as the predominant thought in tourist centers. Every year, there is a veiled competition to obtain the greater amount of growth in square meters constructed, the higher number of tourist beds supplied, the higher amount of tourist.

Although this official positive speech and vision, a number of environmental and social problems linked to population growth can be clearly identified in three of the analyzed destinations:

#### **Problems detected in VGB**

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<sup>1</sup> Moss, Laurence: *The Amenity Migrants. Seeking and sustaining mountains and their cultures*. Cap. 21: *Next steps and the longer view*. CABI Head Office, Oxfordshire, UK, 2006, p. 311.

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- Inadequate state of conservation of internal trails and water streams, due to the presence of polluting elements.
- Social inequity in the access to educative and health services.
- Services infrastructure insufficiency, I
- Increase of residential housing price.
- Increase of life cost.
- Weakening of the links between the public and private sectors.
- Insufficient fulfillment of both municipal and provincial regulations on environmental impacts.
- Lack of continuity of tourist policies in the medium and long term.
- Increase of visual pollution.
- Lack of appropriate recreation services for local population.

In **SMA**, local residents interviewed expressed their main problems: exaggerated growth of housing construction sector, remarkable reduction of public access to common resources, increasing sensation of problems linked to marginalization and poverty: alcoholism, drug addiction, familiar violence).

In **VLA**, the continuous and sustained increase in real estate value and the institutional weakness shown by official regulative administrations, lead to an increasing of the loss of the native forest ground and water pollution. The access to common resources is, again, a core problem of this mountain village.

The contradiction lies in the lack of vision of the State, to provide a situation of welfare in terms of the use of common resources. In fact, the State encourages the development process based on the vision of a macroeconomic function, where higher investment levels correspond with higher employment rates. The problem is that this

type of investment usually neither generate genuine employment sources, nor protect common resources.

Social and economical inequities in most of mountain tourism destinations in Argentina occurs due to administrative and economic corruption of State local managers, as well as the the lack of governance and stakeholders participation in public issues.

It is clearly a problem of the State institutions, which are incapable to regulate a key aspect of the tourist-real estate business: the tourist supply development.

It is still very hard to design and implement growth limiting policies in Argentina. Prevailing values in the political arena are mainly related to the governance and budgetary effectiveness. Within this frame, "to restrain" and "to limit" urban growth may lead to high and unacceptable costs in electoral terms.

### **Contradiction #2: The Mirror effect and the diffuse city**

*The second contradiction is related to the mountain destination projected image on tourist and national citizens, and the consequences of such image on amenity migrants' behavior, once they become residents of these mountain communities.*

Migrants move to the mountains influenced by an idilic image of the new place, but taking with them their urban way of life, building up what can be described as a *mirror effect*: **the reproduction of the former urban way of life, but now within a mountain environment**. Urban images, values and societal forms are intended to be reproduced in the new environment.

Recreational facilities and services, and the access to technological advances enjoyed by former urban inhabitants, are now being

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required by amenity migrants, in their new mountain context. New migrants resist losing those benefits and press on the natural resources, looking for comfort conditions and quality of life (including higher levels of formal education) that were once provided by the great cities. There are increasing similarities between behaviors at "home" and "away"; managers of these tourism destinations need to know and realize that the investments that redesigned their towns and villages are in fact an answer to amenity migrants' demands, then expanding a new model of a "diffuse city" into a mountain environment. This diffuse city model leads to new urban forms, which is basically territory consuming.

In this new model, the idea of a city center has vanished, and instead, a lot of anonymous spaces have appeared. They are spaces with low urban services quality, low population density, and very weak links with surrounding urban environment, places of conflicts and new ways of social interactions. They can be described as morphological and functional isolated systems. Diffuse cities are places without history, then lacking of belonging sense.

The proliferation of this diffuse city model is one of the most significant change that can be seen in our new mountain urban environment nowadays. They consist of closed districts or neighborhoods offering a set of security and isolation conditions required for these new cosmopolitan migrants. These districts, named locally as "countries", are an urban phenomenon born in the big cities, due to the increasing insecurity sensation, and the need of new open spaces. The development of such forms of diffuse cities, require big open and available spaces. Once there is no more space available in the these big cities surroundings, a search for new places all over the country starts. Tourist mountains

destinations are then usually seen as the first attractive opportunity to plan and build up new diffuse cities.

The most representative case of this diffuse cities proliferation is Villa La Angostura. VLA is living a real estate boom since 2001 crisis, when many people decide to invest in the construction sector. Land costs went higher and higher. The cost of construction also experiment a continuous rise, thus attracting high investment development. During 2004 and 2005, for instance, the lands with higher commercial values were those located near the lake's shore and on the riverbanks, or those with a direct view to the hills or to the lake. Only in that period, their price grew up to 50%. Many of this developments are shown and promoted as "mountain neighborhoods". they are usually located in places with high environmental risk, such as mountain and hills slopes and lake shores.

VGB is living a similar phenomenon, but mainly located in its surrounding areas, simply because there is no space left within the city limits. Small nearby communities are now facing new developments based on the above described patterns: the subdivision of land has led to the booming of new closed neighborhoods developed by real estate agents from Cordoba, Argentina's second biggest city, located just 85 kms North Villa General Belgrano.

In SMA, the unavailability of space is a serious concern. Surrounded by hills slopes, this mountain village simply cannot growth more within its limits. But due to new migrants and mainly real estate from Buenos Aires demands, a number of recreational facilities has appeared in the last year. A representative example is the desing

and construction of a 18 holes golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus, just 5 kilometres outside the city limits.

These diffuse cities end up conforming a sort of remedy against the effects of the society polarization. A hidden necessity “to protect form the poor that proliferate”, partly product of the social-economical displacement, starts becoming apparent. This contradiction ends setting up the discussion of the structural problem of inequity in Latin America. This, in turn, has its translation in the tourism field, through the sale of the illusion to live in a developed country, at the cost of the destination - mountain villages- territorial fragmentation of the destinies

### **Contradiction # 3: Amenity migrants as tourist entrepreneurs**

Many amenity migrants are attracted because mountain destinations landscape and quality of life. Once those migrants become entrepreneurs within their new environment, and start performing as tourist service providers, they cannot reach the minimum quality standards in their services, then not matching appropriately with the mountain environment.

In El Bolsón and Lago Puelo Shire(EL-LP), the migration process can be pointed as cause and consequence of different problematic situations, shared with other mountain destinations within Patagonian Andes: population growth with spontaneous and confused urban expansion, and real estate speculation, as well as defficiencies in the regulatory norms application (see table 1)

Table 1

**Population Evolution 1970-2001**

***El Bolsón - Lago Puelo***

Town	Population			
	1970	1980	1991	2001
El Bolsón	2.678	5.001	12.598	15.537
Lago Puelo	670	1.960	2.463	4.046

Source: Marchissio (2007), based on INDEC- Nacional Statistics Institute

A correlation between the growth in the quantity of amenity migrants arrived to the shire and the quantity of new micro and small tourist enterprises, can be identified. The majority of these new residents are directly or indirectly linked with tourism sector. Most of these new enterprises are small scale lodging units. In the last sixteen years accomodation sector in EB had evolved form 8 enterprises in 1991, up to 51 in 2006, meaning a growth rate of 538%. In LP, the amount of lodging enterprises varied from 23 establishments in 2000, up to 41 in 2007, that is, a growth rate of 78 %.

This remarkable growth is due to the existance of relatively low entrance barriers, determined by scale economies, tourist product differentiation, capital requirements, variable costs, the access to commercialization channels, the governmental policy, and the expectations of reaction on present competitors.

It is quite easy for new migrants to see in the lodging industry a "cheap opportunity", since amount of capital investment is significantly smaller than in other mountain tourist destinations in Patagonia. In addition, present governmental policy related to the growth of tourist services supply does not present restrictions for the creation of new enterprises. Tourist micro-enterprise can be

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easily set up and implemented, due to its size and the possibility of combining the commercial tourist activity with household work.

This positive context means an opportunity for those amenity migrants seeking for an alternative way of life based on an improvement of their families economies. Moreover, tourism, and specifically lodging sector is seen by new entrepreneurs as an activity that, in the context of the Patagonian Andes Region, apparently does not require technical knowledge, nor legal or normative requirements. All these factors together allow new migrants to dream of obtaining incomes from tourism industry in a relatively short term.

These tourist entrepreneurs usually don't have a vision of improving their position in the market, but rather a merely subsistence logic. Strategic thinking is not part of the business. Decision making process is based on appreciations and suppositions or even linked to some of the entrepreneurs needs, but with a lack of the necessary sustainable-competitive vision.

#### **Contradiction #4: Displacements and the shadow of tourism**

While tourist and amenity migrants enjoy moving within and through mountain destinations, local residents suffer demobilizations: The access to the majority of public recreation attractions is restringed, space become unaccessible, and socially, they are confined to works such as housecleaning, cooking, entertainment providers, and offering their local knowledge as guides and drivers in tours, and even selling their bodies for sports (i.e. golf) or sex. These displacement are at first only physical: Residents and old migrants are finally set apart from the core spaces: the town centre, the riverbanks and the access to lakes' shores. They are basically displaced from the access to common resources, that are now started being offered to these new

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amenity migrants. But, in a second stage, displacements are also of a social, economical and even psychological nature. Best places and also best opportunities are progressively being occupied by new migrants.

Tourism can be considered as a scenification of the real estate speculative forces. Maybe it is not tourism itself, but what can be called the shadow of tourism, hiding those foreign interest, that promote a long list of new territorial symbolic re-appropriations

In most of the cases, the relationship between residents and new migrants was, at first, positive, due to the need to solve common problems related to infrastructure and community services. A cooperative attitude was clear in those initial times. Nowadays, the gap between those with higher incomes and those in lower socioeconomical situation is increasing dramatically. Community participation in common resources management related topics is then difficult. Physical displacement can be seen in successful exemptions to regulatory norms concerning land use planning, building regulations, and private use of common resources, in favour of those new high cost investments.

The displacement from government and popular participation processes is also perceived by the SMA and VLA residents. Only a 10% of the interviewed residents in SMA have participated in some kind of local government form, but those who haven't, don't feel like doing it either..

In VLA, interviewed residents point out that social differentiation is easily perceived within the village: Almost half of the population is located in those areas with higher environmental risks, with low density of public services. Finally, a higher incomes minority has now the property of public spaces such as riverbanks, lake`s

shores, and even public streets, prohibiting their use to the rest of the community.

## **Steps towards and agenda for growth management in mountain tourism destinations**

A State must be developmental in nature to enable a pace and pattern of sustainable growth. Government's role in enabling such growth has resulted from the provision of public goods and social protection mechanisms, and the creation of institutional conditions for more inclusive and equitable development.

### **Step 1: Setting the *agenda*.**

The first step is *to set an agenda* for growth management and amenity migration in mountain tourist destinations.

- It is necessary that government gets familiarise with the requirements of local communities concerning new migrants and the shadow of tourism: real estate speculation.
- It is needed an understanding of the structure of the national and local economy and how it relates to key regional and global markets
- Governments should build the capacity and accountability mechanisms that will enable them to improve their performance in the delivery of public goods, public service provision and the access to common resources.
- Many actors involved may have to accept that institutional change is necessary. Governments must ensure that growth can be possitive to the whole community and not just to a powerful minority. NGO´s should be aware of the importance of such change, and start being actively involved in such a process.

## Step 2: Policy formulation

Policies should be mainly directed to:

- The development of growth management strategies at a local scale, involving all local actors, and paying special attention to the necessities of the population, natural and cultural resources sustainability, as well as sustainable tourist development plans and actions.
- The creation of a favorable context for sustainable tourism development by means of the application of specific quality improvement strategies and procedures, and State policies concerning local tourist micro-enterprises competitiveness.
- A critical review of local norms and regulations concerning land use management, taking good care of common resources.
- The cooperative work between commerce chambers, associations, NGO's and local government, towards strategies dealing amenity migration.

## Step 3: Implementation

The implementation of such a policy concerning AM in mountain areas in Argentina might face a context with:

- **State control and legitimacy:** State authorities and systems must be strong and viewed as legitimate, maintaining political stability.
- **Public service:** A powerful, competent, autonomous and stable bureaucracy must exist, to create, direct and manage economic and social development. Other effective institutions and networks should appear necessary to promote and implement economic policy.
- **The joint participation of State and non-state actors**

- **Policy priority:** Equitative economic development should be consistently prioritised by government policy, which promotes productive entrepreneurship.
- **Local behaviour and attitudes:** Social and technical innovations are usually generated locally. They should be adapted and used to solve problems and create functional institutions and systems. Tolerance, meritocracy, social mobility and high levels of education should be valued and promoted.
- **Community leadership:** Leaders promote development and corruption is limited or at least not predatory.

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